

**AGE OF
ENLIGHTENMENT:
FRANCE: ROUSSEAU**



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Description

Through an in-depth analysis of primary and secondary sources, specifically by reading and analyzing excerpts from two of Jean Jacques Rousseau's major works, *The Social Contract* (1763) and *Discourse on the Origin and Basis of Inequality among Men* (1754), students in this lesson will identify, understand and be able to explain Rousseau's philosophical ideas and how those ideas inspired French Revolutionary leaders after 1789.

Subjects

English / Language Arts, European History, World History, US History, Philosophy

Grade Level

11-12

Duration

90 minutes

Tour Links

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

Essential Questions

- Who was Jean Jacques Rousseau?
- What were his ideas behind the natural state of man? What were his ideas behind the relationship between man and government?
- Did Rousseau believe in the right of men to stage a revolution against a government? Under what circumstances?
- How did Rousseau's ideas influence French Revolutionary leaders?

Academic Summary

Man was born free, but everywhere he is in chains. This man believes that he is the master of others, and still he is more of a slave than they are. How did that transformation take place? I don't know. How may the restraints on man become legitimate? I do believe I can answer that question....

What, then, is the government? An intermediary body established between the subjects and the sovereign for their mutual communication, a body charged with the execution of the laws and the maintenance of freedom, both civil and political.

Moreover...if the individuals retained certain rights, as there would be no common superior to decide between them and the public, each, being on one point his own judge, would ask to be so on all...and the association would necessarily become inoperative or tyrannical.

Finally, each man, in giving himself to all, gives himself to nobody; and as there is no associate over whom he does not acquire the same right as he yields others over himself, he gains an equivalent for everything he loses.

Jean Jacques Rousseau: the Social Contract, 1763

With regard to equality, this word must not be understood to mean that degrees of power and wealth should be exactly the same, but rather that with regard to power, it should be incapable of all violence and never exerted except by virtue of status and the laws; and with regard to wealth, no citizen should be so opulent that he can buy another, and none so poor that he is constrained to sell himself.

Jean Jacques Rousseau: Discourse on the Origin and Basis of Inequality among Men, 1754

Many of the revolutionaries in Paris during the French Revolution were inspired by the writings of Jean Jacques Rousseau's ideas behind the "Social Contract", a description of the relationship between human beings and their governments. Rousseau was in many ways at the center 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) wrote volumes of books on subjects such as the natural rights of man and the social contract between men and government. French Revolutionary leaders studied these literary works when developing their ideas behind revolution. Of all the great philosophers, perhaps none inspired those men more than Swiss / French philosophe Jean Jacques Rousseau. Rousseau, born in Geneva but who later moved to Paris, believed that the natural state of man was that of freedom, and that only the corruption of society had put him in chains. Governments therefore were created by men to protect individual and general freedoms. Any government that failed to protect those freedoms could be replaced by one that would. Amazingly enough, Rousseau also believed in a sense of equality far advanced of most people in the 18th century, even going so far in his writings to call for the education of women.

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Objectives

1. Students will identify, understand and be able to explain the basic principles behind Jean Jacques Rousseau's ideas of the natural rights of man and the social contract between men and governments.
2. Students will identify, understand and be able to explain how Jean Jacques Rousseau's writings influenced many of the French Revolutionary leaders, particularly Maximillian Robespierre.
3. Students will identify, understand and be able to explain how Jean Jacques Rousseau's writings influenced such documents as the Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen (1789) and the French Constitution of 1793.

Procedure

I. Anticipatory Set

- Writing / Question: Do human beings need governments? What is a government supposed to do? (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 Social Contract and Rousseau's ideas. (20 min)
- Video – The Classics: Rousseau: audio reading (10 min)
- Independent Activity – Students read the primary sources and articles from Jean Jacques Rousseau, taking notes as appropriate. (30 min)
- Suggestion: Have the students read some of these articles for homework the night before class to prepare for class discussion.
- Suggestion: Focus on Rousseau's ideas behind "natural rights" and the "the Social Contract."
- Group Activity – Discussion on how Rousseau's ideas influenced French revolutionaries after the storming of the Bastille, especially Robespierre. (10 min)

III. Closure

- Assessment – Essay / DBQ: Explain in detail how Jean Jacques Rousseau's ideas behind the natural rights of man and the social contract influenced French revolutionaries as they sought to recreate society in the wake of the toppling of the monarchy in 1789.

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 what Rousseau meant by a society based on the equality of men?

Web Links

Lesson Plan Websites

- cdn.icivics.org/sites/default/files/uploads/Rousseau.pdf
iCivics.org (website) worksheet on Rousseau – helps the students define the terms “general will” and natural rights”
- www.fordham.edu/halsall/mod/rousseau-soccon.asp
Internet History Sourcebook at Fordham University – Modern History sourcebook: Jean Jacques Rousseau: the Social Contract, 1763 (excerpts). This primary source contains excerpts short enough for students to analyze and understand in a class period.
- www.iep.utm.edu/soc-cont/#SH2c
Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy at the University of Tennessee Martin – The Social Contract Theory
- directionlessbones.wordpress.com/2010/02/02/rousseaus-social-contract-part-4-the-infamous-general-will/
Article (blog) on Rousseau’s notion of “General Will” by Alderson Warm-fork
- 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.earlymoderntexts.com/rousseau.html
Some Texts from Early Modern Philosophy (website): Jean Jacques Rousseau. 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 Rousseau’s Social Contract) 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.
- 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.
- faculty.rcc.edu/rbrown/files/pol11pp/Social%20Contract%20Theory.ppt
Good PowerPoint on the Social Contract from the Political Science Department at Riverside City College in California.
- www.youtube.com/watch?v=M40waSvXwBU
The Classics: Rousseau – The Social Contract (audio). By Professor Nigel Warburton of the Open University (UK), author of a number of books on classical and modern philosophy. Warburton is also a frequent contributor to the BBC.

Background Information

- en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jean-Jacques_Rousseau
Wikipedia: Jean Jacques Rousseau – contains basic information on Rousseau's life and major literary works
- en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Robespierre
Wikipedia: Maximilien de Robespierre – contains basic information on Robespierre's life, focusing on his role during the French Revolution
- 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/voltaire-candide
Enlightenment in France – Voltaire: Candide
- 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
- General Will
- Natural Rights
- Philosophe
- Philosophy
- Robespierre
- Rousseau
- Scientific Revolution

