

**AGE OF
ENLIGHTENMENT:
FRANCE: VOLTAIRE
(CANDIDE)**



AGE OF ENLIGHTENMENT: FRANCE: VOLTAIRE (CANDIDE)

Description

Students in this lesson will analyze and understand the basic story behind Voltaire's satire by reading *Candide* (1759). In doing such analysis, students will also gain an appreciation and understanding of how Voltaire challenged the French government, the French system of taxation and social ideas behind wealth, and the Roman Catholic Church. Finally students will understand and be able to explain how a little bizarre story about a simple dim-witted character later inspired French Revolutionary leaders to topple the entire system.

Subjects

English / Language Arts
European History
World History
Philosophy

Grade Level

11-12

Duration

90 minutes (2-3 wk. prep)

Tour Links

- Place de la Bastille
- Place de la Concorde
- Palais de Justice
- Pantheon, Paris

Essential Questions

- 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?
- What are the main characters in Voltaire's book, *Candide*, supposed to represent? Is there a parallel in mid-18th century France for each of the characters?
- What overall message runs through Voltaire's book, *Candide*? Does Voltaire do a good job in presenting and proving his points by the end of the book?
- How did Voltaire's ideas influence French Revolutionary leaders?

Academic Summary

If this is the best of all possible worlds, what are the others?

Voltaire: Candide (1759), chapter 6

We are going to a new world... and no doubt it is there that everything is for the best; for it must be admitted that one might lament a little over the physical and moral happenings of our own world.

Voltaire: Candide (1759), chapter 10

Los Padres have everything and the people have nothing; 'tis the masterpiece of reason and justice. For my part, I know nothing so divine as Los Padres who make war on Kings of Spain and Portugal and in Europe act as their confessors; who here kill Spaniards and at Madrid send them to Heaven.

Voltaire: Candide (1759), chapter 14

It would have been better to stay in the Paradise of Eldorado instead of returning to this accursed Europe. How right you are, my dear Martin!

Everything is illusion and calamity!

Voltaire: Candide (1759), chapter 24

Many of the revolutionaries in Paris during the French Revolution were inspired by the writings of Francois Marie Arouet (pen name: Voltaire), perhaps France's greatest writer in the Age of Enlightenment. His writing included a vast amount of work in almost every literary form, including 56 plays, dialogues, historical writing, stories and novels, poetry and epic poems, essays, scientific and learned papers, pamphlets, book reviews, and more than 20,000 letters. His most famous work, a satirical little book, *Candide*, written in 1759, identified and challenged, through satirical exaggeration and outrageous events, the cultural, political, religious and economic conditions in France that the Revolution would topple in the decades to come. 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: mementoes of their family and a copy of *Candide*.

Students in this lesson will analyze and understand the basic story behind Voltaire's satire by reading *Candide* (1759). In doing such analysis, students will also gain an appreciation and understanding on how Voltaire challenged the French government, the French system of taxation and social ideas behind wealth, and the Roman Catholic Church. Finally students will understand and be able to explain how a little bizarre story about a simple dim-witted character later inspired French Revolutionary leaders to topple the entire system.

Objectives

1. Students will identify, analyze, understand and be able to explain the basic principles behind Voltaire's ideas of the natural rights of man, the role religion should play in society and the relationship between men and governments as articulated in his most influential and popular work, *Candide* (1759).
2. Students will identify, understand and be able to explain how Voltaire's writings (particularly in his book, *Candide*) influenced many of the French Revolutionary leaders.

Procedures

I. Anticipatory Set

- Writing / Question: Do human beings need governments? (5 min)
- Handouts – Copies of the primary sources and readings from the websites listed below. (5 min)
- Students should be given about 2-3 weeks to read and analyze Voltaire's book, *Candide*.

II. Body of Lesson

- Lecture / PPT – Brief overview of Voltaire's ideas and literary works. (10 min)
- Video – Voltaire Documentary (30 min) / Video – Voltaire: Life and Works (10 min)
- Independent Activity – Students read the primary sources and articles on Voltaire's *Candide*, taking notes as appropriate. (15 min)
- Suggestion: Have the students read some of these articles for homework the night before class to prepare for class discussion.
- Group Activity – Discussion how Rousseau's ideas influenced French revolutionaries after the storming of the Bastille, especially Robespierre. (15 min)

III. Closure

- Assessment – Short Essay / DBQ: Explain in detail how Voltaire used his famous book *Candide* to criticize many different parts of French (and European) society, including but not limited to the French government, the French system of taxation and social ideas behind wealth, and the Roman Catholic Church. Was he successful? In the end, how does Voltaire describe the “best of all possible worlds”?

Extension

On tour: Place de la Concorde

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

- 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.literature.org/authors/voltaire/candide/
Full text e-book version of Voltaire's Candide
- www.lonestar.edu/library/15327.htm
Website from the Lone Star College System in TX – contains a brief, but helpful, analysis of Voltaire's work.
- chnm.gmu.edu/revolution/d/430/
Copy of the French Constitution of 1793 at the George Mason University website
- chnm.gmu.edu/revolution/d/295/
Copy of the Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen, 26 Aug 1789 at the George Mason University website
- 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 Duvoor of Summit Preparatory Charter High School in Redwood City, CA – highly recommended for teachers.
- www.youtube.com/watch?v=ysqMldFzX3Y
Voltaire Documentary (video)
- www.youtube.com/watch?v=YBaDwyRETak
Voltaire – Life and Works: A brief lecture (with images) on the life, works and philosophy of Voltaire by Dr. Michael Brooks, historian and writer from Toledo, OH.

Background Information

- www.en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Voltaire#The_name_.22Voltaire.22
Voltaire – Wikipedia Article
- <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Candide>
Candide – Wikipedia article
- www.passports.com/group_leaders/on_the_road/france/paris
On the Road: Paris – from Passports Educational Travel

Other Relevant Passports Lesson Plans

- www.passports.com/lesson_plans/france/age-of-enlightenment-rousseau
Enlightenment in France – Rousseau
- www.passports.com/lesson_plans/france/french-revolution-bourgeois-phase
French Revolution – Bourgeois Phase 1789-92
- www.passports.com/lesson_plans/france/french-revolution-robespierre-and-the-terror
French Revolution – Jacobin Terror 1792-94

Key Terms

- Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen (1789)
- Enlightenment
- French Constitution of 1793
- Natural Rights
- Philosophe
- Philosophy
- Satire
- Scientific Revolution
- Social Contract
- Voltaire

