

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

# The Enlightenment

Learn more about this topic! Each section gives more detail on one of the lyrics from the song. Read each section, and then respond by answering the question or taking notes on key ideas.

1. b'

The Scientific Revolution shifted the way scientists and mathematicians saw the world. Nicolaus Copernicus declared that Earth revolved around the sun. Sir Isaac Newton broke the universe down into mathematical laws. René Descartes championed rational thought as proof of man's and God's existence, writing, "I think, therefore I am." This newfound emphasis on observation, experimentation, and reason challenged longstanding assumptions about the world and set the stage for the Enlightenment.

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2. b'

The Enlightenment, also known as the Age of Reason, was a 17th- and 18th-century intellectual movement. During this period, European politics, religion, philosophy, and science were drastically reoriented. This era was a time of economic prosperity in Europe. This prosperity nurtured a sense of optimism that lent itself to deep thought and a questioning of norms.

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The Enlightenment was less a single, unified movement than it was a spread of ideas among intellectuals. While conclusions varied, Enlightenment thinkers were brought together by a belief that reason could lead humankind to a better world now rather than in the next life. This line of thinking was a direct challenge to the traditional authority of Christianity. It also called into question governments that claimed a God-given right to absolute power. Armed with the learnings of the Scientific Revolution, Enlightenment thinkers set out to reimagine political and social life.

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3. b'

English philosopher John Locke, a friend of Sir Isaac Newton, aimed to understand humankind in the same way Newton understood nature. Locke believed humans are born as a blank slate and build character through life experiences. Though he was religious, he rejected the possibility of innate goodness or original sin and promoted religious tolerance. In his 1690 work *Two Treatises of Government*, Locke outlined his political philosophy. He believed people have a natural right to life, liberty, and the ownership of property. He also saw government as a social contract between ruler and subjects. He believed power should not be absolute, but rather granted in exchange for protection of people's rights. Some of this might sound familiar. That's because Thomas Jefferson was heavily influenced by Locke's political philosophy when he wrote the Declaration of Independence.

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4. b'

The Enlightenment spread to France to a group of intellectuals known as the philosophes. One early philosophe named Charles Louis de Secondat, Baron de La Br  tre et de Montesquieu, had spent time living in England. There he took inspiration from John Locke's work and the English political and social structure. Montesquieu opposed France's absolute monarchy. Instead, he favored England's political system, in which the king's executive power was kept in check by the two houses of Parliament. In his 1748 treatise *The Spirit of Laws*, Montesquieu argued for separation of powers and a system of checks and balances in government. He believed this approach would prevent tyranny. The United States borrowed directly from Montesquieu in creating a government divided into three branches with a system of checks and balances.

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A later philosophe named Jean-Jacques Rousseau openly criticized French political and social structure. The first line of his 1762 work *The Social Contract* reads, "Man is born free, and everywhere he is in chains." Rousseau believed no one should give up their natural rights to a king. Instead, individuals should enter a social contract in which their rights are given up to their community as a whole. Rousseau thought elected officials were not capable of properly reflecting the "general will" of the people. Because of this, he favored direct democracy over representative democracy. Rousseau outlined a "civil state" in which every citizen had a say in every political decision and voted to create laws for the "public good." Rousseau's political philosophy and treatises echo throughout parts of the United States Declaration of Independence. His work also directly inspired both the French and Haitian Revolutions.

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