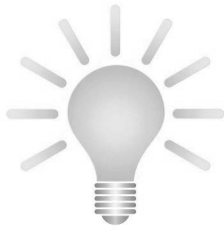


# The Enlightenment

Name: \_\_\_\_\_



## A Time of New Ideas

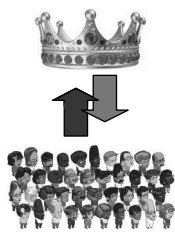
The Age of **Enlightenment** was a period of time when people developed new ideas about human existence, including peoples' basic rights and the level of control they should have over their government and their futures. The Enlightenment began in Europe around 1715. People in cities like Paris gathered in **salons** to discuss philosophy and ways to improve the human experience. Many of their ideas were based in science and reason, which is why this time was also called the Age of Reason.

## Natural Rights

Enlightenment thinkers believed that human beings are born with fundamental, basic rights. These **natural rights** included the right to life, liberty, property, and the freedom to find happiness. In order for people to enjoy these natural rights, other rights needed to be protected. Enlightenment thinkers believed people should have the right to express themselves, move around freely, and petition the government.



## The Social Contract



If there was no government at all, people would live in a **state of nature** with no rules and complete freedom—but without any protection from each other. One Enlightenment idea was the **social contract**: citizens give up some freedom they would have in a state of nature (like the freedom to rob and kill people), and in exchange the government protects citizens' right to life, liberty, and property. To Enlightenment thinkers, the relationship between a government and its citizens was like an agreement. Citizens agree to obey a set of rules, and the government agrees to protect citizens' rights.

## Consent of the Governed

Enlightenment thinkers believed that governments had a responsibility to hold up their end of the social contract. If a government failed, then citizens would no longer agree to be governed and they would have the right to revolt. This idea is known as **consent of the governed**. Traditionally, a government protected citizens from foreign invaders, but the government also had absolute authority over the people. A king ruled his citizens whether they consented or not. To Enlightenment thinkers, this was unacceptable.



## Republicanism



Since the Middle Ages, European leaders had gained power through *heredity*, or family ties. Kings and queens took the throne after another family member died. The people had no say in this process. Many Enlightenment thinkers believed in **republicanism** – the idea that a country's leader should be chosen by the citizens in a general election. Even so, some Enlightenment thinkers frowned on the idea of a democracy. They feared what would happen if a mob of uneducated people had the power to vote.

## Influence on America

The brightest Enlightenment thinkers, with names like Rousseau, Montesquieu, and Locke, became very famous. They influenced leaders in Europe, and became popular with Americans who wanted independence. When our Founding Fathers created a government for the new United States, they embraced many Enlightenment ideas. America's Constitution recognized that citizens were born with basic rights. And even though some of the Founders agreed with those concerned about democracy, the Constitution gave government power to the people. The Enlightenment ended around 1789, about the same time the Constitution was born.

