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# The Spread of Enlightenment Ideas

## TERMS & NAMES

- salon
- baroque
- neoclassical
- enlightened despot
- Catherine the Great

## MAIN IDEA

Enlightenment ideas spread through the Western world and profoundly influenced the arts and government.

## WHY IT MATTERS NOW

An “enlightened” problem-solving approach to government and society prevails in modern civilization today.

**SETTING THE STAGE** The philosophes’ views often got them in trouble. In France it was illegal to criticize either the Catholic Church or the government. Many philosophes landed in jail or were exiled. Voltaire, for example, experienced both punishments. Nevertheless, Enlightenment ideas spread throughout Europe.

## A World of Ideas

In the 1700s, Paris was the cultural and intellectual capital of Europe. Young people from around Europe—and also from the Americas—came to study, philosophize, and enjoy fine culture. The brightest minds of the age gathered there. From their circles radiated the ideas of the Enlightenment.

**The Paris Salons** The buzz of Enlightenment ideas was most intense in the mansions of several wealthy women of Paris. There, in their large drawing rooms, these hostesses held regular social gatherings called **salons**. At these events, philosophers, writers, artists, scientists, and other great intellects met to discuss ideas and enjoy artistic performances.

The most influential of the salon hostesses in Voltaire’s time was Marie-Thérèse Geoffrin (zhuh-frehn). Self-educated and from the well-to-do middle class, Madame Geoffrin was friends with both philosophes and heads of state. She corresponded with the king of Sweden and Catherine the Great of Russia.

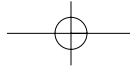
**Diderot’s Encyclopedia** Madame Geoffrin also helped finance the project of a leading philosophe named Denis Diderot (DEE-duh-ROH). Diderot imagined a large set of books to which all the leading scholars of Europe would contribute articles and essays.

This *Encyclopedia*, as he called it, would bring together all the most current and enlightened thinking about science, technology, art, government, and more.

Diderot began publishing the first volumes in 1751.

This painting by Anicet Charles Lemonnier shows a salon in the home of Madame Geoffrin (inset, and seated third from right). The guests are listening to an actor reading aloud from a new play.





### THINK THROUGH HISTORY

#### A. Making

**Inferences** In what ways did the *Encyclopedia* project reflect the Age of Enlightenment?

The Enlightenment views expressed in the articles soon angered both the French government and the Catholic Church. Their censors banned the work. They said it undermined royal authority, encouraged a spirit of revolt, and fostered “moral corruption, irreligion, and unbelief.” Fearing arrest, some leading philosophes withdrew from the project and urged Diderot to quit. Diderot pressed on, however, and finally won permission to continue publishing the *Encyclopedia*. New volumes came out regularly under his editorship until 1772.

**New Ideas Circulate** The salons and the *Encyclopedia* helped spread Enlightenment ideas to educated people all over Europe. The enlightened thinkers of Europe considered themselves part of an intellectual community. They shared their ideas through books, personal letters, visits back and forth, and magazine articles. As one writer of the day described the flurry of communication, “Never have new ideas had such rapid circulation at such long distance.”

Enlightenment ideas also eventually reached middle-class people through newspapers, pamphlets, and even political songs. Enlightenment ideas about government and equality attracted the attention of a growing literate middle class. This group had money but limited status and political power. With their money, middle-class people could afford to buy many books and support the work of artists. Through its purchasing power, this group had growing influence over European culture in the 1700s.



This detail of *Seated Woman with Book*, by French artist Jean-Baptiste Chardin, shows a middle-class woman whose interests include reading. In the 1700s, the middle class had more leisure time for such pursuits.

## Art and Literature in the Age of Reason

The Enlightenment ideals of order and reason were reflected in the arts—music, literature, painting, and architecture. European art of the 1600s and early 1700s had been dominated by the style called **baroque**—a grand, ornate style. Monarchs had built elaborate palaces such as Versailles (see page 141). Musicians like the German composer Johann Sebastian Bach and the English composer George Frederick Handel had written dramatic organ and choral music. Artists had created paintings rich in color, detail, and ornate imagery.

Under the influence of the Enlightenment, styles began to change. The arts began to reflect the new emphasis on order and balance. Artists and architects worked in a simple and elegant style that borrowed ideas and themes from classical Greece and Rome. The style of the late 1700s is therefore called **neoclassical** (“new classical”). In music, the style of this period is called classical.

### THINK THROUGH HISTORY

#### B. Contrasting

How does the art of the baroque and classical periods differ in style?

**Classical Music** Three composers in Vienna, Austria, rank among the greatest figures of the classical period in music. They were Franz Joseph Haydn, Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, and Ludwig van Beethoven.

Haydn was particularly important in developing new musical forms, such as the sonata and symphony. Mozart was a gifted child who began composing music at the age of five and gave concerts throughout Europe as a youth. At 12, he wrote his first opera. Mozart’s great operas—*The Marriage of Figaro*, *Don Giovanni*, and *The Magic Flute*—set a new standard for elegance and originality. Although he lived only to age 35, he wrote more than 600 musical works.

Beethoven showed enormous range in his work. He wrote beautiful piano music, string quartets, and stirring symphonies. Beethoven’s earlier works were in the same classical style as Mozart’s. However, his later compositions began new trends, which carried music into the Age of Romanticism.

**Popularity of the Novel** Writers in the 18th century also developed new styles and forms of literature. A number of European authors began writing novels—lengthy works of prose fiction. These books were popular with a wide middle-class audience,





## HISTORY THROUGH ART: Fine Art

# Art in the Age of Enlightenment

The Enlightenment influenced many European painters of the middle and late 1700s. Increasingly, artists looked for inspiration in the material world—in nature and human nature. Some artists showed an Enlightenment interest in science and social issues in their work. Others emphasized a new sensitivity toward individuals.

### The Individual

The French painter Elisabeth-Louise Vigée-Le Brun was one of the most celebrated portrait artists of the late 1700s. She was the favorite painter of Queen Marie Antoinette of France. Her portraits bring out the personalities of her subjects. Her own energy, success, and independence also reflected the Enlightenment spirit. These qualities shine through this detail of a self-portrait with her daughter.



### The Promise of Science

The English artist Joseph Wright of Derby was fascinated by science and its impact on people's lives. The painting below, *Philosopher Giving a Lecture on the Orrery*, shows children and adults gazing into a miniature planetarium. The way Wright uses light in this picture makes a point about how science can educate and enlighten people.



### Politics and Society

The English artist William Hogarth often used satire in his paintings. In the painting above, *Canvassing for Votes—The Election*, he comments on political corruption. While the candidate flirts with the ladies on the balcony, his supporters offer a man money for his vote. Hogarth's detailed, realistic style and moralistic topics were meant—like the popular novels of his day—to appeal to a wide middle-class audience.

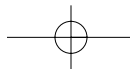
### Connect to History

**Analyzing Issues** Imagine you are a philosophe who moonlights as an art critic. For each of these paintings, write a brief statement about how it reflects Enlightenment ideas.

SEE SKILLBUILDER HANDBOOK, PAGE R12

### Connect to Today

**Updating a Picture** Choose one of the paintings on this page and think about how you might change it to depict politics, science, or people today. You might describe the modern version in words or using a sketch or other kind of artwork.



who liked the entertaining stories written in everyday language. Writers—including many women—turned out a flood of popular novels in the 1700s.

English novelists such as Samuel Richardson and Henry Fielding developed many of the features of the modern novel. Their works had carefully crafted plots, used suspense and climax, and explored their characters' thoughts and feelings. Richardson's *Pamela* is often considered the first true English novel. It told the story of a young servant girl who refused the advances of her master. In Fielding's comic masterpiece *Tom Jones*, the hero of the book is an orphan who has been kicked out of his adopted home. He travels all over England and overcomes numerous obstacles to win the hand of his lady.

A third popular English novelist was Daniel Defoe, author of the adventure *Robinson Crusoe*. Crusoe is a sailor stranded on a tropical island. Through his wits and the help of a native he calls Friday, Crusoe learns how to survive on the island and is eventually rescued.

## Enlightenment and Monarchy

From the salons, artists' studios, and concert halls of Europe, the Enlightenment spirit also swept through Europe's royal courts. Many philosophes, including Voltaire, believed that the best form of government was a monarchy in which the ruler respected the people's rights. The philosophes tried to convince monarchs to rule justly. Some monarchs embraced the new ideas and made reforms that reflected the Enlightenment spirit. They became known as **enlightened despots**. *Despot* means absolute ruler.

### THINK THROUGH HISTORY

#### C. Analyzing

**Motives** Why did the enlightened despots undertake reforms?

The enlightened despots supported the philosophes' ideas. But they also had no intention of giving up any power. The changes they made were motivated by two desires: they wanted to make their countries stronger and their own rule more effective. The foremost of Europe's enlightened despots were Frederick II of Prussia, Holy Roman Emperor Joseph II of Austria, and Catherine the Great of Russia.

**Frederick the Great** Frederick II, the king of Prussia from 1740 to 1786, once wrote to Voltaire: "I must enlighten my people, cultivate their manners and morals, and make them as happy as human beings can be, or as happy as the means at my disposal permit." Frederick indeed committed himself to reforming Prussia. He granted many religious freedoms, reduced censorship, and improved education. He also reformed the justice system and abolished the use of torture. However, Frederick's changes only went so far. For example, he believed that serfdom was wrong, but he did nothing to end it. This was because he needed the support of wealthy landowners. As a result, he never challenged the power of the Junkers or tried to change the existing social order.

Perhaps Frederick's most important contribution was his attitude toward being king. He called himself "the first servant of the state." From the beginning of his reign, he made it clear that his goal was to serve and strengthen his country. This attitude was clearly one that appealed to the philosophes.

### Changing Idea: Relationship Between Ruler and State

#### Old Idea

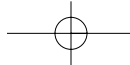
The state and its citizens exist to serve the monarch—as Louis XIV reportedly said, "I am the state."



#### New Idea

The monarch exists to serve the state and support citizens' welfare—as Frederick the Great said, a ruler is only "the first servant of the state."

**Joseph II** The most radical royal reformer was Joseph II of Austria. The son and successor of Maria Theresa, Joseph II ruled Austria from 1780 to 1790. He introduced legal reforms and freedom of the press. He also supported freedom of worship—even for Protestants, Orthodox Christians, and Jews. In his most radical reform, Joseph abolished serfdom and ordered that peasants be paid for their labor with cash. Not



## HISTORY MAKERS



**Catherine the Great**  
1729–1796

Catherine was the daughter of a minor German prince. At age 15, she was summoned to the distant Russian court at St. Petersburg. She was to marry the Grand Duke Peter, heir to the Russian throne.

The marriage between Catherine and Peter was a disaster. Peter was mentally unstable. His chief pleasure was playing with toy soldiers. More than once he tormented his own dogs.

Catherine soon saw that Peter's weakness gave her a chance to seize power. She made important friends among Russia's army officers, and she became known as the most intelligent and best-informed person at court. In 1762, only months after her husband became czar as Peter III, Catherine had him arrested and confined. Soon afterward, Peter conveniently died, probably by murder.

surprisingly, the nobles firmly resisted this change. Like many of Joseph's reforms, it was undone after his death.

**Catherine the Great** The ruler most admired by the philosophes was Catherine II, known as **Catherine the Great**. She ruled Russia from 1762 to 1796. The well-educated empress read the works of philosophes, and she exchanged many letters with Voltaire. She ruled with absolute authority, but she also took steps to modernize and reform Russia.

In 1767, Catherine formed a commission to review Russia's laws. She presented it with a brilliant proposal for reforms based on the ideas of Montesquieu and Beccaria. Among other changes, she recommended allowing religious toleration and abolishing torture and capital punishment. Her commission, however, accomplished none of these lofty goals.

Catherine eventually put in place limited reforms, but she did little to improve the life of the Russian peasants. Her thinking about enlightened ideas changed after a massive uprising of serfs in 1773. With great brutality, Catherine's army crushed the rebellion. Catherine had previously favored an end to serfdom. However, the revolt convinced her that she needed the nobles' support to keep her throne. Therefore, she gave the nobles absolute power over the serfs. As a result, Russian serfs lost their last traces of freedom.

**Catherine Expands Russia** Peter the Great had fought for years to win a port on the Baltic Sea. Likewise, Catherine sought access to the Black Sea. In two wars with the Ottoman Turks, her armies finally won control of the northern shore of the Black Sea. Russia also gained the right to send ships through Ottoman-controlled straits leading from the Black Sea to the Mediterranean Sea.

Catherine also expanded her empire westward into Poland. In Poland, the king was relatively weak, and independent nobles held the most power. The three neighboring powers—Russia, Prussia, and Austria—each tried to assert their influence over the country. In 1772, these land-hungry neighbors each took a piece of Poland in what is called the First Partition of Poland. In further partitions in 1793 and 1795, they grabbed up the rest of Poland's territory. With these partitions, Poland disappeared from the map of Europe. It did not reappear as an independent

country until after World War I.

By the end of her remarkable reign, Catherine had vastly enlarged the Russian empire. Meanwhile, as Russia was becoming an international power, another great power, Britain, faced a challenge in its 13 American colonies. Inspired by Enlightenment ideas, colonial leaders decided to cast off British rule and found an independent republic.

### THINK THROUGH HISTORY

#### D. Synthesizing

How accurately does the term *enlightened despot* describe Catherine the Great? Explain.

## Section 3 Assessment

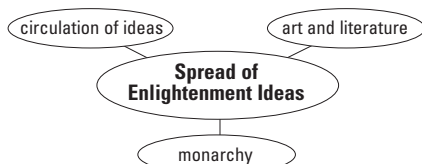
### 1. TERMS & NAMES

Identify

- salon
- baroque
- neoclassical
- enlightened despot
- Catherine the Great

### 2. TAKING NOTES

Copy the concept web shown below and add to it examples that illustrate the concepts.



Write two generalizations about the spread of Enlightenment ideas.

### 3. DRAWING CONCLUSIONS

What advantages do you think salons had over earlier forms of communication in spreading new ideas? Justify your response with specific references to the text.

#### THINK ABOUT

- who hosted the salons and where they were held
- who was invited to the salons
- church and state influence on publishing and education

### 4. THEME ACTIVITY

#### Power and Authority

Imagine you are a public relations consultant for Frederick the Great, Joseph II, or Catherine the Great. The monarch you represent wants to be named "Most Enlightened Despot of the 1700s." Write a press release or design a poster or flyer that presents reasons why your client should be given this honor.