



Ideas of the Enlightenment

The Big Idea

Enlightenment thinkers built on ideas from earlier movements to emphasize the importance of reason.

Main Ideas

- The Enlightenment was also called the Age of Reason.
- The Enlightenment's roots can be traced back to earlier ideas.
- New ideas came mainly from French and British thinkers.

Key Terms and People

Enlightenment

Voltaire

salon

Mary Wollstonecraft

Reading Check

Find Main Ideas

How did the Enlightenment thinkers explain the world?

If YOU were there . . .

You are a student in the early 1700s. It seems your teacher can pass or fail whomever he wants. You think the teacher should make his decisions about grades based on what a student has learned. You come up with a new idea—testing students so they can prove what they know. You think this idea will improve your grades as well as relations in your school.

Will you challenge the teacher's authority?

The Age of Reason

Discoveries made during the Scientific Revolution and on the voyages of discovery led to changes in Europe. A number of scholars were beginning to challenge long-held beliefs about science, religion, and government.

These new scholars relied on reason, or logical thought, instead of religious teachings to explain how the world worked. They believed human reason could be used to achieve three great goals—knowledge, freedom, and happiness—and that achieving these goals would improve society. The use of reason in guiding people's thoughts about philosophy, society, and politics defined a time period called the **Enlightenment**. Because of its emphasis on the use of reason, the Enlightenment was also known as the Age of Reason.

The Enlightenment's Roots

The main ideas of the Enlightenment had their roots in other eras. Enlightenment thinkers looked back to the Greeks, the Romans, and the history of Christianity. The Renaissance, Reformation, and Scientific Revolution also provided ideas.

Greek and Roman Philosophers Enlightenment thinkers used ideas about the natural world from the ancient Greeks and Romans. Greek philosophers had observed an order and regularity in the natural world. Aristotle, for example, taught