

**AGE OF  
ENLIGHTENMENT:  
ENGLAND: JOHN  
LOCKE**



# AGE OF ENLIGHTENMENT: ENGLAND: JOHN LOCKE

## Description

Students in this lesson will identify, understand and be able to explain the basics of Locke's ideas on society and government by reading and analyzing excerpts from his two major philosophical works, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (1689) and *Two Treatise on Government* (1690), thereby gaining a better understanding of how Locke's writings influenced Jefferson and the other founding fathers.

## Subjects

European History  
World History  
US History

## Grade Level

11-12

## Duration

90 minutes

## Tour Links

- Windsor
- Houses of Parliament
- Westminster Abbey

## Essential Questions

- What were the facts behind the signing of the Declaration of Independence? How does the document articulate Enlightenment principles?
- Who was John Locke? What were his ideas behind the natural state of man? What were his ideas behind the relationship between man and government?
- What did Locke think of the right of men to stage a revolution against a government?
- Were the American colonists justified in issuing the Declaration of Independence?

## Academic Summary

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.

*John Locke, Second Treatise of Civil Government (1690), Chapter 19, Section 222*

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.

*Declaration of Independence, 04 July 1776*

On 04 July 1776, the Continental Congress, meeting in Philadelphia, adopted and signed the final draft of the Declaration of Independence. Presented by the so-called "Committee of Five" (John Adams of MA, Roger Sherman of CT, Ben Franklin of PA, Robert Livingston of NY and Thomas Jefferson of VA), the document contained references to the "Social Contract" and was in many ways a natural outgrowth of the Age of Enlightenment, a political, philosophical and cultural movement of intellectuals during the 17th and 18th centuries. Inspired by the scientific revolution of a century earlier and a rededication to a reliance on reason, philosophers during the Enlightenment (most centered in Paris, but many others in England and Scotland) wrote volumes of books on subjects such as the natural rights of man and the social contract between men and government. The American founding fathers studied these literary works when developing their ideas behind revolution and independence. Of all the great philosophers, perhaps none inspired the founding fathers (especially Jefferson) more than English philosophe John Locke. Locke, educated at the Westminster School in London and later at Oxford University, believed that the natural state of man was that of freedom, and that governments were created to protect man's live liberty and property.

Through an in-depth analysis of primary and secondary sources, students in this lesson will identify, understand and be able to explain the basics of Locke's ideas on society and government by reading and analyzing excerpts from his two major philosophical works, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (1689) and *Two Treatise on Government* (1690), thereby gaining a better understanding of how Locke's writings influenced Jefferson and the other founding fathers.

## Objectives

1. Students will identify, understand and be able to explain the events surrounding issuance of the Declaration of Independence by the Continental Congress in Philadelphia on 04 July 1776.
2. Students will identify, understand and be able to explain the basic principles behind John Locke's ideas of the natural rights of man and the social contract between men and governments.
3. Students will identify, understand and be able to explain how the American founding fathers, and Thomas Jefferson in particular, were influenced by John Locke's writings.

## Procedures

### I. Anticipatory Set

- Writing / Question: What basic principles are contained within the Declaration of Independence? (5 min)
- Handouts – Copies of the primary sources and readings from the websites listed below. (5 min)

### II. Body of Lesson

- Lecture / PPT – Brief overview of the Declaration of Independence and how it was influenced by John Locke. (20 min)
- Video – John Locke (5 min)
- Video – John Locke and his Influence on the Founding Fathers (20 min)
- Independent Activity – Students read the primary sources and articles from John Locke, taking notes as appropriate. (20 min)
- Suggestion: Have the students read some of these articles for homework the night before class to prepare for class discussion.
- Suggestion: Focus on Locke's ideas behind “natural rights” and the “right of revolution.”
- Group Activity – Socratic discussion how John Locke's ideas influenced Thomas Jefferson and the Committee of Five when they wrote the Declaration of Independence. (10 min)

### III. Closure

- Assessment – Essay / DBQ: Explain how the American Declaration of Independence is a natural outgrowth of Enlightenment principles, particularly those of “natural rights”, the “social contract” and the “right of revolution” as articulated by English philosopher John Locke a century earlier. Were the colonists in 1776 justified in issuing the Declaration?

## Extension

### **On tour: Parliament**

While on tour, students visit Parliament, where they can see for themselves the heart of modern Britain's constitutional government. Locke lived in an age when the monarchy ruled England, albeit with the consent of Parliament. Today's monarch is little more than a figurehead. Almost all of the power in England's government today resides in the Commons chamber, where the English people control their own system. A different system than the one Americans have, the British government puts almost total control into the lower house of its legislature.

# Web Links

## Lesson Plan Websites

- [earlymoderntexts.com/f\\_locke.html](http://earlymoderntexts.com/f_locke.html)  
Some Texts from Early Modern Philosophy (website): John Locke – fantastic website, run by Professor Johnathan Bennett, a retired professor from Syracuse University, who has taken most of the important philosophical works of the Age of Enlightenment (including Locke’s major works) and has translated them into modern English so students can readily access and understand them. This site is highly recommended for any and all teachers and students studying the philosophical works of the Enlightenment period.
- [slideshare.net/brianbelen/locke-presentation-871189](https://www.slideshare.net/brianbelen/locke-presentation-871189)  
Slideshare.net PowerPoint by Brian Belen on Locke’s ideas behind natural rights and man’s relationship to government
- [avalon.law.yale.edu/18th\\_century/declare.asp](http://avalon.law.yale.edu/18th_century/declare.asp)  
Yale Law School Library: The Avalon Project: documents in Law, History and Diplomacy: Declaration of Independence
- [teachingchannel.org/videos/choosing-primary-source-documents?fd=1](http://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 Duvoor of Summit Preparatory Charter High School in Redwood City, CA – highly recommended for teachers.
- [wallbuilders.com/libissuesarticles.asp?id=99156](http://wallbuilders.com/libissuesarticles.asp?id=99156)  
Wallbuilders.com (website) – John Locke: A Philosophical Founder of America
- [archives.gov/exhibits/charters/declaration\\_history.html](http://archives.gov/exhibits/charters/declaration_history.html)  
National Archives (US govt) website – Charters of Freedom: Declaration of Independence
- [youtube.com/watch?v=UDCfzXB76h0](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UDCfzXB76h0)  
John Locke video
- [youtube.com/watch?v=D2KL3CqaC7g](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=D2KL3CqaC7g)  
AP Government Lecture (on video) on John Locke and his influence on the Founding Fathers by Ron Stallard, of Shawnee Mission East HS in Prairie Village, KS (a suburb of Kansas City)

## Background Information

- [simple.wikipedia.org/wiki/John\\_Locke](http://simple.wikipedia.org/wiki/John_Locke)  
“John Locke” – Wikipedia article
- [passports.com/group\\_leaders/on\\_the\\_road/the\\_united\\_kingdom/london](http://passports.com/group_leaders/on_the_road/the_united_kingdom/london)  
On the Road: London – city facts on London from Passports Educational Travel

## Key Terms

- Age of Reason
- Declaration of Independence
- Enlightenment
- Natural Rights
- John Locke
- Philosophe
- Philosophy
- Scientific Revolution
- Thomas Jefferson

