

Have you ever wondered?

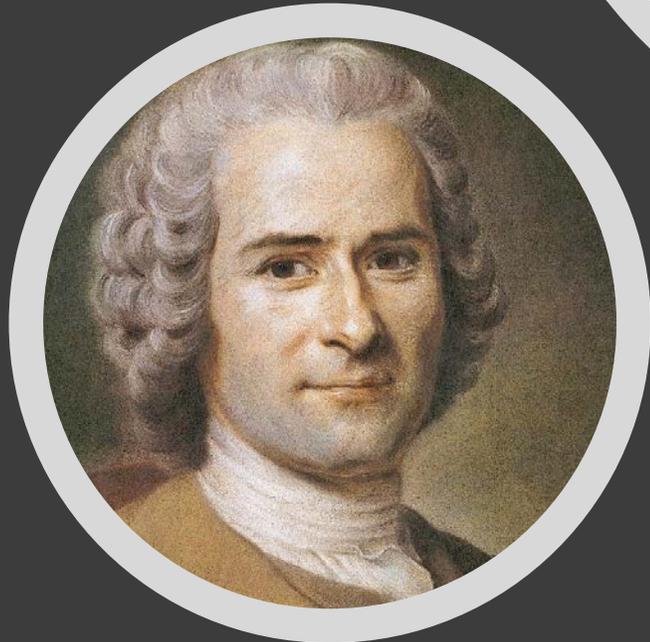
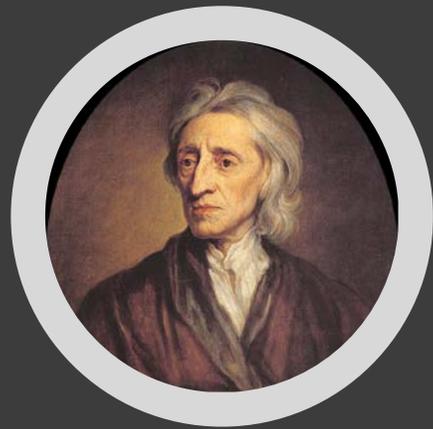
🍎 Grandpa's History Lessons that Matter

Lesson 12:

The Enlightenment "Age of Reason"

(1685 to 1815 CE)

In Search of Happiness, Reason, Nature, Progress, and Liberty



The Enlightenment “Age of Reason” (1685 to 1815 CE)

In Search of Happiness, Reason, Nature, Progress, and Liberty

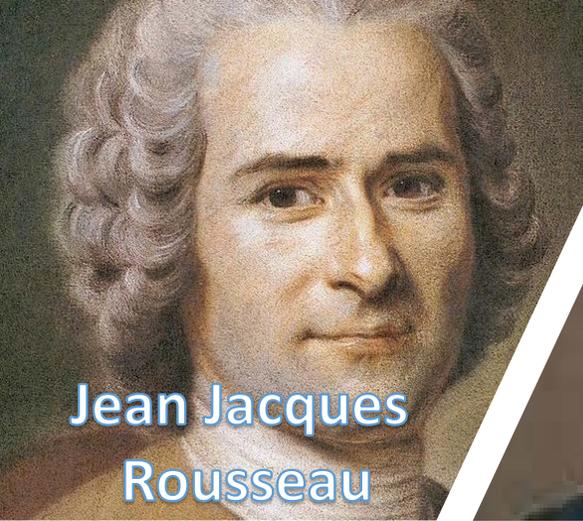
Introduction:

European politics, philosophy, science and communications were radically reoriented during the course of the “long 18th century” (1685-1815) as part of a movement referred to by its participants as the Age of Reason, or simply the Enlightenment. Enlightenment thinkers in Britain, in France and throughout Europe questioned traditional authority and embraced the notion that humanity could be improved through rational change. The goal of the Enlightenment was to establish an authoritative ethics, aesthetics, and knowledge based on an “enlightened” rationality. The Enlightenment produced numerous books, essays, inventions, scientific discoveries, laws, wars and revolutions. The American and French Revolutions, the rise of Capitalism and the birth of Socialism were directly inspired by Enlightenment ideals and respectively marked the peak of its influence and the beginning of its decline.

Enlightened rationality gave way to the wildness of 19th-century Romanticism, but 19th-century Liberalism and Classicism—not to mention 20th-century Modernism—all owe a heavy debt to the thinkers of the Enlightenment.

The heart of the eighteenth century Enlightenment is the loosely organized activity of prominent French thinkers of the mid-decades of the eighteenth century, the so-called “philosophes”(e.g., Voltaire, D’Alembert, Diderot, Montesquieu). The philosophes constituted an informal society of men of letters who collaborated on a loosely defined project of Enlightenment exemplified by the project of the Encyclopedia. However, there are noteworthy centers of Enlightenment outside of France as well. There is a renowned Scottish Enlightenment (key figures are Frances Hutcheson, Adam Smith, David Hume, Thomas Reid), a German Enlightenment (die Aufklärung, key figures of which include Christian Wolff, Moses Mendelssohn, G.E. Lessing and Immanuel Kant), and there are also other hubs of Enlightenment and Enlightenment thinkers scattered throughout Europe and America in the eighteenth century.





Jean Jacques
Rousseau



Immanuel
Kant

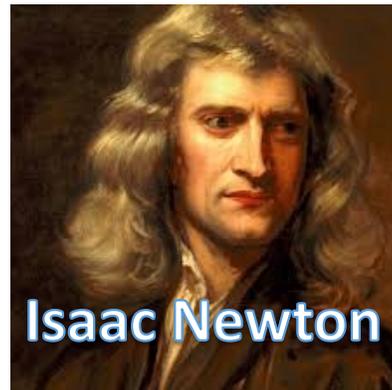


David Hume



Mary Wollstonecraft

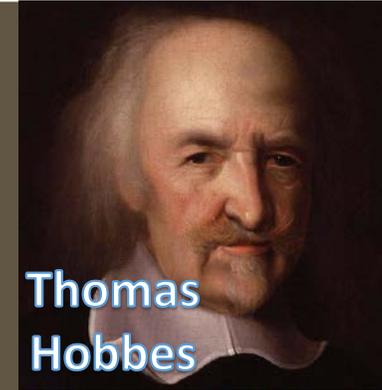
Did you know?
• In his essay 'What is Enlightenment?' (1784), the German philosopher Immanuel Kant summed up the era's motto in the following terms: 'Dare to know! Have courage to use your own reason!'



Isaac Newton



Ben
Franklin



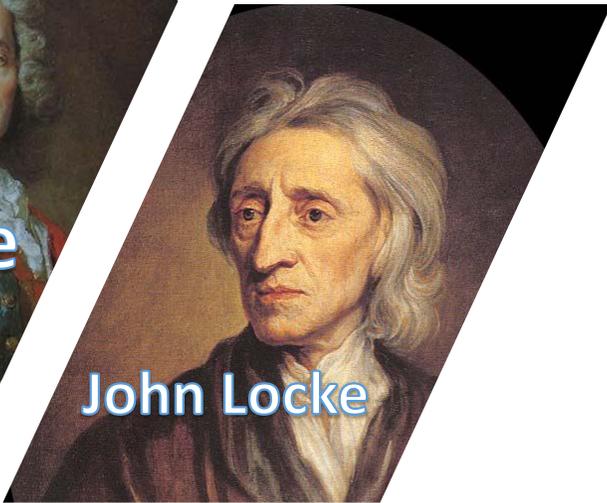
Thomas
Hobbes



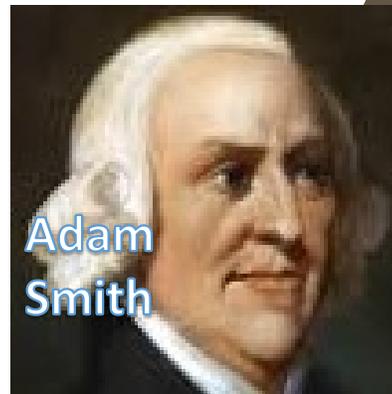
Montesquieu



Voltaire



John Locke



Adam
Smith

*The Enlightenment "Age of Reason"
(1685 to 1815 CE)*

People and their ideas

Centred in France, the Enlightenment took place throughout Europe, in Britain and in America through the 18th century. But the Enlightenment was less about places and more about people and their ideas. These are a few of the people who were key movers and shakers of the Enlightenment.

The Early Enlightenment (1685 to 1730 CE)

In Search of Happiness, Reason, Nature, Progress, and Liberty



Francis Bacon served as attorney general and Lord Chancellor of England, resigning amid charges of corruption. His more valuable work was philosophical. Bacon took up Aristotelian ideas, arguing for an empirical, inductive approach, known as the scientific method, which is the foundation of modern scientific inquiry.

Francis Bacon

1561-1626 CE

1588-1679 CE

English philosopher, wrote in *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* and *Two Treatises of Government* that government is obligated to serve the people, by protecting life, health, liberty, and property, the natural right to property derived from labor. He favored representative government and rule of law. Known as the "Father of Liberalism."

John Locke

1632-1704 CE

1642-1727 CE

Montesquieu called the idea of dividing government power into three branches the "separation of powers." He thought it most important to create separate branches of government with equal but different powers to avoid placing too much power with one individual or group of individuals. His *Spirit of the Laws* was first published in 1748.

Montesquieu

1689-1755 CE

1694-1778 CE

Thomas Hobbes

English philosopher and scientist developed some of the fundamentals of European liberal thought. In his 1651 work *Leviathan*, he advocated a civil society regulated by a "social contract", providing for absolutism of the sovereign to avoid chaos, which he associated with the state of nature.

Isaac Newton

In *Principia*, Newton formulated the laws of motion and universal gravity until superseded by the theory of relativity. He used his mathematical description of gravity to prove Kepler's laws of planetary motion, account for tides, the trajectories of comets and the precession of the equinoxes, confirming the Sun as centre of the Solar System.

Voltaire

Voltaire was a French Enlightenment writer, historian, and philosopher famous for his wit, his attacks on the established Catholic Church, and his advocacy of freedom of religion, freedom of expression, and separation of church and state. His two most famous works are *The Treatise on Tolerance* and *The Philosophical Dictionary*.

The High Enlightenment (1685 to 1730 CE)

In Search of Happiness, Reason, Nature, Progress, and Liberty



An American polymath and one of the Founding Fathers of the United States. A leading writer, printer, political philosopher, politician, Freemason, postmaster, scientist, inventor, humorist, civic activist, statesman, and diplomat. His most famous work was with electricity. In his famed experiment with a kite and key, Franklin proved that lightning was a form of electrical energy.

Benjamin Franklin

1711-1776 CE

The Social Contract outlines a legitimate political order within a framework of classical republicanism. By joining together into civil society through the social contract, submitting to the authority of the general will of the people, individuals can preserve themselves and remain free.

Jean Jacques Rousseau

1712-1778 CE

Primary proponent in history of “deontological ethics”, the study of duty. In Kant's view, what gives an action moral worth is not the outcome but the motive that is behind the action. He advanced the idea that perpetual peace could be secured through universal democracy and international cooperation, and that perhaps this could be the final stage of world history.

Immanuel Kant

1723-1790 CE

In *A Treatise of Human Nature* he states that we are more influenced by our feelings than by reason. An insult to our self-image, Hume thought that if we could learn to deal well with this fact, we could be individually and collectively a great deal calmer and happier.

David Hume

1706-1790 CE

In *The Wealth of Nations*, Smith's ideas are a reflection on economics in light of the beginning of the Industrial Revolution. He states that free-market (capitalist) economies are the most productive and beneficial to their societies. He argues for an economic system based on individual self-interest led by an “invisible hand,” which would achieve the greatest good for all.

Adam Smith

1723-1790 CE

An English writer, philosopher, and advocate of women's rights. Her *A Vindication of the Rights of Men* attacks aristocracy and advocates republicanism. *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* is one of the earliest works of feminist philosophy.

Mary Wollstonecraft

1759-1797 CE

1724-1804 CE

The Late Enlightenment and Beyond: 1780-1815

Revolutions, the rise of Capitalism and the birth of Socialism

- The [French Revolution](#) of 1789 was the culmination of the High Enlightenment vision of throwing out the old authorities to remake society along rational lines, but it devolved into bloody terror that showed the limits of its own ideas and led, a decade later, to the rise of [Napoleon](#). Still, its goal of egalitarianism attracted the admiration of the early feminist Mary Wollstonecraft and inspired both the Haitian war of independence and the radical racial inclusivism of Paraguay's first post-independence government.
- The American Enlightenment was a period of intellectual ferment in the thirteen American colonies in the 18th to 19th century, which led to the American Revolution (1775-1783), and the creation of the United States of America. The American Enlightenment was influenced by the 17th-century European Enlightenment and its own native American philosophy. According to James MacGregor Burns, the spirit of the American Enlightenment was to give Enlightenment ideals a practical, useful form in the life of the nation and its people.
- Enlightened rationality gave way to the wildness of Romanticism, but 19th-century Liberalism and Classicism—not to mention 20th-century [Modernism](#)—all owe a heavy debt to the thinkers of the Enlightenment.

Appendix

Action Links

**MORE FUN, MORE FACTS
ABOUT THE MOST SIGNIFICANT
PEOPLE AND EVENTS
DURING THE ENLIGHTENMENT**

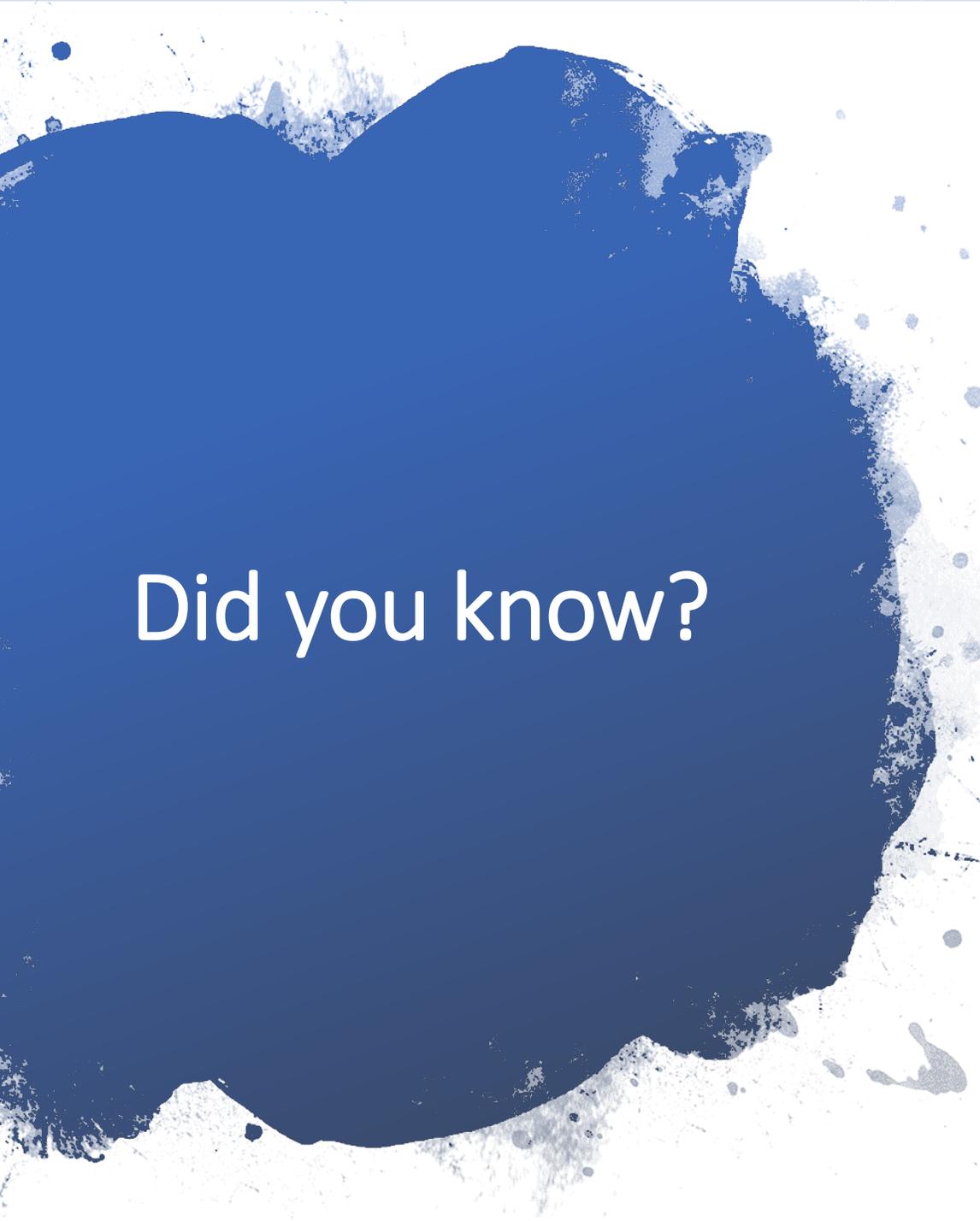
The Early Enlightenment (1685-1730 CE)

- The Enlightenment's important 17th-century precursors included the Englishmen Francis Bacon and Thomas Hobbes, the Frenchman René Descartes and the key natural philosophers of the Scientific Revolution, including Galileo Galilei, Johannes Kepler and Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz. Its roots are usually traced to 1680s England, where in the span of three years [Isaac Newton](#) published his "Principia Mathematica" (1686) and [John Locke](#) his "Essay Concerning Human Understanding" (1689)—two works that provided the scientific, mathematical and philosophical toolkit for the Enlightenment's major advances.
- There was no single, unified Enlightenment. Instead, it is possible to speak of the French Enlightenment, the Scottish Enlightenment and the English, German, Swiss or American Enlightenment. Individual Enlightenment thinkers often had very different approaches. Locke differed from David Hume, Jean-Jacques Rousseau from [Voltaire](#), [Thomas Jefferson](#) from [Frederick the Great](#). Their differences and disagreements, though, emerged out of the common Enlightenment themes of rational questioning and belief in progress through dialogue.



The High Enlightenment (1730-1780 CE)

- Centered on the dialogues and publications of the French “philosophes” (Voltaire, Rousseau, Montesquieu, Buffon and Denis Diderot), the High Enlightenment might best be summed up by one historian’s summary of Voltaire’s “Philosophical Dictionary”: “a chaos of clear ideas.” Foremost among these was the notion that everything in the universe could be rationally demystified and cataloged. The signature publication of the period was Diderot’s “Encyclopédie” (1751-77), which brought together leading authors to produce an ambitious compilation of human knowledge.
- It was an age of enlightened despots like Frederick the Great, who unified, rationalized and modernized Prussia in between brutal multi-year wars with Austria, and of enlightened would-be revolutionaries like [Thomas Paine](#) and Thomas Jefferson, whose “Declaration of Independence” (1776) framed the [American Revolution](#) in terms taken from of Locke’s essays.
- It was also a time of religious (and anti-religious) innovation, as Christians sought to reposition their faith along rational lines and deists and materialists argued that the universe seemed to determine its own course without God’s intervention. Locke, along with French philosopher Pierre Bayle, began to champion the idea of the separation of Church and State. Secret societies—like the Freemasons, the Bavarian Illuminati and the Rosicrucians—flourished, offering European men (and a few women) new modes of fellowship, esoteric ritual and mutual assistance. Coffeehouses, newspapers and literary salons emerged as new venues for ideas to circulate.



Did you know?

- In his essay 'What Is Enlightenment?' (1784), the German philosopher Immanuel Kant summed up the era's motto in the following terms: 'Dare to know! Have courage to use your own reason!'