

ENLIGHTENMENT QUOTES

Preparation

- Download the Enlightenment Quotes Worksheet

Purpose

The Enlightenment can be a difficult movement to fully understand. By analyzing a set of quotes from authors who were either inspirations for, or products of, the Enlightenment, you'll learn more about their perspectives, which will help you understand the viewpoints of people who lived during that time. Quote analysis is an important analytical skill, and will help you see how different types of evidence can help us better understand the past. In this case, the analysis will help you understand how this movement inspired the revolutionary period that followed. In addition, you'll connect these quotes to current events to evaluate how these ideas still influence society today.

Process

In this activity, you'll work together to analyze a set of quotes from seventeenth- and eighteenth-century authors to determine how each quote is both symbolic of the Enlightenment, and an indication of the Enlightenment's impact today. These quotes were written hundreds of years ago using language and style different from how most people write and speak today. Because of this, these quotes can sometimes be difficult to interpret. This activity offers an everyday-language interpretation to help you fully understand the meaning of each quote.

First, your teacher will either hand out or have you download the Enlightenment Quotes worksheet. As a class, you'll review the differences between one original quote and one everyday-language translation. These everyday-language interpretations should not be taken as the *only* way to understand them. In fact, many of the "original" quotes are themselves translated from other languages. When doing this type of analysis, it's important to keep in mind which lenses of interpretation have been applied when deciding what something means. Could there be other ways to "translate" the quotes that might lead to a slightly different understanding?

Then, your teacher will break the class into groups of three or four. Each group will be responsible for two or three of the quotes on the worksheet. With your group, read your assigned quotes and answer the questions posed at the end of the worksheet for each quote. Make sure to read your quotes carefully and look up any words you don't know.

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Name: Date:

Directions: Read your group's assigned quotes in their original form. Next, read the everyday-language translation to assist in your understanding, and discuss with your group the significance of your assigned quotes. Then, answer the questions for each of your assigned quotes.

1. **Original quote:** "Whosoever, therefore, the legislative shall...either by ambition, fear, folly, or corruption, endeavor to grasp themselves, or put into the hands of any other, an absolute power over the lives, liberties, and estates of the people, by this breach of trust they forfeit the power the people had put into their hands...and it devolves to the people, who have a right to resume their original liberty, and by the establishment of a new legislative...provide for their own safety and security, which is the end for which they are in society." John Locke, *The Second Treatise on Civil Government* (1689)

Everyday-language translation: *If the government—either out of desire for power, fear, corruption, or foolishness—tries to take an absolute control over the lives, rights, or properties of citizens, they violate the trust of the people and lose the power the people had given them. The power then returns to the people, who have a right to take back the freedoms and privileges they had before and create a new government. And this government should provide for the safety and security of the people, which is their purpose in society.*

2. **Original quote:** "...men are equal all; From virtue only true distinction springs..." Voltaire, *Mahomet* (1741)

Everyday-language translation: *Men are born equal—it is only the way that we act that distinguishes people.*

3. **Original quote:** "...till women are more rationally educated, the progress of human virtue and improvement in knowledge must receive continual checks." Mary Wollstonecraft, *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792)

Everyday-language translation: *Until women receive full and complete educations, the development of society and the growth of knowledge will be limited.*

4. **Original quote:** "Woman is born free and remains equal to man in rights...Oh women! Women, when will you cease to be blind? What advantages have you gathered in the revolution?" Olympe de Gouges, *Declaration of the Rights of Woman and of the Female Citizen* (1791)

Everyday-language translation: *Yes, we acknowledge to be true the fact that women are equal to men... But women, open your eyes! The revolution has done nothing to actually change the status of women.*

5. **Original quote:** "In free governments, the rulers are the servants and the people their superiors and sovereigns." Benjamin Franklin, from a debate at the Constitutional Convention (1787)

Everyday-language translation: *In free governments, it is those in positions of power who are servants, and it is the people whom they must answer to.*

6. **Original quote:** "When we are planning for posterity, we ought to remember that virtue is not hereditary." Thomas Paine, *Common Sense* (1776)

Everyday-language translation: *When we are planning for the future, we should remember that honesty and righteousness are not inherited traits.*

7. **Original quote:** "Political liberty is to be found only in moderate governments; and even in these it is not always found. It is there only when there is no abuse of power: but constant experience shows us that every man invested with power is apt to abuse it, and to carry his authority as far as it will go. To prevent this abuse, it is necessary, from the very nature of things, that power should be a check to power...When the legislative and

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executive powers are united in the same person...there can be no liberty...there is no liberty if the judicial power be not separated from the legislative and executive." Montesquieu, *Spirit of the Laws* (1748)

Everyday-language translation: *The right for citizens to freely participate in the political process is only found in governments that are not extremist; and even then it is not guaranteed. Political liberty exists only when there is no abuse of power. But history shows us that those who have power are likely to abuse it, and to try to expand that power as far as possible. To stop the abuse of power, it is inherently necessary to divide it. That is, political freedom cannot exist when the power to make and carry out laws is in the hands of the same person. Similarly, there can be no political freedom if the power to judge the fairness of laws is not separated from the people who make and carry out the laws.*

8. **Original quote:** "The very right to vote imposes on me the duty to instruct myself in public affairs, however little influence my voice may have in them." Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *The Social Contract* (1762)

Everyday-language translation: *The fact that I have the right to vote means that I have a responsibility to stay informed of what's happening politically and socially, even if my participation makes very little impact.*

ENLIGHTENMENT QUOTES

Name:

Date:

Author of assigned quote: _____

Do you agree or disagree with this argument? Explain your reasoning.

How does this quote exemplify Enlightenment ideals?

What connections do you see to current events? Be as specific as possible.

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