

From Ideas to Realities: Enlightenment Influences in Philadelphia

Subjects: European History, World History, Social Studies

Suggested Grade Levels: 9–12

Time Frame: Variable

*Margaret Smith,
Friends Select School*

Overview

The Enlightenment was an eighteenth-century intellectual movement that began in Europe and led to cultural, and political consequences around the globe. One such commonly cited consequence is the American Revolution. The ideas of Enlightenment writers such as Montesquieu, Voltaire, John Locke, and others can easily be found in the Declaration of Independence. But the influence of the Enlightenment in Philadelphia extends far beyond the revolution. Numerous events and institutes from late eighteenth and early nineteenth-century Philadelphia can be studied to understand how ideas from one part of the world can become realities in other places around the globe.

After studying the Enlightenment and the writings of specific Enlightenment authors, students will identify a late eighteenth or early nineteenth-century event or institute in Philadelphia that can be considered an extension of the Enlightenment project. Students will research their event or institute in order to make an argument for how it demonstrates the transformation of intellectual ideas from Europe into political and cultural realities in Philadelphia.

Examples of Enlightened Projects in Philadelphia:

- Independence Hall's Assembly Room
- Courtroom of the Pennsylvania Supreme Court
- Charles Wilson Peale's Museum
- Library Company of Philadelphia
- University of Pennsylvania
- American Philosophical Society
- Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts
- Academy of Natural Sciences
- Franklin Institute
- Eastern State Penitentiary
- Centennial Exhibition

Connection to Philadelphia World Heritage Tool Kit's Goal

This lesson provides a direct opportunity to explore Philadelphia's global history. This lesson also explicitly challenges students to develop a transnational analysis as they trace the spread of ideas from Europe to their development of cultural and political realities in other regions of the world.

Core Curriculum Standards

- CC.8.5.11-12.A: Cite specific textual evidence to support analysis of primary and secondary sources, connecting insights gained from specific details to an understanding of the text as a whole.
- CC.8.5.9-10.B: Determine the central ideas or information of a primary or secondary source; provide an accurate summary of how key events or ideas develop over the course of the text.
- CC.8.5.11-12.E: Analyze in detail how a complex primary source is structured, including how key sentences, paragraphs, and larger portions of the text contribute to the whole.
- CC.8.5.11-12.G: Integrate and evaluate multiple sources of information presented in diverse formats and media (e.g., visually, quantitatively, as well as in words) in order to address a question or solve a problem.
- CC.8.6.11-12.A: Write arguments focused on discipline-specific content.
- CC.8.6.11-12.B: Write informative/explanatory texts, including the narration of historical events, scientific procedures/ experiments, or technical processes.
- CC.8.6.11-12.F: Conduct short as well as more sustained research projects to answer a question (including a self-generated question) or solve a problem; narrow or broaden the inquiry when appropriate; synthesize multiple sources on the subject, demonstrating understanding of the subject under investigation.
- CC.8.6.11-12.G: Gather relevant information from multiple authoritative print and digital sources, using advanced searches effectively; assess the strengths and limitations of each source in terms of the specific task, purpose, and audience; integrate information into the text selectively to maintain the flow of ideas, avoiding plagiarism and overreliance on any one source and following a standard format for citation.
- CC.8.6.11-12.H: Draw evidence from informational texts to support analysis, reflection, and research.

Objectives

Students will demonstrate their understanding of specific Enlightenment ideas and values, while also exploring how intellectual movements in one part of the world can shape culture and politics in other regions of the globe by identifying and analyzing Philadelphia events and institutes that reflected the values and goals of the Enlightenment.

Students have the opportunity to practice a number of research, reading, analysis, writing, and presentation skills. Students will synthesize information from various eighteenth-century European primary sources then apply and test their understanding in a novel context, that of independently researched events and institutes in Philadelphia.

Essential Question

What happens to ideas as they become realities?

Materials Needed

Access to computer for online research and technology-related projects, materials for posters or other physical projects.

Procedure

This lesson is designed to be the culminating activity for a unit on the Enlightenment. The full unit would take approximately two to two and a half weeks. (Teachers could adjust the timetable as necessary to fit their schedule and curriculum priorities.)

Students will begin reading selected Enlightenment primary sources, in full or excerpts, as determined by their teacher. After a discussion of individual authors' arguments, students would work to synthesize the various authors' main ideas into a list of convergent ideas and values of the Enlightenment.

Students would then read and study some of the Enlightenment cultural projects and political developments in eighteenth-century Europe such as the publication of the *Encyclopédie*, the spread of newspapers, and the creation of lending libraries. (Here too, teachers' schedule and curricular priorities would dictate the breadth and depth of this content.) Students should have the opportunity to discuss and debate any perceived conflicts between Enlightened ideals and practices, such as the value of liberty in an age of slavery, or the exclusion of women from scientific societies.

The unit would culminate with students surveying eighteenth and nineteenth-century intellectual, cultural, and political developments in Philadelphia looking for evidence of Enlightenment values and ideas. Students would select one cultural institute or political event that they believe demonstrates the spread of the Enlightenment project to Philadelphia, and students would then research that event or institute in depth. (Depending on the age, research skill level, and/or time available, teachers may want to have students search for these from scratch, scaffold the research process by providing students with a list of recommended websites, or scaffold even further with a predetermined list of potential Enlightenment sites and events in Philadelphia.)

As they conduct their research, students would prepare an argument that demonstrates the way(s) in which the event or institute reflects a continuation of the Enlightenment project abroad. As evidence for their argument, students should connect specific elements in their chosen event or institute to specific quotes from Enlightenment authors.

This lesson is scalable. Depending on the nature of the course and/or the size and of the class, some teachers might elect to expand beyond Philadelphia in order to demonstrate the global influence of the Enlightenment. In that case students could research events and institutes in other US cities or in other parts of the world beyond Europe.

Outcome/Assessment

Students will present their arguments to the class. Depending on the age, presentation skill level, time, and/or available technology, teachers may want to have students present orally (with or without an accompanying visual presentation), in a written essay, in a poster session, or through the creation of websites.

Special Education and English Language Learners Accommodations

If the technology is available, ELL learners could prepare a movie in lieu of an oral presentation. They would still meet the requirement of presenting their argument, but they would be able to control the pace of their presentation, chunk their speaking efforts, make revisions, and have the ability to edit the final work.

Additional Resources

Web:

Enlightenment background & primary sources: <http://legacy.fordham.edu/halsall/mod/modsbook10.asp>

Map of eighteenth-century Philadelphia: <http://teachingamericanhistory.org/convention/map/>

Descriptions of eighteenth-century Philadelphia:

<http://nationalhumanitiescenter.org/pds/becomingamer/growth/text2/philadelphiadescriptions.pdf>

Overview of the Enlightenment: <http://www.britannica.com/event/Enlightenment-European-history>

Overview of the Enlightenment: <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/enlightenment/>

Overview of the Enlightenment: <http://www.history.com/topics/enlightenment>

Independence Hall's Assembly Room:

<http://www.nps.gov/inde/learn/historyculture/places-independencehall.htm>

Courtroom of the Pennsylvania Supreme Court:

<http://www.nps.gov/inde/learn/historyculture/places-independencehall.htm>

Charles Wilson Peale's Museum: <http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=92388477>

Charles Wilson Peale's Museum: <https://journals.ku.edu/index.php/amerstud/article/viewFile/2470/2429>

Library Company of Philadelphia: <http://www.librarycompany.org/about/index.htm>

University of Pennsylvania: <http://www.upenn.edu/about/history>

American Philosophical Society: <http://www.amphilsoc.org/about/campus/philosophicalhall>

American Philosophical Society: <http://www.amphilsoc.org/about>

Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts: <https://www.pafa.org/museum/history-pafa>

Academy of Natural Sciences: <http://www.ansp.org/about/academy-history/>

Franklin Institute: <https://www.fi.edu/about-us/mission-history>

Eastern State Penitentiary: <http://www.easternstate.org/learn/research-library/history>

Centennial Exhibition: <http://www.lcpimages.org/centennial/index.htm>