

CONSTITUTION

MODULE 2

PRINCIPLES OF THE AMERICAN REVOLUTION



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Module 2: Principles of the American Revolution Lesson Plan

PRINCIPLES OF THE AMERICAN REVOLUTION

*“The Revolution was in the minds of the people,
and this was effected, from 1760 to 1775, in the course of
fifteen years before a drop of blood was drawn at Lexington.”*

—John Adams to Thomas Jefferson, August 24, 1815

In this module, you will examine the form of government established by the American Revolution and the Constitution, and its key ideas—including natural rights, popular sovereignty, and the rule of law. By examining the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution, you will learn how these two documents set the foundation for American democracy.

Learning Objectives

At the conclusion of this module, you should be able to:

1. Define natural rights, popular sovereignty, and rule of law—the key principles at the core of the American Revolution.
2. Describe how ancient and Enlightenment thinkers influenced the development of many of the key ideas on which the nation was founded.
3. Identify the factors that gave rise to the American Revolution.
4. Identify key principles of the American Revolution in significant sources from the era.

2.1 Activity: Quote Analysis

Purpose

In this activity, you will explore the ideas that shaped the American Revolution and read several prompts to engage in a conversation with your classmates. Together, you will discuss how ideas are shared, modified, and reused over time to build arguments.

Process

Read the following quote by key founder, Thomas Jefferson:

“This was the object of the Declaration of Independence. Not to find out new principles, or new arguments, never before thought of, not merely to say things which had never

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been said before, but to place before mankind the common sense of the subject, in terms so plain and firm as to command their assent, and to justify ourselves in the independent stand we are compelled to take. Neither aiming at originality of principle or sentiment, not yet copied from any particular and previous writing, it was intended to be an expression of the American mind, and to give to that expression the proper tone and spirit called for by the occasion. All it's [sic] authority rests on the harmonizing sentiments of the day, whether expressed in conversation, letters, printed essays, or in the elementary books of public right, as Aristotle, Cicero, Locke, Sidney, & c."

—Thomas Jefferson to Henry Lee, May 8, 1825

Then, complete the [Activity Guide: Quote Analysis](#) worksheet.

2.1 Activity Notes & Teachers Comments

Launch

Give students time to read the selected texts in advance. Encourage active reading and highlighting.

Activity Synthesis

Invite students to share their 3-2-1 and react to others. Questions to ask can be:

- Who else highlighted these words?
- Does anyone see similarities or differences?
- What do you think Jefferson meant by “*harmonizing sentiments of the day*”?

Activity Extension (Optional)

Now that students have a better understanding of Thomas Jefferson’s message, ask the following questions:

- What is your immediate reaction to the quotation?
- What words stand out to you?
- Do you have any desire to respond to Jefferson, and, if so, what might you say to him?

2.2 Activity: People and Ideas That Shaped the American Revolution: Classical and Enlightenment Thinkers

Purpose

In this activity, you will identify the intellectual sources of the Declaration of Independence—the very thinkers that Jefferson mentioned in his letter. You will also explore the root of the principles—such as natural rights, popular sovereignty, rule of law, and the social contract—that

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influenced the American Revolution and led to the Declaration of Independence, the U.S. Constitution, and the Bill of Rights.

Process

Work in groups to review the information sheets on the following *Ancient and Enlightenment Thinkers*, who are from the classical world and the European Enlightenment, and whose ideas helped shape the American Revolution.

- Aristotle
- Cicero
- Algernon Sidney
- John Locke

After you have reviewed each thinker, complete one of the following activity guides with your group.

After your group has prepared a profile sheet on your thinker, share with other groups without revealing the person. Give key ideas, but also let them ask questions about the person. This is a “Who Am I?” activity with other groups, so everyone gets to meet all of the thinkers listed.

Resources

Primary Sources

- [Primary Source: Aristotle](#)
- [Primary Source: Cicero](#)
- [Primary Source: Algernon Sidney](#)
- [Primary Source: John Locke](#)

Activity Guides

- [Activity Guide: Aristotle](#)
- [Activity Guide: Cicero](#)
- [Activity Guide: Algernon Sidney](#)
- [Activity Guide: John Locke](#)

2.2 Activity Notes & Teachers Comments

Launch Information

Break students into four groups, assigning each group a thinker from the ancient world or the Enlightenment whose ideas shaped the American Revolution. Students will be given a short essay on their person. With the help of the info briefs, students will identify key details about the thinkers and the ideas they expressed that influenced the American Revolution. These profiles will allow students to jigsaw the information back together with other groups, so that each student gains insight into all four people listed. Students will then reveal to their classmates information about the thinker from their profile sheets that will allow other students to get to

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know their key figure and guess “Who am I?” The goal is to have other groups try and identify the person based on their profile and core idea(s).

Activity Synthesis

After the “Who Am I?” activity, students will reconvene in their original groups, compare the notes that they learned about the other thinkers, and finalize their activity guide. Use Q&A to review information about each thinker for the class, emphasizing what is most important. Share final activity guides with all students for a full group study guide. Students should process the important information about all four thinkers. Then, have students write a summary of the major contributions of each one.

Activity Extension

Create an Instagram account, a Facebook page, or a bio for their person.

2.3 Activity: Key Terms

Purpose

Why did the American colonists believe that they had the right to overthrow their government? By examining the principles of the American Revolution, you will engage with key concepts from the period and the meaning of these key principles that continue to drive our democracy today.

Process

Complete the [Activity Guide: Key Terms - Principles of the American Revolution](#) document to identify module key terms:

1. Natural Rights
2. Popular Sovereignty
3. Rule of Law
4. Social Contract Theory

Every revolution (or push for change) needs a sturdy foundation rooted in key principles that answer a simple (but essential) question: *Why?*

Think about the American Revolution. The American colonists were small in number, were mostly farmers, and, against the odds, still chose to pick a fight with the most powerful country in the world. That took courage, but it also took powerful ideas. What principles made them believe that they could win—and that the American Revolution itself was a fight worth winning?

Read over the definitions of the four key principles. These principles helped to support the colonists’ claim for independence. Begin to complete the other attributes of the principles. As you do so, re-read the questions stated above and discuss them with peers. Remember that *principles* are defined as “fundamental truths that serve as the foundation of a system of belief

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or behavior or for a chain of reasoning.” How do these principles serve as the foundation for the American Revolution and continue to define the American idea?

2.3 Activity Notes & Teachers Comments

Launch Information

Review with all students the four key principles and the definitions. Give examples of each of the criteria in the graphic organizer before asking students to start their group work:

- Definition (student friendly description of the item; usually teacher written)
- Characteristic (features that help students recognize, identify, or distinguish the idea)
- Example (synonyms, concrete examples, term in action in their lives)
- Non-example (antonym, inappropriate application of idea, or examples going against the idea)

Break students into four groups and allow them time to explore, discuss, and begin to complete the graphic organizer.

Activity Synthesis

At the end of the activity, remind students that they will be exploring this tool throughout the entire module and will use it as a worksheet for the video lesson. Have students share a few ideas and questions from each group.

Notes

This activity will be built on the definition worksheet using the following **big four terms**.

Natural Rights

- **Definition:** Natural rights are rights that are given by God or by nature. They come not from a law passed by the government but rather are inherent in all individual human beings from birth.
- **Characteristics:** not dependent on laws or customs, fundamental and inalienable, universal (everyone has these inherent rights as a part of being human).
- **Examples:** freedom of conscience, life, liberty, pursuit of happiness
- **Non-examples:** right to punish crime (that’s alienable—you can give it away to the government)

Popular Sovereignty

- **Definition:** The Constitution establishes a government based on the consent of the governed. The sovereign power is held not by a king or an aristocracy but by the American people.
- **Characteristics:** consent of the governed, popular sovereignty, rule by we, the people
- **Examples:** democracy, voting, Preamble (“We, the People”), ratification of the Constitution, Article V amendment process, declaring independence, republican form of government
- **Non-examples:** monarchy, dictatorship, oligarchy, aristocracy

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Rule of Law

- **Definition:** The rule of law is the basic idea that we have a neutral government of laws, not an arbitrary government of one person. In other words, no one is above the law.
- **Characteristics:** predictable laws, transparent laws, accountability, and equal enforcement and impartiality
- **Examples:** impeachment proceedings, judicial review, a written constitution, written (and published) laws, a stop sign
- **Non-examples:** arbitrary rule, dictatorship, aristocracy/oligarchy (with different rules governing elites than everyone else)

Social Contract Theory

- **Definition:** People form a government with limited powers and temporary control over some rights. The government has an obligation to provide greater security and safety in return.
- **Characteristics:** combination of natural rights and popular sovereignty, duties imposed on both the government and the people
- **Examples:** the Declaration of Independence, the Constitution, John Locke's Two Treatises
- **Non-examples:** dictatorship, divine right of kings

Interaction will give minimal characteristics, examples, and non-examples BEFORE the video.

2.4 Video Activity: Declaration of Independence

Purpose

Your guide, Professor Jeffrey Rosen, will explore the Declaration of Independence to see how it set the foundation for American democracy and discuss the three fundamental principles at the heart of the American Revolution: natural rights, popular sovereignty, and rule of law. These principles also serve as the foundation for the U.S. Constitution.

Process

Read the [Info Brief: Declaration of Independence and the Preamble](#) before watching [the video](#), and be on the lookout for the key terms as you watch.

Then, complete the [Video Reflection: Declaration of Independence](#) worksheet.

Identify any areas that are unclear to you or where you would like further explanation. Be prepared to discuss your answers in a group and to ask your teacher any remaining questions.

After you answer the questions, you will have a chance to reflect on the information you learned in the video. Review the previous activity and develop your responses if your understanding of the terms, characteristics, examples, and non-examples has changed. Then, complete the [Activity Guide: Key Terms - Version 2](#) document

When you are finished, review the Declaration of Independence and identify where the principles are referenced. For fun, you can do this with the Preamble as well.

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2.4 Activity Notes & Teachers Comments

Launch Information

Before watching the video, read aloud with students the excerpts from the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution's Preamble. If possible, provide students with a copy to review while watching the video.

Students will watch the video and use their shared worksheets to continue to explore the meaning and characteristics of the principles of the American Revolution. Use the questions and prompts to check in with the students and ensure that they are understanding the key ideas covered in the video.

Activity Synthesis

Ask students to share how their understanding of the terms changed from the beginning of the module to after they watched the video. Try to identify common themes in student responses and identify natural rights, popular sovereignty, or the rule of law in everyday life.

Notes

Use the [Info Sheet: Preamble Breakdown](#) to show the principles.

2.5 Activity: Reasons for Rebellion

Purpose

In this activity, you will use primary sources to identify how three key principles—natural rights, popular sovereignty, and the rule of law—contributed to the American Revolution and form the core of the Declaration of Independence itself. You will also evaluate the connections among these key ideas and reflect on how they have remained relevant throughout American history.

Process

Read each of the excerpts below:

- [Primary Source: Declaration of Independence \(Short list of grievances\)](#)
- [Primary Source: Thomas Paine, *Common Sense* \(1776\)](#)
- [Primary Source: John Dickinson, *Letters from a Farmer in Pennsylvania to the Inhabitants of the British Colonies* \(1768\)](#)

After you complete the readings, identify information that helps explain the factors that caused the American Revolution by answering the following questions:

- What are some of the sources for the language and ideas found in the Declaration of Independence?
- Can you match a grievance to one or more of the key principles?

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Share your answers with your peers and discuss as a group how these principles are in your lives today (or are lacking).

2.5 Activity Notes & Teachers Comments

Launch Information

Students will review the excerpts of grievances from the Declaration of Independence and explore the reason associated with each grievance. As a class, answer the following questions and have a brief discussion:

- What are some of the sources for the language and ideas found in the Declaration of Independence?
- Can you match a grievance to one or more of the key principles?

Next, break the class into two groups and assign half of the class Thomas Paine's *Common Sense* and half of the class John Dickinson's *Letters from a Farmer*.

Note: Modification suggestions are noted below. Once students have completed their review, have each group share 3–5 key findings from their document and associated key principles.

As a final activity, have a full group discussion, using the worksheet as a support tool to discuss where each of the key principles are in their lives today. Are there any that are missing? This activity would be highly effective as a Harkness discussion. For more information, refer to the [Classroom Learning Materials: Civil Dialogue and Constitutional Conversations](#) webpage.

Activity Synthesis

List all three principles on the board:

- Natural rights
- Rule of law
- Popular sovereignty

Have students from each group share their quote, their answer to the question, and then, as a group, place the quote in the appropriate principle bucket. Hint: There could be more than one.

- Are there any that fit more than one?
- Are there any that fit all three?
- Are there any that don't fit in any bucket?

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2.6 Test Your Knowledge

Purpose

Congratulations for completing the activities in this module! Now it's time to apply what you have learned about the basic ideas and concepts covered.

Process

Complete the questions in the following quiz to test your knowledge.

- [Test Your Knowledge: Principles of the American Revolution](#)

2.7 Extended Activity: Social Contracts

Purpose

In this activity, you will apply social contract theory to your home, classroom, or club.

This lesson teaches you about self-government by using the social contract theory to analyze a class, family, or club membership contract. You should review your membership agreements with a lens on the danger of the tyranny of the majority, the meaning of consent, and the issue of how to enforce the students' contract with their teacher, their family, or their club. At the end of the exercise, you will have learned the basics of social contract theory and the need to understand the agreements, rights, and responsibilities of each community the students engage with and how these are different, depending on the type of ruling structure.

Process

Complete the [Extended Activity: Social Contracts](#) worksheet.

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2.1 Activity Guide

QUOTE ANALYSIS

In this activity, you will explore the ideas that shaped the American Revolution and read several prompts to engage in a conversation with your classmates. Together, you will discuss how ideas are shared, modified, and reused over time to build arguments.

Read the following quote by a key Founding Father, Thomas Jefferson.

“This was the object of the Declaration of Independence. Not to find out new principles, or new arguments, never before thought of, not merely to say things which had never been said before, but to place before mankind the common sense of the subject, in terms so plain and firm as to command their assent, and to justify ourselves in the independent stand we are compelled to take. Neither aiming at originality of principle or sentiment, not yet copied from any particular and previous writing, it was intended to be an expression of the American mind, and to give to that expression the proper tone and spirit called for by the occasion. All it’s [sic] authority rests on the harmonizing sentiments of the day, whether expressed in conversation, letters, printed essays, or in the elementary books of public right, as Aristotle, Cicero, Locke, Sidney, & c.”

—Thomas Jefferson to Henry Lee, May 8, 1825

Answer the following questions:

| | |
|---|---|
| 3 | Highlight three words or phrases that stand out to you. |
| | |
| 2 | Identify two questions that come to mind. |
| | |
| 1 | Summarize the quote in one sentence. |
| | |

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2.2 Primary Source

ARISTOTLE

Background: Aristotle (384–322 B.C.) was a philosopher in Ancient Greece and author of *The Politics* and *The Nicomachean Ethics*. The Founding generation turned to Aristotle for his insights into how different societies might structure their governments. For Aristotle, a government might take one of three forms: a monarchy (government by the one), an aristocracy (government by the few), or a polity (government by the many). Aristotle also emphasized the important role that virtue played in successful governments—with a virtuous government promoting the common good rather than the selfish interests of those in charge.

Excerpt:

View the document on the National Constitution Center’s website [here](#).

Aristotle, *The Politics*—Book Three:

Let’s consider the different forms of government. [W]e come to consider . . . the different number of governments which there are, and what they are; and first, what are their excellencies: for when we have determined this, their defects will be evident enough.

There is a supreme power in each government; it may be held by a single person, a few people, or the people as a whole; the quality of a government should be judged based on how well it serves the common good. It is evident that every form of government . . . must contain a supreme power over the whole state, and this supreme power must necessarily be in the hands of one person, or a few, or many; and when either of these apply their power for the common good, such states are well-governed; but when the interest of the one, the few, or the many who enjoy this power is alone consulted, then ill We usually call a state which is governed by one person for the common good, a kingdom; one that is governed by more than one, but by only a few, an aristocracy; either because the government is in the hands of the most worthy citizens, or because it is the best form for the city and its inhabitants. When the citizens at large govern for the public good, it is called a state [or a polity]

There are bad versions of each type of government, too. Now the corruptions attending each of these governments are these; a kingdom may degenerate into a tyranny, an aristocracy into an oligarchy, and a state [or polity] into a democracy. Now a tyranny is a monarch where the good of one man is the object of government, an oligarchy only the rich, and a democracy only the poor; but neither of them have a common good in view.

Aristotle, *The Politics*—Book Five:

These are the causes of revolution. The original causes which dispose men to [revolution] are . . . seven in number . . . : . . . profit and honour sharpen men against each other The other causes are haughtiness, fear, eminence, contempt, disproportionate increase in some part of the state. There are also other things which in a different manner will occasion revolutions in

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2.2 Primary Source

governments; as election intrigues, neglect, want of numbers, a too great dissimilarity of circumstances.

Aristotle, *The Politics*—Book Eight:

Public education is important to the success of a polity; it holds the key to a virtuous people committed to the common good. No one can doubt that the magistrate ought greatly to interest himself in the care of youth; for where it is neglected it is hurtful to the city, for every state ought to be governed according to its particular nature; for the form and manners of each government are peculiar to itself; and these, as they originally established it, so they usually still preserve it. For instance, democratic forms and manners a democracy; oligarchic, an oligarchy: but, universally, the best manners produce the best government. Besides, as in every business and art there are some things which men are to learn first and be made accustomed to, which are necessary to perform their several works; so it is evident that the same thing is necessary in the practice of virtue. As there is one end in view in every city, it is evident that education ought to be one and the same in each; and that this should be a common care [F]or each one is a part of the state, and it is the natural duty of each part to regard the good of the whole It is evident, then, that there should be laws concerning education, and that it should be public.

***Bold sentences give the big idea of the excerpt and are not a part of the primary source.**

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2.2 Primary Source

CICERO

Background: Cicero (106-43 B.C.) was a political theorist, a leading statesman in Ancient Rome, and the author of *De Officiis (On Duties)* and *The Tusculan Disputations*. Many key founders—including John Adams, Benjamin Franklin, and Thomas Jefferson—drew important lessons about happiness and virtue from Cicero’s *Tusculan Disputations*. Today, we define happiness as the pursuit of short-term pleasure. In contrast, Cicero defined it as the pursuit of long-term virtue—requiring each of us to practice the four classical virtues (temperance, prudence, fortitude, and justice) and use our powers of reason to convert our turbulent emotions into calm, rational ones.

Excerpt:

View the document on the National Constitution Center’s website [here](#).

Cicero, *The Tusculan Disputations*:

Virtue is the key to happiness. All men think that a divine power and divine nature exist [and] in every inquiry the unanimity of the races [or nations] of the world [or the common sense of all people] . . . lay the foundation of our happiness in the strength and greatness of our minds, in a contempt and disregard of all earthly things, and in the practice of every virtue. . . .

Human beings are flawed; reason helps us move past our flaws and commit to a life of virtue; this leads to self-control. As a rule, all men’s minds contain naturally an element of weakness, despondency, servility, a kind of nervelessness and flaccidity. Had human nature nothing else, no creature would be more hideous than man; but reason, the mistress and queen of the world, stands close at hand and striving by her own strength and pressing onward she becomes completed virtue. It is man’s duty to enable reason to have rule over that part of the soul which ought to obey. The whole, then, consists in this—that you should have command over yourself. . . .

We are all born with the ability to live virtuous lives, but the world corrupts us. The seeds of virtue are inborn in our dispositions and, if they were allowed to ripen, nature’s own hand would lead us on to the happiness of life; as things are, however, as soon as we come into the light of day and have been acknowledged, we at once find ourselves in a world of iniquity amid a medley of wrong beliefs, so that it seems as if we drank in deception with our nurse’s milk. . . .

These worldly influences lead us to distress; we must resist them if we want to live a peaceful, quiet, and happy life. It is wholly in an idea that we find the cause not merely indeed of distress but of all other disturbances as well. We must with all our might and main resist these disturbances which folly looses and launches like a kind of evil spirit upon the life of mankind, if we wish to pass our allotted span in peace and quiet. . . .

A virtuous life is one led by reason, not the passions. Virtue may be defined in a few words to be right reason itself, [while vice includes all the] turbid and violent motions of the mind,

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repugnant to reason, and enemies in a high degree to the peace of the mind and a tranquil life. .

. .

Reason will lead us to a virtuous and happy life. [T]he man, whoever he is, whose soul is tranquilized by restraint and consistency and who is at peace with himself, so that he neither pines away in distress, nor is broken down by fear, nor consumed with a thirst of longing in pursuit of some ambition, nor maudlin in the exuberance of meaningless eagerness—he is the wise man of whom we are in quest, he is the happy man who can think no human occurrence insupportable to the point of dispiriting him, or unduly delightful to the point of rousing him to ecstasy.

***Bold sentences give the big idea of the excerpt and are not a part of the primary source.**

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2.2 Primary Source

JOHN LOCKE

Background: John Locke (1632-1704) was an English political theorist during the Enlightenment era and the author of *A Letter Concerning Toleration* (1689), *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (1690), and *Two Treatises on Government* (1690). From 1760 to 1800, Locke's works on government and religious toleration made him one of the most cited secular authors in America. His *Second Treatise on Government* taught the founding generation important lessons about the social contract, natural rights, and the right of revolution.

Excerpt:

View the document on the National Constitution Center's website [here](#).

John Locke, *Second Treatise on Government*:

Let's begin by considering people in a state of nature, before they form a government. To understand political power right, and derive it from its original, we must consider, what state all men are naturally in, and that is, a state of perfect freedom to order their actions, and dispose of their possessions and persons, as they think fit, within the bounds of the law of nature, without asking leave, or depending upon the will of any other man.

The state of nature is a state of equality. A state also of equality, wherein all the power and jurisdiction is reciprocal, no one having more than another

It is also a state of liberty, but that liberty has its limits. But though this be a state of liberty, yet it is not a state of licence: though man in that state have an uncontrollable liberty to dispose of his person or possessions, yet he has not liberty to destroy himself

The state of nature is governed by natural law; everyone is born free and equal and, generally speaking, may not harm others. The state of nature has a law of nature to govern it, which obliges every one: and reason, which is that law, teaches all mankind, who will but consult it, that being all equal and independent, no one ought to harm another in his life, health, liberty, or possessions Every one, as he is bound to preserve himself, and not to quit his station wilfully, so by the like reason, when his own preservation comes not in competition, ought he, as much as he can, to preserve the rest of mankind, and may not, unless it be to do justice on an offender, take away, or impair the life, or what tends to the preservation of the life, the liberty, health, limb, or goods of another. . . .

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Everyone has a right to his/her own body and to labor freely. Though the earth, and all inferior creatures, be common to all men, yet every man has a property in his own person: this no body has any right to but himself. The labour of his body, and the work of his hands, we may say, are properly his. Whatsoever then he removes out of the state that nature hath provided, and left it in, he hath mixed his labour with, and joined to it something that is his own, and thereby makes it his property. . . .

Government is based on the consent of the governed; and once the people form a government, a majority has the authority to govern. MEN being . . . by nature, all free, equal, and independent, no one can be put out of this state, and subjected to the political power of another, without his own consent. The only way whereby any one divests himself of his natural liberty, and puts on the bonds of civil society, is by agreeing with other men to join and unite into a community for their comfortable, safe, and peaceable living one amongst another, in a secure enjoyment of their properties, and a greater security against any, that are not of it. This any number of men may do, because it injures not the freedom of the rest; they are left as they were in the liberty of the state of nature. When any number of men have so consented to make one community or government, they are thereby presently incorporated, and make one body politic, wherein the majority have a right to act and conclude the rest. . . .

People enter into government to protect their property and to keep them safe and secure; when the government fails to hold up its end of the bargain, the people can get rid of it and form another one. The reason why men enter into society, is the preservation of their property; and the end why they chuse and authorize a legislative, is, that there may be laws made, and rules set, as guards and fences to the properties of all the members of the society, to limit the power, and moderate the dominion, of every part and member of the society: . . . whenever the legislators endeavour to take away, and destroy the property of the people, or to reduce them to slavery under arbitrary power, they put themselves into a state of war with the people, who are thereupon absolved from any farther obedience, and are left to the common refuge, which God hath provided for all men, against force and violence. Whensoever therefore the legislative shall transgress this fundamental rule of society; and either by ambition, fear, folly or corruption, endeavour to grasp themselves, or put into the hands of any other, an absolute power over the lives, liberties, and estates of the people; by this breach of trust they forfeit the power the people had put into their hands for quite contrary ends, and it devolves to the people, who have a right to resume their original liberty, and, by the establishment of a new legislative, (such as they shall think fit) provide for their own safety and security, which is the end for which they are in society. What I have said here, concerning the legislative in general, holds true also concerning the supreme executor

The people will rebel if the government abuses them. But it will be said, this hypothesis lays a ferment for frequent rebellion. To which I answer, . . . [n]o more than any other hypothesis: for when the people are made miserable, and find themselves exposed to the ill usage of arbitrary

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power, cry up their governors, as much as you will, for sons of Jupiter; let them be sacred and divine, descended, or authorized from heaven; give them out for whom or what you please, the same will happen. The people generally ill treated, and contrary to right, will be ready upon any occasion to ease themselves of a burden that sits heavy upon them. They will wish, and seek for the opportunity, which in the change, weakness and accidents of human affairs, seldom delays long to offer itself. . . .

***Bold sentences give the big idea of the excerpt and are not a part of the primary source.**

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ALGERNON SIDNEY

Background: Algernon Sidney (1623-1683) was an English political theorist during the Enlightenment era and author of *Discourses Concerning Government* (1698). Although of noble birth, Sidney fought in the English Civil War on the side of Parliament. He was later executed for treason by King Charles II. In the process, he became an important republican martyr—admired by many members of America’s founding generation. His *Discourses Concerning Government* attacked the divine right of kings, championed the rule of law (and a vision of limited government), celebrated governments founded on the consent of the people, and justified the right of the people to alter or abolish their government if it failed to serve the common good. Sidney’s ideas helped to inspire both the Glorious Revolution in England and the American Revolution across the Atlantic.

Excerpt:

View the document on the National Constitution Center’s website [here](#).

Algernon Sidney, *Discourses Concerning Government*:

The divine right of kings makes no sense; it is the death of liberty. [T]here is more than ordinary extravagance in [Robert Filmer’s] assertion, that *the greatest liberty in the world is for a people to live under a monarch*, when his whole book is to prove, that this monarch hath his right from God and nature, is endowed with an unlimited power of doing what he pleaseth, and can be restrained by no law. If it be liberty to live under such a government, I desire to know what is slavery. . . .

All we seek is government based on the consent of the governed, not the divine right of kings. It were a folly hereupon to say, that the liberty for which we contend, is of no use to us, since we cannot endure the solitude, barbarity, weakness, want, misery and dangers that accompany it whilst we live alone, nor can enter into a society without resigning it; for the choice of that society, and the liberty of framing it according to our own wills, for our own good, is all we seek. This remains to us whilst we form governments, that we ourselves are judges how far ’tis good for us to recede from our natural liberty; . . . and the difference between the best government and the worst, doth wholly depend upon a right or wrong exercise of that power. If men are naturally free, such as have wisdom and understanding will always frame good governments: But if they are born under the necessity of perpetual slavery, no wisdom can be of use to them; but all must forever depend on the will of their lords, how cruel, mad, proud or wicked soever they be. . . .

We come together and form a government to avoid a life of anxiety and violence. The weakness in which we are born, renders us unable to attain this good of ourselves: we want help in all things, especially in the greatest. The fierce barbarity of a loose multitude, bound by no law, and regulated by no discipline, is wholly repugnant to it: Whilst every man fears his neighbour, and has no other defence than his own strength, he must live in that perpetual

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2.2 Primary Source

anxiety which is equally contrary to that happiness, and that sedate temper of mind which is required for the search of it. The first step towards the cure of this pestilent evil, is for many to join in one body, that everyone may be protected by the united force of all; and the various talents that men possess, may by good discipline be rendered useful to the whole; as the meanest piece of wood or stone being placed by a wise architect, conduces to the beauty of the most glorious building. But every man bearing in his own breast affections, passions, and vices that are repugnant to this end, and no man owing any submission to his neighbour; none will subject the correction or restriction of themselves to another, unless he also submit to the same rule. . . .

Every constitution may become corrupt; if so, we must return to our founding principles.

All human constitutions are subject to corruption, and must perish, unless they are timely renewed, and reduced to their first principles

We are all born with natural rights, including freedom. The creature having nothing, and being nothing but what the creator makes him, must owe all to him, and nothing to anyone from whom he has received nothing. Man therefore must be naturally free, unless he be created by another power than we have yet heard of. . . . God only who confers this right upon us, can deprive us of it

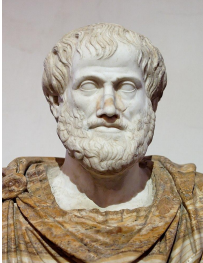
***Bold sentences give the big idea of the excerpt and are not a part of the primary source.**

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2.2 Activity Guide

GET TO KNOW AN ENLIGHTENMENT THINKER: ARISTOTLE

Review the information sheets about four key Enlightenment thinkers, and complete the chart based on information about your assigned individual.

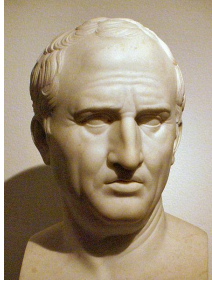
| | |
|---|--|
| Name | Aristotle |
| Photo |  |
| I lived from years ____ to ____. | |
| Three facts about me are... | |
| My closest associates were... | |
| My key writings include... | |
| My ideas shaped the American Revolution by... | |

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GET TO KNOW AN ENLIGHTENMENT THINKER: CICERO

Review the information sheets about four key Enlightenment thinkers, and complete the chart based on information about your assigned individual.

| Name | Cicero |
|---|--|
| Photo |  |
| I lived from years ____ to ____. | |
| Three facts about me are... | |
| My closest associates were... | |
| My key writings include... | |
| My ideas shaped the American Revolution by... | |

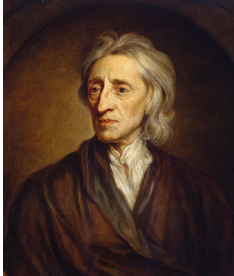
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2.2 Activity Guide

GET TO KNOW AN ENLIGHTENMENT THINKER: JOHN LOCKE

Review the information sheets about four key Enlightenment thinkers, and complete the chart based on information about your assigned individual.

| | |
|---|--|
| Name | Locke |
| Photo |  |
| I lived from years ____ to ____. | |
| Three facts about me are... | |
| My closest associates were... | |
| My key writings include... | |
| My ideas shaped the American Revolution by... | |

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GET TO KNOW AN ENLIGHTENMENT THINKER: ALGERNON SIDNEY

Review the information sheets about four key Enlightenment thinkers, and complete the chart based on information about your assigned individual.

| | |
|---|---|
| Name | Algernon Sidney |
| Photo |  A portrait of Algernon Sidney, a 17th-century English philosopher and statesman. He is depicted from the chest up, wearing a dark brown coat over a white ruffled collar and a white cravat. He has dark hair and a mustache. The background is dark and indistinct. |
| I lived from years ____ to ____. | |
| Three facts about me are... | |
| My closest associates were... | |
| My key writings include... | |
| My ideas shaped the American Revolution by... | |

KEY TERMS

PRINCIPLES OF THE AMERICAN REVOLUTION

Why did the American colonists believe that they had the right to overthrow their government? By examining the principles of the American Revolution, you will engage with key concepts from the period and the meaning of these key principles that continue to drive our democracy today.

Review the interaction to help you fill out the chart below with the module key terms:

- Natural Rights
- Popular Sovereignty
- Rule of Law
- Social Contract Theory

Every revolution (or push for change) needs a sturdy foundation rooted in key principles that answer a simple (but essential) question: *Why?*

Think about the American Revolution. The American colonists were small in number, were mostly farmers, and against the odds still chose to pick a fight with the most powerful country in the world. That took courage, but it also took powerful ideas. What principles made them believe that they could win—and that the American Revolution itself was a fight worth winning?

Read over the definitions of the four key principles. These principles helped to support the colonists' claim for independence. Begin to complete the other attributes of the principles. As you do so, re-read the questions stated above and discuss them with peers. Remember that *principles* are defined as “fundamental truths that serve as the foundation of a system of belief or behavior or for a chain of reasoning.” How do these principles serve as the foundation for the American Revolution and continue to define the American idea?

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2.3 Activity Guide

Definition

Natural rights are rights that are given by God or by nature. They come not from a law passed by the government but rather are inherent in all individual human beings from birth.

Characteristic

Natural Rights

Example

Non-Example

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2.3 Activity Guide

Definition

The Constitution establishes a government based on the consent of the governed. The sovereign power is held not by a King or an aristocracy but by the American people.

Characteristic

Popular Sovereignty

Example

Non-Example

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2.3 Activity Guide

Definition

The rule of law is the basic idea that we have a neutral government of laws, not an arbitrary government of one person. In other words, no one is above the law.

Characteristic

Rule of Law

Example

Non-Example

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Definition

People form a government with limited powers and temporary control over some rights. The government has an obligation to provide greater security and safety in return.

Characteristic

Social Contract Theory

Example

Non-Example

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Module 2: Principles of the American Revolution
2.4 Info Brief

DECLARATION OF INDEPENDENCE AND THE PREAMBLE

Read the excerpts of the Declaration of Independence and the Preamble to the Constitution before watching the following video, and be on the lookout for them as you watch. As you watch underline or highlight phrases that match to key terms reviewed. Look for ideas that match the principles like natural rights, popular sovereignty, rule of law, and social contract theory.

Declaration of Independence (1776):

We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.—That to secure these rights, Governments are instituted among Men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed, —That whenever any Form of Government becomes destructive of these ends, it is the Right of the People to alter or to abolish it, and to institute new Government, laying its foundation on such principles and organizing its powers in such form, as to them shall seem most likely to effect their Safety and Happiness.

Preamble to the Constitution (1787):

We the People of the United States, in Order to form a more perfect Union, establish Justice, insure domestic Tranquility, provide for the common defence, promote the general Welfare, and secure the Blessings of Liberty to ourselves and our Posterity, do ordain and establish this Constitution for the United States of America.

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2.4 Video Reflection

DECLARATION OF INDEPENDENCE

In this activity, you will identify the intellectual sources of the Declaration of Independence—the very thinkers that Jefferson mentioned in his letter. You will also explore the root of the principles—such as natural rights, the social contract, popular sovereignty, and the rule of law—that influenced the American Revolution and led to the Declaration of Independence, the U.S. Constitution, and the Bill of Rights.

After you watch the video, answer the following questions. Be on the lookout for concepts from the Declaration of Independence and the Preamble to the Constitution as you watch.

Where in the Declaration do you see one of the following key principles: popular sovereignty, natural rights, or the rule of law?

How is that key principle defined?

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2.4 Video Reflection

What other principles are mentioned?

How does the Preamble to the Constitution reflect these key principles?

KEY TERMS - PRINCIPLES OF THE AMERICAN REVOLUTION

Reflect on the information you learned in the video. Review the previous activity and review the key terms to see how your understanding of the term, characteristics, examples, and non-examples has changed.

| | |
|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| Definition | Characteristic |
| Natural Rights | |
| Example | Non-Example |

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2.4 Key Terms

Definition

Characteristic

**Popular
Sovereignty**

Example

Non-Example

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2.4 Key Terms

Definition

Characteristic

Rule of Law

Example

Non-Example

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2.4 Key Terms

Definition

Characteristic

**Social
Contract
Theory**

Example

Non-Example

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THE DECLARATION OF INDEPENDENCE (1776)

View the document on the National Constitution Center's website [here](#).

On July 4, 1776, the United States officially declared its independence from the British Empire when the Second Continental Congress adopted the Declaration of Independence. The Declaration was authored by a "Committee of Five"—John Adams, Benjamin Franklin, Thomas Jefferson, Robert Livingston, and Roger Sherman—with Jefferson as the main drafter. But Jefferson himself later admitted that he was merely looking to reflect the "mind of Americans"—bringing together the core principles at the heart of the American Revolution. The Declaration also included a list of grievances against King George III, explaining to the world why the American colonies were separating from Great Britain. The American Revolution ended with the Battle of Yorktown in 1781 and the Treaty of Paris in 1783. A little over two decades after King George III took the throne, the American people had broken from Great Britain and begun a new experiment in republican government.

Excerpt:

The history of the present King of Great Britain is a history of repeated injuries and usurpations, all having in direct object the establishment of an absolute Tyranny over these States. To prove this, let Facts be submitted to a candid world.

- He has dissolved Representative Houses repeatedly, for opposing with manly firmness his invasions on the rights of the people. . . .
- He has made Judges dependent on his Will alone, for the tenure of their offices, and the amount and payment of their salaries.
- He has erected a multitude of New Offices, and sent hither swarms of Officers to harass our people, and eat out their substance.
- He has kept among us, in times of peace, Standing Armies, without the consent of our legislatures.

He has combined with others to subject us to a jurisdiction foreign to our constitution and unacknowledged by our laws; giving his Assent to their Acts of pretended Legislation:

- For protecting them by a mock Trial from punishment for any Murders which they should commit on the Inhabitants of these States:
- For cutting off our Trade with all parts of the world:
- For imposing Taxes on us without our Consent:

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2.5 Primary Source

- For depriving us in many cases of the benefits of Trial by Jury:
- For transporting us beyond Seas to be tried for pretended offences . . .
- For suspending our own Legislatures, and declaring themselves invested with power to legislate for us in all cases whatsoever.
- He has abdicated Government here by declaring us out of his Protection and waging War against us.
- He has plundered our seas, ravaged our Coasts, burnt our towns, and destroyed the lives of our people.
- He is at this time transporting large Armies of foreign Mercenaries to complete the works of death, desolation and tyranny, already begun with circumstances of cruelty and perfidy scarcely paralleled in the most barbarous ages, and totally unworthy the Head of a civilized nation. . . .

In every stage of these Oppressions We have Petitioned for Redress in the most humble terms. Our repeated Petitions have been answered only by repeated injury. A Prince, whose character is thus marked by every act which may define a Tyrant, is unfit to be the ruler of a free people. .

. . .

We, therefore, the Representatives of the United States of America, in General Congress, Assembled, appealing to the Supreme Judge of the world for the rectitude of our intentions, do, in the Name, and by the authority of the good People of these Colonies, solemnly publish and declare.

That these United Colonies are, and of Right ought to be Free and Independent States; that they are Absolved from all Allegiance to the British Crown,

and that all political connection between them and the State of Great Britain is and ought to be totally dissolved;

and that as Free and Independent States, they have full Power to levy War, conclude Peace, contract Alliances, establish Commerce,

and to do all other Acts and Things which Independent States may of right do. And for the support of this Declaration, with a firm reliance on the protection of Divine Providence, we mutually pledge to each other our Lives, our Fortunes, and our sacred Honor.

LETTERS FROM A FARMER IN PENNSYLVANIA TO THE INHABITANTS OF THE BRITISH COLONIES

View the document on the National Constitution Center's website [here](#).

The following excerpts are from John Dickinson's *Letters from a Farmer in Pennsylvania to the Inhabitants of the British Colonies*. Originally published in 1768, this series of essays was written to protest a new wave of British taxes. Dickinson helped push the colonists toward a general rejection of parliamentary legislative authority and advanced one of the arguments at the core of the American Revolution: *No taxation without representation*.

John Dickinson, a Pennsylvania lawyer, penned this series of essays to protest the Townshend Duties, a series of parliamentary taxes on imported luxury goods passed in the wake of the Stamp Act's repeal. First serialized in newspapers, Dickinson's essays circulated widely, and were later published in a single volume. Their appeal lay in their clarity—Dickinson did not say what others had not, he simply did so more cogently. The British government hoped that the Townshend Duties would be better received than the controversial Stamp Act on the theory that the former were external, not internal taxes. Dickinson rejected this distinction, insisting that the new duties violated American rights because, like the Stamp Act, their intent was to raise revenue. In collapsing the distinction between external and internal taxation, Dickinson helped push the colonists toward a general rejection of parliamentary legislative authority.

Excerpt:

The Townshend Acts are unconstitutional. “There is another late act of parliament, which appears to me to be unconstitutional, and as destructive to the liberty of these colonies, as that mentioned in my last letter; that is, the act for granting the duties on paper, glass, etc.

Parliament does have the power to pass legislation for America that regulates trade within the British Empire; that helps hold the empire together. The parliament unquestionably possesses a legal authority to *regulate* the trade of *Great Britain*, and all her colonies. Such an authority is essential to the relation between a mother country and her colonies; and necessary for the common good of all. He who considers these provinces as states distinct from the *British Empire*, has very slender notions of justice, or of their *interests*. We are but parts of a *whole*; and therefore there must exist a power somewhere, to preside, and preserve the connection in due order. This power is lodged in the parliament; and we are as much dependent on Great Britain, as a perfectly free people can be on another.

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Parliament passed the Stamp Act to simply raise money in the American colonies; the British had never done that before. I have looked over *every statute* relating to these colonies, from their first settlement to this time; and I find every one of them founded on this principle, till the *Stamp Act* administration....Never did the British parliament, till the period above mentioned, think of imposing duties in America for the purpose of raising a revenue.

This is a dangerous precedent. The last act, granting duties upon paper, etc. carefully pursues these modern precedents....Here we may observe an authority *expressly* claimed and exerted to impose duties on these colonies; not for the regulation of trade; not for the preservation or promotion of a mutually beneficial intercourse between the several constituent parts of the empire, heretofore the *sole objects* of parliamentary institutions; *but for the single purpose of levying money upon us.*

If we give in to this precedent, Parliament will continue to pass more and more burdensome laws until the American colonists lose their liberty. Here then, my dear countrymen, rouse yourselves, and behold the ruin hanging over your heads. If you ONCE admit, that *Great Britain* may lay duties upon her exportations to us, *for the purpose of levying money on us only*, she then will have nothing to do, but to lay those duties on the articles which she prohibits us to manufacture—and the tragedy of *American* liberty is finished.

In response, the American colonists must petition the British authorities and explain the problem. The constitutional modes of obtaining relief are those which I wish to see pursued on the present occasion; that is, by petitions of our assemblies, or where they are not permitted to meet, of the people, to the powers that can afford us relief.

The King and the British people are good and will listen; we should express our complaints with respect. We have an excellent prince, in whose good dispositions toward us we may confide. We have a generous, sensible and humane nation, to whom we may apply. They may be deceived. They may, by artful men, be provoked to anger against us. I cannot believe they will be cruel and unjust; or that their anger will be implacable. Let us behave like dutiful children who have received unmerited blows from a beloved parent. Let us complain to our parent; but let our complaints speak at the same time the language of affliction and veneration.

If they don't listen, then we the colonists must unite. If, however, it shall happen, by an unfortunate course of affairs, that our applications to his Majesty and the parliament for redress, prove ineffectual, let us then take another step, by withholding from *Great Britain* all the advantages she has been used to receive from us. Then let us try, if our ingenuity, industry, and frugality, will not give weight to our remonstrances. Let us all be united with one spirit, in one cause.

This tax may be a small sum, but the danger is in the precedent that it sets for future laws. Some persons may think this act of no consequence, because the duties are so *small*. A fatal error. *That* is the very circumstance most alarming to me. For I am convinced, that the

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authors of this law would never have obtained an act to raise so trifling a sum as it must do, had they not intended by *it* to establish a *precedent* for future use. To console ourselves with the smallness of the duties, is to walk deliberately into the snare that is set for us, praising the neatness of the workmanship.

No taxation without representation! *Those who are taxed without their own consent, expressed by themselves or their representatives, are slaves. We are taxed without our own consent, expressed by ourselves or our representatives. We are therefore—SLAVES.*

***Bold sentences give the big idea of the excerpt and are not a part of the primary source.**

THOMAS PAINE, COMMON SENSE (1776)

View the document on the National Constitution Center's website [here](#).

The following excerpts are from Thomas Paine's *Common Sense*. Originally published in 1776, this pamphlet lays out Paine's theory for why the American colonies should declare independence.

One of the all-time American best sellers, Thomas Paine's *Common Sense*, exploded on the scene in January 1776, at a precarious moment when reconciliation with Great Britain seemed unlikely, yet, to many, independence still seemed unthinkable. In electric prose, Paine, a recent English immigrant, made a forceful case in defense of separation. On multiple scores, the pamphlet radiated a radical democratic spirit. In plain, unadorned writing, it appealed to the common capacities of all people to evaluate the case for independence. It left few traditional hierarchies untouched, meanwhile, nowhere more strikingly than its vigorous condemnation of the institution of monarchy, which Paine claimed was in fact an affront to God. *Common Sense* seized public opinion, propelling American colonists toward independence.

Excerpt:

Why should we think that some people are born to be rulers and some born to be subjects? "[T]here is another and greater distinction for which no truly natural or religious reason can be assigned, and that is the distinction of men into **KINGS** and **SUBJECTS**. Male and female are the distinctions of nature, good and bad the distinctions of Heaven; but how a race of men came into the world so exalted above the rest, and distinguished like some new species, is worth inquiring into, and whether they are the means of happiness or of misery to mankind.

The divine right of kings is a lie; monarchy runs against God's plans. These portions of scripture are direct and positive. They admit of no equivocal construction. That the Almighty hath here entered his protest against monarchical government is true, or the scripture is false. . .

Passing down power from father to son is a bad idea; no reason to think that royal children will make good rulers. To the evil of monarchy we have added that of hereditary succession; and as the first is a degradation and lessening of ourselves, so the second, claimed as a matter of right, is an insult and imposition on posterity. For all men being originally equals, no one by birth could have a right to set up his own family in perpetual preference to all others for ever, and tho' himself might deserve some decent degree of honours of his cotemporaries, yet his descendants might be far too unworthy to inherit them. One of the strongest natural proofs of the folly of hereditary right in Kings, is that nature disapproves it, otherwise she would not so frequently turn it into ridicule, by giving mankind an *Ass for a Lion*.

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Think for yourself, and follow common sense. In the following pages I offer nothing more than simple facts, plain arguments, and common sense: and have no other preliminaries to settle with the reader, than that he will divest himself of prejudice and prepossession, and suffer his reason and his feelings to determine for themselves: that he will put on, or rather that he will not put off, the true character of a man, and generously enlarge his views beyond the present day.

Why should a tiny island across the sea rule a massive place like America? Small islands not capable of protecting themselves are the proper objects for government to take under their care; but there is something absurd, in supposing a Continent to be perpetually governed by an island. In no instance hath nature made the satellite larger than its primary planet; and as England and America, with respect to each other, reverse the common order of nature, it is evident that they belong to different systems. England to Europe: America to itself.

We have an opportunity to remake America and make it an example of freedom for the world; we should seize it. I shall conclude these remarks, with the following timely and well-intended hints. We ought to reflect, that there are three different ways by which an independancy may hereafter be effected; and that one of those *three*, will, one day or other, be the fate of America, viz. By the legal voice of the people in Congress; by a military power; or by a mob: It may not always happen that our soldiers are citizens, and the multitude a body of reasonable men; virtue, as I have already remarked, is not hereditary, neither is it perpetual. Should an independancy be brought about by the first of those means, we have every opportunity and every encouragement before us, to form the noblest, purest constitution on the face of the earth. We have it in our power to begin the world over again. A situation, similar to the present, hath not happened since the days of Noah until now. The birthday of a new world is at hand, and a race of men, perhaps as numerous as all Europe contains, are to receive their portion of freedom from the events of a few months. The reflection is awful, and in this point of view, how trifling, how ridiculous, do the little paltry cavilings of a few weak or interested men appear, when weighed against the business of a world.

Let's unite on behalf of America and win our independence. WHEREFORE, instead of gazing at each other with suspicious or doubtful curiosity, let each of us hold out to his neighbor the hearty hand of friendship, and unite in drawing a line, which, like an act of oblivion, shall bury in forgetfulness every former dissention. Let the names of Whig and Tory be extinct; and let none other be heard among us, than those of *a good citizen; an open and resolute friend; and a virtuous supporter of the RIGHTS of MANKIND, and of the FREE AND INDEPENDANT STATES OF AMERICA.* . . .

In America, the rule of law is king. But where says some is the King of America? I'll tell you Friend, he reigns above, and doth not make havoc of mankind like the Royal Brute of Britain. Yet that we may not appear to be defective even in earthly honors, let a day be solemnly set apart for proclaiming the charter; let it be brought forth placed on the divine law, the word of God; let a crown be placed thereon, by which the world may know, that so far as we approve of monarchy, that in America the law is king. For as in absolute governments the King is law, so in free countries the law ought to be King; and there *ought* to be no other. But lest any ill use

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should afterwards arise, let the crown at the conclusion of the ceremony be demolished, and scattered among the people whose right it is.

Now is the moment to declare independent and form our own government. And when a man seriously reflects on the precariousness of human affairs, he will become convinced, that it is infinitely wiser and safer, to form a constitution of our own in a cool deliberate manner, while we have it in our power, than to trust such an interesting event to time and chance. If we omit it now, some Massanello may hereafter arise, who laying hold of popular disquietudes, may collect together the desperate and the discontented, and by assuming to themselves the powers of government, may sweep away the liberties of the continent like a deluge. . . . Ye that oppose independance now, ye know not what ye do; ye are opening a door to eternal tyranny, by keeping vacant the seat of government. . . .

We must seize this opportunity to create a government of our own based on the right principles. The present time, likewise, is that peculiar time, which never happens to a nation but once, viz. the time of forming itself into a government. Most nations have let slip the opportunity, and by that means have been compelled to receive laws from their conquerors, instead of making laws for themselves. First, they had a king, and then a form of government; whereas, the articles or charter of government, should be formed first, and men delegated to execute them afterward: but from the errors of other nations, let us learn wisdom, and lay hold of the present opportunity—To begin government at the right end

***Bold sentences give the big idea of the excerpt and are not a part of the primary source.**

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Module 2: Principles of the American Revolution

2.6 Test Your Knowledge

PRINCIPLES OF THE AMERICAN REVOLUTION

Complete the questions in the following quiz to test your knowledge of basic ideas and concepts covered in this module.

1. A key principle of the American Revolution is the idea of Natural Rights. The notion is that these rights come from _____ and humans are entitled to them _____.
 - a. God or by nature / from birth
 - b. The king / after taking an oath of allegiance
 - c. The government / after they turn 18 years old
 - d. Congress / only if you pay your taxes

2. The principle of Popular Sovereignty holds that, in the most legitimate form of constitutional government, the power of government comes from _____.
 - a. A powerful tyrant who seizes power by force
 - b. The people
 - c. A hereditary leader whose family is experienced in government
 - d. Noblemen with wealth and property

3. Another important principle is the Rule of Law, the idea that we have a government of laws, not of men. Under this theory, _____.
 - a. People are treated differently before the law
 - b. Those who have enough wealth do not have to follow the law
 - c. The president can violate the law by exercising executive privilege
 - d. No one is above the law

4. Many of the founders were students of this 17th- and 18th-century movement that focused on intellectual, philosophical, and political thought.
 - a. The Progressive Era
 - b. The New Deal
 - c. The Enlightenment
 - d. The Crusades

5. Justice Neil Gorsuch once told the story of the Roman Emperor Caligula, who wrote down laws in small print and posted them on a very high pillar so that no one could read them. According to Justice Gorsuch, this was an example of _____.
 - a. Clever, effective behavior for an emperor
 - b. A violation of the rule of law

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2.6 Test Your Knowledge

- c. The importance of hiding the laws from citizens
 - d. Why you should always carry binoculars

6. An *alienable right* is a right we can give to the government, for example the right to punish. According to John Locke's *Second Treatise*, the people surrender some of these rights to the government in exchange for _____.
 - a. Political influence
 - b. The common good
 - c. Our security
 - d. Both B and C

7. An *inalienable* (or unalienable) right is something that is ours alone and we can't give it away to the government. An example of an inalienable right is _____.
 - a. My house
 - b. My car
 - c. My religious beliefs
 - d. Some of my income

8. The study of the relationship between the government and the people, where the people give away some of their rights in exchange for protection is known as _____.
 - a. Social Contract Theory
 - b. Quid Pro Quo
 - c. The Great Compromise
 - d. The Corrupt Bargain

9. According to the founders, what was the solution to tyrannical misrule by the government?
 - a. Tyranny was acceptable as long as some people had rights.
 - b. The people had the right to alter or abolish it.
 - c. The people had to accept it and submit to tyranny.
 - d. The people should move to another country.

10. Which of the following are essential to the Rule of Law?
 - a. The people must be able to see the law.
 - b. The people must be able to understand the law.
 - c. The law should treat people equally and fairly.
 - d. All of the above

11. Which of these three principles can be seen in the Declaration of Independence?
 - a. Popular Sovereignty
 - b. Natural Rights

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- c. Rule of Law
 - d. All of the above
12. One of the Declaration's most famous passages asserts that "*all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights, that among these are _____.*"
- a. No taxation without representation
 - b. Life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness
 - c. Government of the people, by the people, for the people
 - d. Liberty or Death
13. According to Thomas Jefferson in his letter to Henry Lee, what was the object of the Declaration of Independence?
- a. To find out new principles
 - b. To say things which had never been said before
 - c. To place before mankind the common sense of the subject, in terms so plain and firm as to command their assent, and to justify ourselves in the independent stand we are compelled to take
 - d. All of the above
14. In a powerful vision of popular sovereignty, the Declaration says that "*governments are instituted among men.*" Where does the Declaration say the power of government comes from?
- a. The consent of the governed
 - b. The president
 - c. The Congress
 - d. The Supreme Court
15. According to the Declaration, in what way did King George III abuse his rule of the American people?
- a. Imposing taxation without representation
 - b. Violated jury trial rights
 - c. Sent standing armies in times of peace
 - d. All of the above
16. The Principles of the American Revolution would also serve as the foundation for the government of the United States, established by this document _____.
- a. Magna Carta
 - b. The Gettysburg Address
 - c. The Articles of Confederation
 - d. The Constitution

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17. Many key founders, including John Adams, Benjamin Franklin, and Thomas Jefferson, drew important lessons about happiness and virtue from ancient philosophers. How would they have defined happiness?
 - a. Having a good day
 - b. Short-term pleasure
 - c. Long-term virtue
 - d. Holding ultimate power

18. In response to the taxation policies of Great Britain, this founder published a series of essays titled, *Letters from a Farmer in Pennsylvania to the Inhabitants of the British Colonies* (1768).
 - a. Benjamin Franklin
 - b. Thomas Paine
 - c. John Dickinson
 - d. Robert Morris

19. Thomas Paine became one of America's all-time best-selling authors with his dramatic publication of this work in 1776.
 - a. Common Sense
 - b. The Declaration of Independence
 - c. Thoughts on Government
 - d. The Olive Branch Petition

20. According to Thomas Paine, the idea that monarchs get their authority directly from God, known as the divine right of kings was _____.
 - a. True only in Europe, not America
 - b. True only if the king proved to be a good king
 - c. True but the American colonists should ignore it
 - d. A lie

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Answer Key

1. A
2. B
3. D
4. C
5. B
6. D
7. C
8. A
9. B
10. D
11. D
12. B
13. C
14. A
15. D
16. D
17. C
18. C
19. A
20. D

SOCIAL CONTRACTS

In this activity, you will apply social contract theory to your home, classroom, or club.

This lesson teaches you about self-government by using the social contract theory to analyze a class, family, or club membership contract. You should review your membership agreements with a lens on the danger of the tyranny of the majority, the meaning of consent, and the issue of how to enforce your contract with your teacher, family, or club. At the end of the exercise, you will have learned the basics of social contract theory and the need to understand the agreements, rights, and responsibilities of each community you engage with and how these are different, depending on the type of ruling structure.

Read the short paragraph on social contract theory:

Social contract theory is a political philosophy about making an agreement between the people and their government. The idea is that when this contract is made it spells out the defined rights and duties of each party to the agreement. Influential Enlightenment thinkers like John Locke came up with the ideas behind this theory. Under social contract theory, Locke and his fellow theorists explained that in the earliest years people were born in a state of nature, where they had total freedom but very little safety and security. To increase their safety and security, they built communities and moved from a state of nature into a civil society. They joined with one another for the benefit of everyone. But to live together in peace, they needed to establish rules and set up a government. In the end, they formed a government with limited powers and temporary control over some rights. In return, the government had a duty to provide greater security and safety. The critical insight is that all legitimate forms of government are based on the consent of the people; the people give away certain powers to the government, but the people can always take that power back. So, if the government fails to hold up its end of the contract, the people have the right to alter or abolish it. This theory was central to the American Revolution.

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2.7 Extended Activity

Complete the following chart that lists your right **as a student** and what your responsibilities are:

| Rights as a Student | Responsibilities |
|---------------------|------------------|
| | |

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2.7 Extended Activity

Complete the following chart that lists your right **at your home or in a club you joined** and what your responsibilities are:

| Rights as a Student | Responsibilities |
|---------------------|------------------|
| | |

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2.7 Extended Activity

Compare your rights and responsibilities at school with your home or your club.

| Similarities | Differences |
|--------------|-------------|
| | |