

**VISIONS OF PARADISE:
THOMAS MORE (1516),
VOLTAIRE (1759) AND
JOHN LENNON (1971)**



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Description

Through an in-depth analysis of various primary and secondary sources, including full text versions of More's Utopia and Voltaire's Candide, and full text, audio and video versions of Lennon's "Imagine", students in this lesson will identify, understand and be able to compare and contrast the three different visions of paradise as articulated by the authors themselves and how each of those visions continues to powerfully influence opinions long after their deaths.

Subjects

English / Language Arts
Music
World History
Philosophy

Grade Level

11-12

Duration

180 minutes (multiple classes)

Tour Links

- Tower of London
- Lennon Peace Monument, Liverpool
- Place de la Concorde, Paris
- Pantheon, Paris

Essential Questions

- Who was Sir Thomas More? According to More, what is the Utopian society? Where was it? Was it real? Was a utopian society possible?
- Who was Voltaire? What were his ideas behind the natural state of man? What were his ideas behind the relationship between man, social classes, the church and government?
- Who was John Lennon? What ideas did he express through his 1971 song "Imagine"?
- How does More's Utopia fit into the genre of other utopian literature such as Voltaire's Candide and John Lennon's "Imagine"?
- How do visions of utopia still influence people today?

Academic Summary

As their cities are composed of families, so their families are made up of those that are nearly related to one another. Their women, when they grow up, are married out; but all the males, both children and grandchildren, live still in the same house, in great obedience to their common parent, unless age has weakened his understanding: and in that case, he that is next to him in age comes in his room. But lest any city should become either too great, or by any accident be dispeopled, provision is made that none of their cities may contain above 6,000 families, besides those of the country round it. No family may have less than ten and more than sixteen persons in it; but there can be no determined number for the children under age. This rule is easily observed, by removing some of the children of a more fruitful couple to any other family that does not abound so much in them.

... they are the only people of those parts that neither allow of polygamy nor of divorces, except in the case of adultery or insufferable perverseness; for in these cases the Senate dissolves the marriage, and grants the injured person leave to marry again; but the guilty are made infamous, and are never allowed the privilege of a second marriage. None are suffered to put away their wives against their wills, from any great calamity that may have fallen on their persons; for they look on it as the height of cruelty and treachery to abandon either of the married persons when they need most the tender care of their comfort, and that chiefly in the case of old age, which as it carries many diseases along with it, so it is a disease of itself. But it frequently falls out that when a married couple do not well agree, they by mutual consent separate, and find out other persons with whom they hope they may live more happily. Yet this is not done without obtaining leave of the Senate, which never admits of a divorce but upon a strict inquiry made, both by the Senators and their wives, into the grounds upon which it is desired; and even when they are satisfied concerning the reasons of it, they go on but slowly, for they imagine that too great easiness in granting leave for new marriages would very much shake the kindness of married people. They punish severely those that defile the marriage-bed. If both parties are married they are divorced, and the injured persons may marry one another, or whom they please; but the adulterer and the adulteress are condemned to slavery. Yet if either of the injured persons cannot shake off the love of the married person, they may live with them still in that state, but they must follow them to that labor to which the slaves are condemned; and sometimes the repentance of the condemned, together with the unshaken kindness of the innocent and injured person, has prevailed so far with the Prince that he has taken off the sentence; but those that relapse after they are once pardoned are punished with death.

The Utopians call those nations that come and ask magistrates from them, neighbors; but those to whom they have been of more particular service, friends. And as all other nations are perpetually either making leagues or breaking them, they never enter into an alliance with any State. They think leagues are useless things, and believe that if the common ties of humanity do not knit men together, the faith of promises will have no great effect; and they are the more confirmed in this by what they see among the nations round about them, who are no strict observers of leagues and treaties. We know how religiously they are observed in Europe, more particularly where the Christian doctrine is received, among whom they are sacred and inviolable; which is partly owing to the justice and goodness of the princes themselves, and partly to the reverence they pay to the popes; who as they are most religious observers of their own promises, so they exhort all other princes to perform theirs; and when fainter methods do not prevail, they compel them to it by the severity of the pastoral censure, and think that it would be the most indecent thing possible if men who are particularly distinguished by the title of the "faithful" should not religiously keep the faith of their treaties. But in that newfound world, which is not more distant from us in situation than the people are in their manners and course of life, there is no trusting to leagues, even though they were made with all the pomp of the most sacred ceremonies; on the contrary, they are on this account the sooner broken, some slight pretense being found in the words of the treaties, which are purposely couched in such ambiguous terms that they can never be so strictly bound but they will always find some loophole to escape at; and thus they break both their leagues and their faith. And this is done with such impudence, that those very men who value themselves on having suggested these expedients to their princes, would with a haughty scorn declaim against such craft, or, to speak plainer, such fraud and deceit, if they found private men make use of it in their bargains, and would readily say that they deserved to be hanged.

From Utopia by Sir Thomas More, 1516

When they approached the foot of the throne, Cacambo asked one of the great officers in what manner they were to behave when they went to pay their respects to his Majesty; whether they were to fall down on their knees, or their bellies; whether they were to put their hands upon their heads or upon their backs; whether they were to lick up the dust of the room; and, in a word, what the ceremony was? "The custom is," said the great officer, "to embrace the King, and kiss him on both cheeks." Candide and Cacambo accordingly clasped his Majesty round the neck, who

received them in the most polite manner imaginable, and very genteelly invited them to sup with him.

In the interim, they showed them the city, the public edifices, that seemed almost to touch the clouds; the market places, embellished with a thousand columns; fountains of pure water, besides others of rose-water, and the liquors that are extracted from the sugar canes, which played continually in the squares, which were paved with a kind of precious stones, that diffused a fragrance like that of cloves or cinnamon. Candide asking them to show them their courts of justice, and their parliament house, they told him they had none, and that they were strangers to law-suits. He then inquired if they had any prisons, and was told they had not. What surprised him most, and gave him the greatest pleasure, was the palace of sciences, in which he saw a gallery two thousand paces in length, full of mathematical instruments and scientific apparatus.

After having spent the afternoon in going over about a thousandth part of the city, they were re-conducted to the palace. Candide seated himself at table with his Majesty, his valet Cacambo, and a great many ladies. Never was there a better entertainment; and never was more wit shown at table than what his Majesty displayed. Cacambo interpreted the King's repartees to Candide, and though they were translated, they appeared excellent repartees still; a thing which surprised Candide about as much as anything else.

They spent a whole month in this hospitable manner; Candide continually remarking to Cacambo, "I must say it again and again, my friend, that the castle where I was born was nothing in comparison to the country where we are now; but yet Miss Cunegonde is not here, and without doubt you have left a sweetheart behind you in Europe.

If we stay where we are, we shall be looked upon only as other folks; whereas, if we return to our own world, only with twelve sheep loaded with pebbles of Eldorado, we shall be richer than all the kings put together; we shall have no need to be afraid of the inquisitors, and we may easily recover Miss Cunegonde."

"I am not ignorant that my country is a small affair, but when one is well off it's best to keep so. I certainly have no right to detain strangers; it is a degree of tyranny inconsistent with our customs and laws; all men are free; you may depart when you please; but you cannot get away without the greatest difficulty. It is impossible to go against the current up the rapid river which runs under the rocks; your passage hither was a kind of miracle. The mountains which surround my kingdom are a thousand feet high, and as steep as a wall; they are at least ten leagues over, and their descent is a succession of precipices. However, since you seem determined to leave us, I will immediately give orders to the constructors of my machines, to make one to transport you comfortably. When they have conveyed you to the other side of the mountains, no one must attend you; because my subjects have made a vow never to pass beyond them, and they are too wise to break it. There is nothing else you can ask of me which shall not be granted." "We ask your Majesty," said Cacambo, very eagerly, "only a few sheep loaded with provisions, together with some of the common stones and dirt of your country."

The King laughed heartily; "I cannot," said he, "conceive what pleasure you Europeans find in our yellow clay; but you are welcome to take as much of it as you please, and much good may it do you."

He gave immediate orders to his engineers to construct a machine to hoist up and transport these two extraordinary persons out of his kingdom. Three thousand able mechanics set to work, and in a fortnight's time the machine was completed, which cost no more than twenty millions sterling of their currency.

Candide and Cacambo were both placed on the machine, together with two large red sheep bridled and saddled for them to ride on, when they were over the mountains, twenty sheep of burden, loaded with provisions, thirty with the greatest curiosities of the country, by way of present, and fifty with gold, precious stones, and diamonds.

From Voltaire Candide, 1759

Imagine there's no heaven
It's easy if you try
No hell below us
Above us only sky
Imagine all the people
Living for today...

Imagine there's no countries
It isn't hard to do
Nothing to kill or die for
And no religion too
Imagine all the people
Living life in peace...

You may say I'm a dreamer

But I'm not the only one
I hope someday you'll join us
And the world will be as one

Imagine no possessions
I wonder if you can
No need for greed or hunger
A brotherhood of man
Imagine all the people
Sharing all the world...

You may say I'm a dreamer
But I'm not the only one
I hope someday you'll join us
And the world will live as one
"Imagine" (song) by John Lennon, 1971

Utopia... Heaven... Shangri-La... El Dorado...

Images of paradise are as old as time itself. Every culture has them. They are found in ancient writings from Mesopotamia, Egypt, Greece and Rome. Ancient Hindu and Buddhist sources describe a formless energy from which creation sprang and to which everyone will eventually return. Early Judeo-Christian and Muslim scholars tried to describe these places as supernatural, almost mystical places. One of the main goals of philosophical thought over the centuries was to explain what it would be like to live in a perfect society. Not everyone's vision was the same, to be sure. No one will ever compare Marx's idealistic communist society with Plato's true republic.

Sir Thomas More's Utopia, published in 1516, describes such a place, but the English philosopher sprinkles in just enough facts (as they were known in his time) to make it believable. The book is about a fictional island somewhere in the "New World" (which had been discovered by Europeans only a couple of decades earlier and was still largely unexplored when More wrote his book). The first part of the work explores the evils of European society (as More sees them) in the early 16th century: the tendency of kings to start wars, high taxes, punishments that don't fit the crimes, and poverty and starvation among the poorer classes. In the fictional kingdom, More's characters live in an ordered society, where the author describes some interesting laws and practices such as unrestricted divorce, unrestricted voting, no real social classes, and even authorized suicide. More's Utopia, however is not without its problems. Everyone lives in a rather communal setting, whether they live in a rural community or a regulated city setting. There is plenty of "freedom", as long as those who are free behave in the way society wants them to behave. There is no poverty, and More even describes the redistribution of wealth in a way that would make Marx and Lenin proud, but readers are left to wonder how people in Utopia would get rich in the first place.

Interestingly enough, in an age where literacy rates were very low, More's audience would have been the elite gentry, and even some of them would have been unable to read Utopia, a work written in Latin and only translated decades after it was first published. Scholars and historians have long debated why More wrote the book knowing that most (if not all) of his readers would have seen the island of Utopia as a nightmare in many ways. There is even the curious question as to why More described such an society as having many ideals that went against his personal and religious beliefs (More's views on Henry VIII's divorce and the King's subsequent decision to split the English Church from the Roman Catholic Church will get him executed). Voltaire, an 18th century French philosopher during the Age of Enlightenment, wrote Candide in 1759, a book where he identified and challenged, through satirical exaggeration and outrageous events, the cultural, political, religious and economic conditions in France that the Revolution would eventually topple in the decades to come. Much of the book attacks different parts of European society in the 18th century, but as part of his adventures, Voltaire's main character Candide ends up in a land called "El Dorado" (somewhere in the New World) where he and his companion find an idyllic society based on many of the same principles outlined by More in Utopia almost 250 years earlier. The citizens of El Dorado, unlike citizens in Voltaire's Absolutist France, live in harmony with each other and with nature. There is no wealth, and yet no poverty. Voltaire even describes how El Dorado's inhabitants fail to understand Candide's fascination with "yellow clay" (gold) – something of which they have an unlimited supply. Voltaire's work had a powerful impact on his society. According to stories and tales that have come down through history since the revolutionary period, common soldiers and citizens carried two items with them as they took to the streets: mementos of their family and a copy of Candide.

Two centuries later, John Lennon, a musician from Liverpool, England took on the subject of a utopian society with his 1971 hit song "Imagine." Written as a political statement in London by Lennon and his wife Yoko Ono during a time when the singer was protesting the Vietnam War and very active in social causes, "Imagine" asks listeners to envision a society where there was no heaven, no hell, no religion, no war, no greed and no hunger. Released in 1971, the song became the best-selling single of Lennon's career (quite a feat considering some of the songs he put out). The song has been covered dozens of times since Lennon's untimely death in 1980, and continues to inspire peace activists and dreamers to this day.

Through an in-depth analysis of various primary and secondary sources, including full text versions of More's Utopia and Voltaire's Candide, and full text, audio and video versions of Lennon's "Imagine", students in this lesson will identify, understand and be able to compare and contrast the three different visions of paradise as articulated by the authors themselves and how each of those visions continues to powerfully influence opinions long after their deaths.

Objectives

1. Students will identify, analyze, understand and be able to explain the utopian society found in Thomas More's 16th century literary work Utopia.
2. Students will identify, analyze, understand and be able to explain the utopian society of El Dorado as described in Voltaire's 18th century literary work Candide.
3. Students will identify, analyze, understand and be able to explain the utopian society as described in John Lennon's 1971 song "Imagine".
4. Students will be able to identify, analyze, understand, compare and explain the different utopian societies as described by Thomas More, Voltaire and John Lennon, focusing on similarities between the three and how visions of those societies continue to influence people long after their deaths.

Procedures

I. Anticipatory Set

- Writing / Question: How would you describe a perfect society?
- Handouts – Copies of the primary sources and readings from the websites listed.

II. Body of Lesson

- Lecture / PPT – Brief overviews of More's Utopia, Voltaire's Candide and Lennon's "Imagine".
- Videos
Thomas More Utopia
Chapter 18 of Candide
John Lennon – "Imagine" HD
- Independent Activity – Students read the primary sources and articles on More's Utopia, Voltaire's Candide, and Lennon's "Imagine", taking notes as appropriate.
- Students in this lesson should be given ample time to read text versions Utopia and Candide. Utopia should be read in full. Students should read at least chapter 18 of Candide.
- Suggestion: Have the students read some of the articles for homework to prepare for class discussion.
- Suggestion: Break students into groups and assign different articles to each group.
- Group Activity – Socratic Discussion: Compare and contrast the three different visions of paradise as articulated by More, Voltaire and Lennon, and how each of those visions continues to powerfully influence opinions long after their deaths.

III. Closure

- Assessment – Essay / DBQ: Using information from the texts and/or songs themselves, compare and contrast the three different visions of paradise as articulated by More, Voltaire and Lennon, and how each of those visions continues to powerfully influence the opinions of peace activists and dreamers long after their deaths.

Extension

On tour: John Lennon Peace Monument in Liverpool

While on tour in Great Britain, students can visit the John Lennon Peace Monument in Liverpool at Kings Dock on the Liverpool Waterfront. The 18 foot sculpture, unveiled on 09 Oct 2010 on what would have been Lennon's 70th birthday, is topped by a white (metal) feather, a lasting symbol for peace. Over the last three years, the monument has become one of the most famous attractions in Liverpool.

On tour: Tower of London (Chapel of St. Peter ad Vincula)

While on tour, students visit the Tower of London, where Sir Thomas More was executed under orders from Henry VIII. According to records from his execution, his headless body was put in the chapel at the Tower, but the head itself was parboiled and then placed on London Bridge for a month. According to multiple sources, Margaret Roper, More's daughter, then purchased her father's head and had it buried in the Roper family vault in Canterbury.

On tour: Place de la Concorde in Paris

While on tour, you will visit the Place de la Concorde. The square, the largest in the French capital, originally bore the name "Place Louis XV." During the French Revolution, the square was renamed "Place de la Revolution." It was here where such people as Louis XVI, Marie Antoinette, Maximilien Robespierre and thousands of others were beheaded in front of cheering crowds. The name was changed to its current one during the period known as the "directory" (after 1795). Students will have the opportunity to see for themselves where the excesses of the Revolution took place. It is said that at its height, the Revolution executed so many people on a daily basis that blood ran down the street to the Seine River. Was this the "best of all possible worlds" Voltaire described in Candide?

Web Links

Lesson Plan Websites

- oregonstate.edu/instruct/phl302/texts/more/utopia-contents.html
Utopia (primary source) – full text searchable online version of Thomas More's Utopia from Bill Uzgalis, Professor of Philosophy, Oregon State University
- www.literature.org/authors/voltaire/candide/
Candide (primary source) -- Full text e-book version of Voltaire's Candide
- thomasmorestudies.org/utopia/Utopia_guide.pdf
Study Guide for Utopia (worksheet). 10 page worksheet packet on More's book that goes through each book and chapter – highly recommended for all students and teachers.
- bullard.fresno.k12.ca.us/html/SummerHomework/Euro%20Summer%20Assign.pdf
PDF document – AP European History reading assignment on Candide from Bullard High School in Fresno, CA. Contains a great series of study questions that break the book down, chapter by chapter. Also has an entire page analyzing Voltaire's main ideas throughout the book – a valuable resource for students and teachers alike.
- www.sjsu.edu/faculty/wooda/149/4-More.html
Summary of Thomas More's Utopia (website) – from Andrew Wood, Communications Professor at San Jose State University
- faculty.goucher.edu/eng211/sir_thomas_more__utopia.htm
Sir Thomas More and Utopia (website) – from Arnie Sanders, Department of English, Goucher College (MD)
- schoolwires.henry.k12.ga.us/cms/lib08/GA01000549/Centricity/Domain/6273/Utopia%20PowerPoint.pptx
Utopia (PowerPoint) – from Morgan Mileham, English teacher at Eagle's Landing High School (GA)
- www.teachingchannel.org/videos/choosing-primary-source-documents?fd=1
Reading Like a Historian: Primary Source Documents (video) – great 2-minute video on how to incorporate primary sources into the Common Core and history classes. From Shilpa Duvooor of Summit Preparatory Charter High School in Redwood City, CA. Highly recommended for teachers.
- www.youtube.com/watch?v=w-5BLInpvp8
Thomas More Utopia (video) – from Adam Crowley, Professor of British Literature, Husson University (ME)
- www.youtube.com/watch?v=2k9y6mRbejU
Chapter 18 – Candide by Voltaire (video)
- www.youtube.com/watch?v=DVg2EJwIF8
John Lennon – Imagine HD (video)

Background Information

- en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Thomas_More
Thomas More – Wikipedia article
- [en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Utopia_\(book\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Utopia_(book))
Utopia (book) – Wikipedia article
- en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Voltaire
Voltaire – Wikipedia article
- en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Candide
Candide – Wikipedia article
- en.wikipedia.org/wiki/John_Lennon
John Lennon – Wikipedia article
- [en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Imagine_\(song\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Imagine_(song))
Imagine (song) – Wikipedia article
- passports.com/group_leaders/on_the_road/the_united_kingdom/country_profile
On the Road: Britain (country profile) – from Passports Educational Travel

Other Relevant Passports Lesson Plans

- www.passports.com/lesson_plans/france/voltaire-candide
Enlightenment in France – Voltaire's Candide
- www.passports.com/lesson_plans/england/sir-thomas-more
Reformation England – Sir Thomas More

Key Terms

- Candide
- El Dorado
- John Lennon
- Thomas More
- Utopia
- Utopian Philosophy
- Voltaire

