## The Enlightenment Name:

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| The Enlightenment was a period in which philosophy—especially political philosophy—became a critical motivator for many educated middle class people across Europe. It saw the idea of Humanism brought to its final application: government. Humanism when applied to religion created the Protestant Reformation. Humanism when applied to science created the Scientific Revolution. Humanism applied to politics caused a number of governments to be overthrown. | |
| **Reason**  The absolute most important belief of the Enlightenment was that reason should guide humanity. Reason is the ability to make observations and come to answers that make sense and are based on the information known. The writers of the Enlightenment stated that everything should be based on reason—government, science, daily lives, and even religion to some enlightenment thinkers.  Although this idea would have been very radical a couple hundred years before, Europe had a class of people very ready to accept these ideas. Europe had already been through 200 years of reformation and scientific revolution. It had been 300 years since the printing press made books affordable. By now there was a large educated middle class in Western and Central Europe who were eager to follow these ideas. However, conservative powers of the royals and nobles still resisted these ideas. | **Summarize this belief:** |
| **What resistance or barriers were there to this idea?** |
| **Popular Sovereignty**  Until the modern era, most kings and governments claimed their authority came from God, a concept called the Divine Right. This idea was challenged in the Enlightenment by the emergence of popular sovereignty. Popular sovereignty is the idea that governments take their authority from the consent and support of the people, not from God. Although some monarchs were relatively comfortable with this idea, there was a more frightening side. One application of this idea is that if a government fails or mistreats its people, the people have the right to replace it. This principle was used to justify the American and French revolutions. Because of this, Kings and Queens doubled down on divine right throughout the Enlightenment, arguing that they could not be replaced because God chose them. | **Summarize this belief:** |
| **What resistance or barriers were there to this idea?** |
| **Constitutionalism**  The Enlightenment was mostly defined by its political writers and one of the most important political ideas was the concept that governments should have a constitution. The idea of a constitution is that government should have powers that are clearly defined—not just be able to make them up however it wants. A constitution was a sort of deal with the people so that the people of the country could know exactly what rules and powers the government had over them and what rights they, as citizens, would have.  The idea came from Britain, who did not have (and still does not have) a single constitution. However, Britain does have a large number of documents that together define what the British Government can do. These constitutional documents were the envy of enlightenment thinkers in all the other countries of Europe who did not have such guarantees. | **Summarize this belief:** |
| **Which European countries already had constitutions?** |
| **Natural Rights**  As the name suggests, natural rights are rights and freedoms that all people have regardless of whatever laws or governments they live under. This idea suggested that even the most powerful, absolute monarch still had no right to do certain things to his/her citizens. According to John Locke there were three natural rights: life, liberty and property. All individuals were entitled to live in safety, to be free from oppression, to acquire property and have it safe from theft or seizure. It is the responsibility and the duty of government, Locke wrote, to uphold and protect the natural rights of individuals. The American writer Thomas Jefferson described natural rights as “inalienable rights” because they cannot be taken away.  This idea went hand in hand with Popular Sovereignty. A government could retain the sovereignty granted by the people only so long as it defended their natural rights. | **Summarize this belief:** |
| **What are some natural rights?** |
| **Equality**  One of the central ideas of the Enlightenment was that all humans are basically equal. It didn’t necessarily say that everyone was as strong or smart or rich as anyone else but that all people are people and should be treated the same. Many enlightenment philosophers such as Rousseau and Locke thought that people are born entirely equal to one another and it is their upbringing or their society that makes them either good or bad, intelligent or ignorant.  Equality was not the norm. Most European states were still involved with slavery. Most had nobles who obeyed different laws and could hold jobs that were permanently blocked from “low-born” or “common” people. And this inequality became one of the things enlightenment thinkers fought hardest against. | **Summarize this belief:** |
| **What resistance or barriers were there to this idea?** |
| **Which ideas of the Enlightenment can be applied to our governments? Why do you think that? Be specific** | |

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