

# Introduction to The Age of Enlightenment

The Enlightenment – the great ‘Age of Reason’ – is defined as the period of rigorous scientific, political, and philosophical discourse that characterized European society during the ‘long’ 18th century: from the late 17th century to the ending of the Napoleonic Wars in 1815.

The Enlightenment, a philosophical movement that dominated in Europe during the 18th century, was centered around the idea that reason is the primary source of authority and legitimacy, and advocated such ideals as liberty, progress, tolerance, fraternity, constitutional government, and separation of church and state. At least six ideas came to punctuate American Enlightenment thinking: deism, liberalism, republicanism, conservatism, toleration, and scientific progress. Many of these were shared with European Enlightenment thinkers, but in some instances took a uniquely American form. The Enlightenment helped combat the excesses of the church, establish science as a source of knowledge, and defend human rights against tyranny. It also gave us modern schooling, medicine, republics, representative democracy, and much more.

The four fundamental principles of Enlightenment were:

1. The law like order of the natural world.
2. The power of human reason.
3. The “natural rights” of individuals (including the right to self-government)
4. The progressive improvement of society.

## Plan for this Block

During this block, as with all our history blocks we will start by studying the 3- Fold Commonwealth: Liberty, Equality and Fraternity.

In the area of Liberty, we have the English-Spirit-Thinking, French-Soul-Feeling and German-Body-Will. During this section we will study Francis Bacon, Voltaire and Frederick the Great, Moliere. Moliere was a master of the language and a dramatist who knew the subtleties of the heart. We will also study Bach from Germany. You will find the following readings in this block for the student:

Francis Bacon  
Voltaire  
Frederick the Great  
Moliere  
Bach

In our subjects of Equality, we will study *Politics, Justice, Sociology and Religion*. Although we have a huge choice, we will enter at depth into four Frenchmen, the 18th being France's century. We will study Marat, Talleyrand, Louis XIV, and Cardinal Richelieu. In the same city a decade or so later, we have an unparalleled peek at the life and times through the window of Samuel Pepy's Diaries. These were recorded between 1660 and 1669, and give vivid accounts of The Great Plague, The Fire of London, and even of the Dutch fleet advancing up Old Father Thames. During this part of the block the student will find the following readings:

Marat  
Talleyrand  
Louis XIV  
Cardinal Richelieu  
Samuel Pepy's Diaries

In our section on Fraternity, the Body; the four study areas are *Commerce, Industry, Communications, and Food Production*. The student will find the following readings in this section:

Commerce: Cutters and Smugglers  
Industry  
Communications  
Food Production

We will then move into 17th & 18th Century Literature as another way to gain insight into The Age of Enlightenment. The student will find the following readings in this section:

English poet John Milton  
1776 American Bill of Rights  
Cervantes  
The Princess of Cleves  
Pilgrim's Progress by John Bunyan  
Robinson Crusoe: Short Version  
Tom Jones  
Casanova  
Candide