

The French Enlightenment & Critical Thinking

Age of Students: 16

Lesson Duration: 90 minutes



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AI NAVIGATORS



NEW MINDSET
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Why this case stands out

Critical thinking at the core

The Enlightenment is explored through reason, argument, censorship and intellectual challenge.

Literature becomes a tool

Students examine how genres and rhetorical techniques were used to communicate ideas and resist censorship.

From analysis to creation

Students move beyond recognition: they emulate Enlightenment styles in their own argumentative writing.

Purposeful AI support

NotebookLM was used to prepare the learning materials.

Transferable design

Historical content, close reading, critical analysis and creative application.

The learning challenge

Students learn about the Enlightenment, and at the same time they learn how ideas can be communicated, challenged and defended.

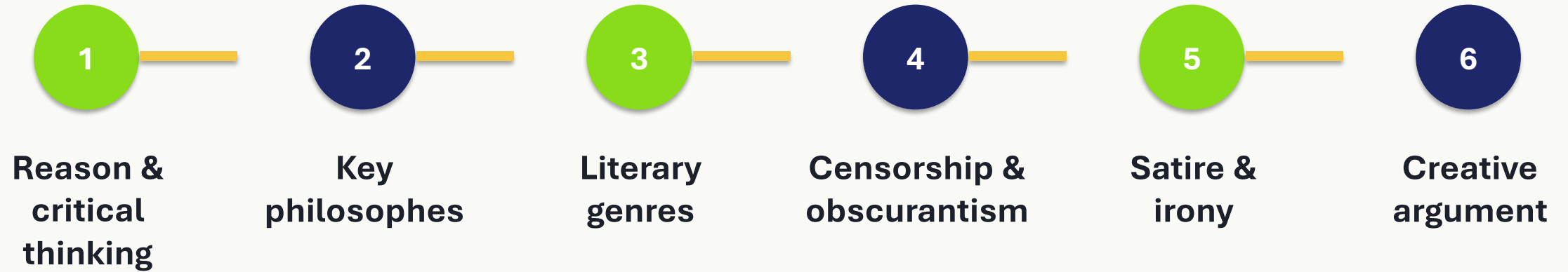
- Explained the Enlightenment as a movement centred on reason and critical thinking.
- Identified how Voltaire, Montesquieu and Diderot used literary genres to promote human rights and religious tolerance.
- Analysed satire and irony as ways of challenging state and religious censorship.
- Identified black humour and the perspective of the “naive foreigner”.
- Apply features of Enlightenment writing in a creative argumentative text.

The opening question: creativity before theory

What is creativity and which genre is most creative in your view? **Discussion**

The lesson began with students' own ideas about creativity and genre before moving into the historical and philosophical context of Enlightenment writing.

The lesson at a glance



A progression from understanding the movement → analysing its techniques → using those techniques.

Ideas travelled through different literary forms

Voltaire

Enlightenment thinker
examined through literary works
and argumentative strategies.

Montesquieu

Part of the exploration of how
philosophes communicated
and challenged established
ideas.

Diderot

Connected to the
encyclopedia as a genre for
disseminating knowledge and
Enlightenment ideas.

Genres in focus

Philosophical tale • Encyclopedia

The lesson connected form with purpose:
how a genre can carry criticism, argument and new ideas.

Why satire mattered

CONTEXT

State censorship
Religious censorship
Obscurantism



WRITERS' TOOLS

Satire
Irony
Black humour
The “naive foreigner”

Core learning activity

Students analysed examples from Enlightenment works to:

- 1 identify satirical techniques;
- 2 explain how those techniques communicate criticism or argument;
- 3 connect the technique to Enlightenment ideas and the context of censorship.

The emphasis was on purpose, explaining the technique's role and function.

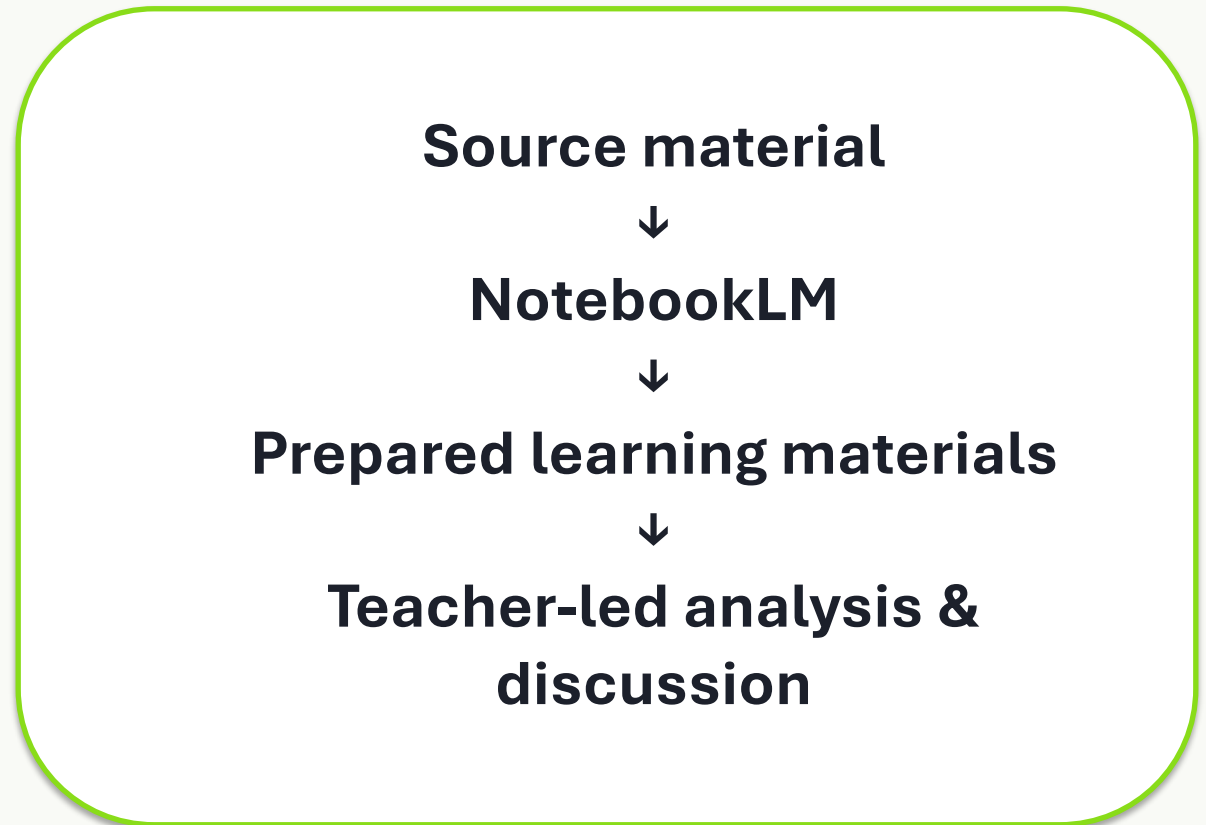
Where AI enters the lesson

NotebookLM

Purpose:

Prepare materials

AI SUPPORTS THE TEACHER



**AI support is positioned around material preparation.
The intellectual work remains with students and teacher.**

From interpretation to creation

Creative argumentative writing

After analysing historical examples, students applied features of Enlightenment writing in their own text.

ANALYSE

How does the original text create criticism?

SELECT

Which Enlightenment features can be reused?

CREATE

Use those features in an argumentative text.

Link to materials prepared with AI: [HERE](#)

Evidence of learning

Assessment method: TEST

Success criteria:

- ✓ students identify relevant satirical techniques;
- ✓ students explain their argumentative purpose in the context of Enlightenment ideas and censorship;
- ✓ students apply features of Enlightenment writing in a creative argumentative text.

AI support used for assessment: No

What another teacher can borrow

1 Begin with a human question

Start with students' own thinking before introducing theory.

2 Link technique to purpose

Ask not only “what is this device?” but “what does it allow the writer to do?”

3 Move from analysis to production

Let students demonstrate understanding by creating with the concepts they have studied.

4 Keep AI in a supporting role

Use AI to prepare materials while preserving discussion, interpretation and judgement as human learning tasks.

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