



## Biographical Briefing on Aristotle

**Directions:** The following information will help your group prepare for the press conference in which one of you has been assigned to play Aristotle and the rest of you have other roles to play. To prepare for the press conference, each group member reads a section of the handout and leads a discussion of the questions following that section.

Aristotle was born in 384 B.C. in Stagira, a small township in northern Greece. His father, a physician at the royal court of Macedonia, died while his son was still young. Aristotle then left Stagira to study at Plato's Academy in Athens. For the next 20 years, Aristotle studied with Plato, a renowned Greek philosopher, and the circle of philosophers at the Academy. After Plato's death in 347 B.C., Aristotle left the Academy and traveled in Greece and Asia Minor, writing and studying in academic circles. His writing covers a wide range of subjects: logic, physics, astronomy, biology, ethics, politics, rhetoric (public speaking), and literary criticism. In 342 B.C., King Philip of Macedonia asked Aristotle to become the tutor of Philip's son, Alexander, who later became the conqueror Alexander the Great. When Alexander became king, Aristotle left Macedonia and returned to Athens, where he began his own school named the Lyceum. After Alexander's death in 323 B.C., the Athenians became hostile to Macedonian rule. Because of his connections with Alexander and the Macedonian government, Aristotle fled Athens in 324 B.C. in fear for his life. Aristotle died the next year on the island of Euboea.



- **Where did Aristotle study as a young man?**
- **What subjects did he examine in his writing?**
- **Why did Aristotle leave Athens towards the end of his life?**

Aristotle considered language and speech to be critically important since the ability to reason comes from the use of language. Reason, Aristotle claimed, is what distinguishes humans from animals. Aristotle thought that people are not born virtuous (good, morally excellent), but learn to be good. Parents teach children right from wrong by punishing them for wrong actions. It is through reason, he proposed, that children learn to separate right from wrong and are able to learn moral values. Aristotle believed that over time, humankind has evolved to higher and higher forms of development. The development of the *polis* (political community or society) represents the highest stage in this development. People exercising reason can join together in societies through their understanding that the common good is more important than individual good. In the absence of society and law and order, Aristotle thought, humans become selfish and evil. Yet when unified in a *polis*, humans can be the best of all creatures. Aristotle believed that only through society and government can people realize their full potential.



- **What makes humans different from animals, according to Aristotle?**
- **According to Aristotle, are people naturally good? Explain.**
- **How, did he argue, can people best realize their potential?**

In his work *Politics*, Aristotle described three positive forms of government: monarchy (rule by a king or queen), aristocracy (rule by the noble or wealthy class), and constitutional rule (rule by the people). He believed that monarchy and aristocracy are good forms of government as long as the rulers are virtuous. If the rulers are not virtuous, monarchy and aristocracy can become negative and dangerous. This happens when rulers selfishly use their power to increase their own wealth, rather than to foster (support) the common good. Aristotle believed that democracy is the least dangerous form of government. His main concern with democracy was that because people have equal freedom, they might think they are equal in every way and fail to recognize their different strengths and weaknesses. Since some people are better educated and more suited to have political power, Aristotle argued that a belief in total equality would harm the society in general.



- **What did Aristotle name as the three positive forms of government?**
- **When did he think monarchy and aristocracy become dangerous?**
- **What did Aristotle believe is the possible danger of democracy?**

Aristotle believed that the ideal society is one in which everyone is educated to be morally virtuous, and all citizens participate in political society. He thought that the best form of government would be rule by properly educated members of the middle class. Power, he believed, should be given to the middle class because people in this class are free of the excesses found in the upper and lower classes. He thought that while the rich are too arrogant (prideful) and the poor may be vengeful (wanting revenge), the middle class can more easily be stable and rational. However, he also realized that this ideal is almost impossible to achieve. In his time, kings held most of the power, so Aristotle favored a system where kings would take advice on ruling from philosophers. He wrote in *On Kingship*, “[It is] not merely unnecessary for a king to be a philosopher, but even a disadvantage. Rather a king should take advantage of true philosophers. Then he would fill his reign with good deeds, not with good words.” By separating the philosophers from direct rule, Aristotle hoped to keep the philosophers independent in spirit. He felt that if the philosophers could not become wealthy from a position of direct power, they would be more honest.



- **What did Aristotle believe the relationship should be between kings and philosophers?**
- **What did he believe is the best form of government?**
- **Why are members of the middle class best able to govern?**



## Biographical Briefing on Queen Elizabeth I

**Directions:** The following information will help your group prepare for the press conference in which one of you has been assigned to play Queen Elizabeth I and the rest of you have other roles to play. To prepare for the press conference, each group member reads a section of the handout and leads a discussion of the questions following that section.

Elizabeth I was born in 1533 to the English King Henry VIII and his second wife, Anne Boleyn. Henry had defied the orders of the Roman Catholic Pope by divorcing his first wife and marrying Anne Boleyn. Because of this, England broke from the Catholic Church and became a Protestant country, with Henry VIII as the first head of the Church of England. While Elizabeth was still a young child, her father accused her mother of adultery (unfaithfulness) and beheaded her. Later, Elizabeth was cared for by her father's sixth wife. Under the instruction of a private tutor, Elizabeth received an excellent education, one similar to what was given to royal sons. She studied history, rhetoric (public speaking), and moral philosophy, and learned to speak Greek, Latin, French, and Italian fluently. After the death of her Catholic half-sister, Mary, in 1558, Elizabeth succeeded to the throne. As the daughter of the head of the Protestant Church of England, Elizabeth's reign ushered in a new era for England.



- **Who were Elizabeth's parents?**
- **What happened because of Henry VIII's divorce?**
- **What kind of education did Elizabeth receive?**

The Tudors, Elizabeth's family, came into royal power in England following the bloody War of the Roses, during which two noble houses competed for the throne. After the war had ended and the House of Tudor had been established as the royal power, the Tudor family developed the so-called *Tudor Myth*. This myth declared that all the events leading to the war and its conclusion had been divinely decided by God, so it was by God's will that the Tudors came to power. Therefore, though Elizabeth did not think that as ruler she should have absolute (complete) power over her subjects, she did believe that she had been chosen by God to be queen. Her view was that society should be structured in a hierarchy (ordered social rankings), with each person in his or her proper place. As a ruler chosen by God, her position in England should be at the very top of the social hierarchy, and she should have the right to make all final decisions about her country. Before and throughout her long reign (1558-1603), Elizabeth refused to share her power by marrying. She declared, "This shall be for me sufficient, that a marble stone shall declare that a Queen, having reigned such a time, lived and died a virgin." Queen Elizabeth considered herself to be both wedded to and the mother of her subjects.



- **What did the *Tudor Myth* declare?**
- **According to Elizabeth, who granted her power to be queen?**
- **How did Elizabeth view her role in England?**

England had set limitations on the rights of monarchs (kings and queens) a long time before Elizabeth's reign. While Elizabeth was clearly the most powerful person in England, by law she had to accept that the two-house Parliament (lawmaking group) had some political power. The House of Lords (one group of Parliament) made new laws, and Elizabeth had to ask the House of Commons (the other group of Parliament) to approve her spending. Even though she ruled in a limited monarchy, she insisted on watching over Parliament and making final decisions about her subjects and foreign policy. Elizabeth also influenced the Parliament to pass the Act of Supremacy. Under this law, England became a Protestant country again, reversing the policy of the previous queen, her half-sister Mary, to return England to Catholicism. Following in her father's footsteps, Elizabeth became head of the Church of England and was the head of both the church and the government.



- **With whom did Elizabeth have to share some political power?**
- **What was her attitude towards Parliament?**
- **What happened under the Act of Supremacy?**

While Elizabeth was the queen in a limited monarchy, she saw her role as maternalistic (mothering). She was dedicated to taking care of her subjects (the English people) as a mother is dedicated to her children. In addition to her power as queen, Elizabeth's dynamic personality and caring attitude toward her country made her subjects voluntarily love and obey her. For this reason, Elizabeth's power increased so that she only had to ask for obedience, not enforce it. She would say during her reign that "her state [England] did require her to command what she knew her people would willingly do for their own love of her." Much of the force of Elizabeth's power rested with her powerful appearance and personal qualities. She, more than other monarchs, became a symbol for the grandeur (magnificence) of all of England. She was well-educated, very intelligent, and an excellent orator (speechmaker); she also enjoyed music, dance, and the theatre. Her clothes were beautiful, and she always dressed to give herself a grandiose appearance. In one of her last speeches, Elizabeth said, "For above all earthly treasure I esteem my people's love...I shall be judged by a [God]...to whose Judgment...I do appeal that never a thought was cherished in my heart that tended not to my people's good. And though you have had and may have many princes more mighty and wise sitting in this seat, yet you never had or shall have any that will be more careful and loving."



- **How did Elizabeth view her role as queen?**
- **How did Elizabeth feel about her subjects?**
- **How did her subjects feel about her?**



## Biographical Briefing on Thomas Hobbes

**Directions:** The following information will help your group prepare for the press conference in which one of you has been assigned to play Thomas Hobbes and the rest of you have other roles to play. To prepare for the press conference, each group member reads a section of the handout and leads a discussion of the questions following that section.

Thomas Hobbes was born in England in 1588. This was a time of much social unrest in England, and Hobbes later wrote that “fear and I were born twins.” Hobbes’ father was a clergyman, and Hobbes was educated in the classics at Oxford University. He traveled many times to meet writers, philosophers, and scientists of other European countries and to study different forms of government. The English Civil War prompted Hobbes to flee to Paris and to become a political philosopher. In 1651 Hobbes wrote his most famous work *Leviathan*. In it, he argued that people are naturally wicked and cannot be trusted to govern. Therefore, Hobbes believed that an absolute monarchy—a government that gives all power to a king or queen—is best.



- **What was happening in England when Hobbes was born?**
- **Where did Hobbes go to study government?**
- **What was the topic of Hobbes’ book *Leviathan*?**

Hobbes’ political philosophy is based on his idea that humans are essentially selfish creatures. He believed that all people are equal, and that this equality leads to competition and violence. In *Leviathan* Hobbes wrote that humans are driven by a “perpetual and restless desire [for] power...that ceases only in death,” and that the natural condition of humankind is a situation of “a war of every man against every man.” Because he thought that people act in their own selfish interests if they are left alone, Hobbes did not believe that people should be trusted to make their own decisions. He also felt that nations, like people, are selfishly motivated and in a constant battle for power and wealth. To further prove his point, Hobbes wrote, “If men are not naturally in a state of war, why do they always carry arms and why do they have keys to lock their doors?”



- **What did Hobbes believe to be humankind’s main characteristics?**
- **According to Hobbes, why should people not be trusted to make decisions?**
- **What evidence did Hobbes use to prove his point that countries are in a battle for wealth and power?**

Governments were created, according to Hobbes, to protect people from their own selfishness and evil. He believed that it is not possible for people to have both freedom and peace, since the state of freedom is a state of unlimited greed and war. Joining together to form societies is thus humankind's only possibility for peace. The best government is one that has the great power of a *leviathan*, or sea monster. Hobbes believed in the rule of a king or queen because he felt a country needs an authority figure to provide direction and leadership. Because the people are only interested in promoting their own interests, Hobbes believed that democracy—allowing citizens to vote for government leaders—would never work. Hobbes believed that without a strong government, people experience “continual fear and danger of violent death” and lives that are “solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short.”



- **For what purpose did Hobbes think governments were created?**
- **Why did Hobbes believe in the rule of a king or queen?**
- **Why would democracy not work, according to Hobbes?**

Hobbes reasoned that all people should voluntarily choose to relinquish (give up) their rights to the leviathan, who then would protect people from one another and ensure peace. This idea was not the same as divine right—the belief that monarchs are chosen by God and thus people do not have the right to question their rule. Instead, Hobbes believed that a ruler's absolute power comes not from God, but from people rationally deciding that this is in their best interests. Hobbes considered that the ruler could abuse his or her absolute power and become cruel and unfair. However, this problem could be lessened, Hobbes believed, by appointing a diverse group of representatives to present the problems of the common people to the leviathan. These representatives would only have the power to present opinions, since all final decisions would be made by the leviathan.



- **For Hobbes, what was the proper role in government for the people?**
- **Where does the leviathan get his or her power?**
- **How did Hobbes propose to lessen the possibility that the leviathan might abuse his or her power?**



## Biographical Briefing on John Locke

**Directions:** The following information will help your group prepare for the press conference in which one of you has been assigned to play John Locke and the rest of you have other roles to play. To prepare for the press conference, each group member reads a section of the handout and leads a discussion of the questions following that section.

John Locke was born into a Puritan family in Bristol, England in 1632. Locke's father, an attorney, was part of the parliamentary army fighting against the monarchy during the English Civil War. He wanted his son to become a minister, but Locke decided against this and instead studied medicine. As a student at Oxford University, Locke was influenced by John Owen, Dean of Christ Church College. It was Owen who first introduced Locke to the idea of religious freedom and the idea that people should not be punished for having different views on religion. However, Locke, a Protestant, continued to oppose Catholic and atheist (the belief that there is no God) influence in England. He remained entirely tolerant only of different forms of Protestantism. He was deeply influenced by the writing of the French philosopher and mathematician René Descartes, who proclaimed that all men possess the ability to reason. Locke also believed that people develop reason and can therefore rationally settle their differences by seeking a middle ground and compromising.



- **Describe Locke's family background.**
- **In what ways did John Owen and René Descartes influence Locke?**
- **Why did Locke believe people could rationally settle their differences?**

After college, Locke continued to study and read with a passion. He expressed his views about freedom of religion and the rights of citizens. When in 1682 his ideas were seen by the English government as a challenge to the king's authority, he fled to Holland. Locke returned to England in 1689 after the Glorious Revolution had forced the new British monarch to respect the authority of Parliament and accept a Bill of Rights limiting the king's power. Locke defended this revolution and the limitation of the monarch's power. Throughout his writings, Locke argued that people have the gift of reason, or the ability to think. Locke thought people have the natural ability to govern themselves and to look after the well-being of society. He wrote, "The state of nature has a law of nature to govern it, which [treats] everyone [equally]. Reason, which is that law, teaches all mankind...that being all equal and independent, no one ought to harm another in his life, health, or possessions."



- **Why did Locke go to Holland?**
- **What ability did Locke believe people had?**
- **Did Locke believe people were capable of governing themselves? Why or why not?**

Locke did not believe that God had chosen a group or family of people to rule countries. He rejected this idea of “Divine Right,” which many kings and queens used to justify their right to rule. In his own society, Locke supported a monarchy (rule by king or queen) whose power is limited to ensure that the rights of the people are respected. He argued that governments—including the limited monarchy under which he lived—should only operate with the consent, or approval, of the people being governed. Locke wrote, “[We have learned from] history we have reason to conclude that all peaceful beginnings of government have been laid in the consent of the people.” Governments are formed, according to Locke, to protect the right to life, the right to freedom, and the right to property. These rights are absolute, belonging to all people. Locke believed that ideally government power should be divided equally into three branches of government so that politicians do not face the “temptation...to grasp at [absolute] power.” If any government abuses the rights of the people instead of protecting them, the people have the right to rebel and form a new government. He wrote, “Whenever [the preservation of life, liberty, and property for which power is given to rulers by a commonwealth] is manifestly neglected or opposed, the trust must necessarily be forfeited and then [returned] into the hands of those that gave it, who may place it anew where they think best for their safety and security.” Locke’s idea that only the consent of the governed gives validity to a government inspired the founders of new democracy, such as the writers of the United States Constitution.



- **What did Locke think about Divine Right?**
- **According to Locke, what is the purpose of government?**
- **What did Locke think people should do if governments abused people’s rights?**

John Locke believed that the control of any person against her or his will was unacceptable, whether in the form of an unfair government or in slavery. Locke wrote, “The natural liberty of man is to be free from any superior power on earth, and not to be under the will or legislative authority of man, but only have the law of nature for his rule.” He extended his ideas about freedom to a belief in civil liberties. Locke felt that women had the ability to reason, which entitled them to an equal voice, at least in the home—an unpopular idea during this time in history. Despite fearing that he might be censored, he wrote, “It may not be [wrong] to offer new...[ideas] when the old [traditions] are apt to lead men into mistakes, as this [idea] of [fatherly] power probably had done, which seems so [eager] to place the power of parents over their children wholly in the father, as if the mother had no share in it; whereas if we consult reason or [the Bible], we shall find she has an *equal* title.”



- **What did Locke think of men being controlled against their will?**
- **What did Locke write about the abilities of women?**
- **How do you think Locke’s views were received?**





## Biographical Briefing on King Louis XIV

**Directions:** The following information will help your group prepare for the press conference in which one of you has been assigned to play King Louis XIV and the rest of you have other roles to play. To prepare for the press conference, each group member reads a section of the handout and leads a discussion of the questions following that section.

Louis XIV became King of France in 1643 at the age of 5. Until Louis was 23, Cardinal Mazarin, the head of the French Catholic Church, controlled the government. At that time, France was the most populated and prosperous country in Europe. Wealthy nobles with great estates, who had been powerful for many years, were now being forced to share their power and influence with a new middle class of merchants who were becoming wealthy through international trade. Louis's own grandiose (extravagant) life-style symbolized the grandeur (magnificence) and wealth of his country. At only 5 feet 4 inches in height, Louis was a charismatic leader who built himself a glorious new city named Versailles near Paris. The enormous Palace of Versailles was full of polished mirrors, gleaming chandeliers, and gardens with fountains. Versailles was marveled at throughout Europe and envied by many other kings. He came to be called the "Sun King" because it seemed that his power and influence radiated from Versailles out to the entire world.



- **What was France like when Louis assumed the throne?**
- **What did Louis' rich life-style symbolize?**
- **Describe Versailles.**

Louis XIV believed in his right to exercise absolute power over France. He was considered an absolute ruler because no other persons or institutions in France could exercise control over him. Louis believed that, as the king, he should be informed about everything in his country; he should have sole power to decide France's foreign policy; he should control how French money was spent; and he should have the right to keep his actions secret if he so chose. This philosophy of absolutism was supported by the Catholic Church, an institution that was very influential in Louis' thinking. The church taught that kings were chosen by God and thus had divine (God given) right to rule. Since all power came from God, the king was only responsible to God—not to the people—for the way in which he exercised that power. Louis believed that "however bad a king may be, the revolt of his subjects is criminal." The doctrine of Divine Right taught that only God had the power and right to punish a bad ruler. Louis' court preacher, Bishop Jacques-Bénigne Bossuet, was a staunch defender of Divine Right. Bossuet wrote, "As all perfection and all strength are united in God, so all the power of individuals is united in the person of the [king]. What grandeur that a single man should embody so much!"



- **What is “absolute” power?**
- **What did the Catholic Church teach about Divine Right?**
- **According to Divine Right, to whom is the king responsible?**

Louis XIV ensured his absolute control of France by strengthening royal power over the nobles and French provincial governments. To do this, Louis sent royal officials to the provinces to ensure that local governments were obedient and ordered that all local mayors had to be approved by the king. At one time, the Estates General, composed of nobles, had been a powerful political body in France that monarchs consulted for advice. Louis abolished the Estates General and stripped the nobles of all political authority. To observe and control the nobles, he provided many of them with positions at the beautiful Versailles palace, the center of elite (upper class) social life in France. Instead of nobles, Louis employed middle-class merchants and church leaders to run the real affairs of government because these people had more loyalty to him. Louis also felt that religious unity contributed to the strength of his rule. During Louis’ rule, Protestants (non-Catholic Christians) were persecuted (oppressed) more and more. In 1685 he revoked (abolished) the Edict of Nantes, a law that had ensured freedom of religion for Protestants. After this, soldiers were stationed in Protestant homes to ensure that the families did not practice their religion. Many Protestants fled France for Holland, Germany, and America during this time. The loss of successful Protestant businessmen damaged the French economy.



- **How did Louis increase royal power over the provinces?**
- **How did Louis treat the nobles?**
- **How did Louis treat the Protestants?**

Louis XIV is famous for saying of himself, “I am the state [government].” His reign of over 60 years was the longest rule by a king in French history. His immense confidence in his own greatness and Divine Right to rule encouraged him to use his control over the military to expand the boundaries of France. In the beginning, the French people loved these military exploits, as it made France seem even stronger, and new territory meant new income. The battles increased the people’s love for him and therefore his power. However, other countries in Europe feared Louis’ greed and went to war against France. Continual fighting eventually left France weakened and in debt. On his deathbed in 1715, Louis confessed that he “loved war too much.”



- **What did Louis mean when he said, “I am the state”?**
- **What did Louis’ confidence lead him to do?**
- **What condition was France in by the time Louis died?**



## Biographical Briefing on Baron de Montesquieu

**Directions:** The following information will help your group prepare for the press conference in which one of you has been assigned to play Baron de Montesquieu and the rest of you have other roles to play. To prepare for the press conference, each group member reads a section of the handout and leads a discussion of the questions following that section.

Charles Louis de Secondat was born in Bordeaux, France in 1689. Despite his family's wealth, de Secondat was placed in the care of a poor family during his childhood. He later went to college and studied science and history, eventually becoming a lawyer in the local government. De Secondat's father died in 1713, and de Secondat was placed under the care of his uncle, Baron de Montesquieu. The Baron died in 1716 and left de Secondat his fortune, his office as president of the Bordeaux Parliament, and his title of Baron de Montesquieu. Later, the new Baron de Montesquieu became a member of the Bordeaux and French Academies of Science and studied the customs and governments of the countries of Europe. He gained fame in 1721 with his *Persian Letters*, which criticized the life-style and liberties of the wealthy French, as well as the church. However, Montesquieu's *On the Spirit of the Laws*, published in 1748, was his most famous book. It outlined his ideas on how government would best work.



- **Where was Montesquieu born?**
- **How did he acquire the title Baron de Montesquieu?**
- **What was the subject of *On the Spirit of the Laws*?**

Montesquieu was very concerned about the relationship between religion and violence. He writes in the *Persian Letters*, "I can assure you that no kingdom has ever had as many evil wars as the kingdom of Christ." A character in the *Persian Letters* states strongly, "in order to love and conform to one's religion it is not necessary to hate and persecute those who do not conform to it." Montesquieu argued not for atheism (belief that there is no God), but rather a secular (worldly) morality that is tolerant of many different religions. Despite Montesquieu's belief in religious tolerance, he did not feel that all people were equal. Montesquieu approved of slavery. He also thought that women were weaker than men and that they had to obey the commands of their husbands. At the same time, he felt that the gentler nature of women could make them valuable decision makers and participants in government. "It is against reason and against nature for women to be mistresses in the house...but not for them to govern an empire. In the first case, their weak state does not permit them to be preminent (above others); in the second, their very weakness gives them more gentleness and moderation, which, rather than the harsh and ferocious virtues, can make for good government."



- **How did Montesquieu feel about religious intolerance?**
- **What did he think about slavery?**
- **Why did Montesquieu believe that women would be valuable members of government?**

According to Montesquieu, there are three forms of government: monarchy (rule by a king or queen), aristocracy (rule by the noble or wealthy class), and republicanism (rule by elected leaders). Montesquieu was opposed to absolute monarchy (where no other persons or institutions have any control over the monarch) and believed that a monarchy with limited powers makes countries the most stable and secure. People's role in government, Montesquieu believed, should be based on political virtue (moral goodness) and equality. Political virtue means that citizens voluntarily put their public interests above their individual interests. States should be kept small to make it easier for people to play a role in government. Montesquieu believed that the success of a government depends upon maintaining the right balance of power between different branches.



- **How did Montesquieu define the three types of government?**
- **Which type did Montesquieu favor?**
- **Upon what did Montesquieu believe the success of a government depends?**

Montesquieu argued that the best government is one in which power is balanced among three separate branches of government with equal but different powers. He thought that England in the eighteenth century provided the best model of government because it divided power among three parts: the king, who enforced laws; the Parliament, which created laws; and a court system, which interpreted laws. Montesquieu called this idea of divided government rule the "separation of powers." He believed in the separation of powers because he felt that if all political power is handed over to one branch, greed and corruption inevitably result. He wrote, "When the [lawmaking] and law-enforcing powers are united in the same person...there can be no liberty." According to Montesquieu, each branch of government checks (limits) the power of the other two. This way, no branch of government can threaten the freedom of the people, and tyranny can be avoided. His ideas about the separation of powers became the basis for the United States Constitution.



- **What kind of government did Montesquieu believe was best?**
- **What country provided a good model of government?**
- **Why did Montesquieu favor a separation of powers?**



## Biographical Briefing on Plato

**Directions:** The following information will help your group prepare for the press conference in which one of you has been assigned to play Plato and the rest of you have other roles to play. To prepare for the press conference, each group member reads a section of the handout and leads a discussion of the questions following that section.

Plato was born into a wealthy family in Athens, Greece in 428 B.C. When he was 23, he witnessed Sparta's defeat of Athens and the end of the Athenian empire. After seeing a great deal of violence, he decided that all wars are fought over money. During his youth, Plato became a close friend of Socrates, a Greek philosopher, and was influenced by Socrates' search for the meaning of life. Plato planned to become a politician but decided against it when the Athenian democracy put Socrates on trial and executed him. Thereafter, Plato focused his energy on the search for how society could be structured so as to bring out the best in people. Plato was very interested in promoting the study of mathematics, philosophy, and government. In 387 B.C. he founded the Academy in Athens, the first university, where Aristotle, another famous Greek philosopher, became one of his students. Plato died in 347 B.C.

Stop Here  
& Discuss



- **What was happening in Athens during Plato's childhood?**
- **Why did Plato decide not to become a politician?**
- **What institution did Plato found?**

In his book *The Republic*, Plato discussed his ideal form of government, in which a society could be constructed to bring out the best behavior of its citizens. Plato believed that different people have different strengths and weaknesses, and that the ideal society is one in which each member understands and performs her or his proper role. Talent—not wealth, gender, or noble birthright—determines a citizen's proper role. The strong and courageous should become soldiers, those skilled with their hands should become artisans and laborers, and those with wisdom and virtue should become leaders. Plato believed this assigning of appropriate roles encourages citizens to lead a good and just life and to serve the society as a whole. Not surprisingly, he believed that education is absolutely essential for good government, since it is important to teach people how to be good citizens. As president of the first university, he hoped to instill (put in) the kind of values in future leaders that would influence them to seek wisdom and justice rather than wealth and power.

Stop Here  
& Discuss



- **What are some different roles in Plato's ideal society?**
- **How are different roles determined for citizens?**
- **What did Plato believe is essential for good government?**

After witnessing his friend Socrates be condemned to death by a democratic government, Plato decided that democracy (rule by the people) is “tragically inadequate” as a form of government. He criticized democracy as “mob rule” where the ignorant and uneducated majority govern, rather than the wise and virtuous. But he also recognized the dangers of a state ruled by autocracy (unlimited power by one person over others), where a single ruler is tempted to make decisions based on his or her own greed and self-interest rather than on the good of the people. Tyranny (cruel and unjust government) results, he thought, when the three most powerful drives—ambition, fear, and greed—become stronger motivations than reason and humanity. In order for the state to maintain its focus on caring for the people, the rulers must not be allowed to pursue personal ambitions for power and wealth. Plato wrote that the evil of existing governments is present because power and wisdom are not united in the same person. Evil governments will only end, Plato thought, when philosophers are kings. By “philosopher-kings” Plato meant that the smartest—the lover of knowledge, wisdom, and virtue—should govern. In *The Republic*, he wrote, “unless philosophers are kings, or those now called kings and chiefs genuinely philosophize...there is no rest from ills for cities...nor, I think, for human kind.”



- **What did Plato believe were the dangers of democracy and autocracy?**
- **Under Plato’s ideal form of government, who should rule?**
- **Based on Plato’s earlier discussion of proper roles in society, how would philosopher-kings be chosen?**

Plato rejected both democracy and autocracy in favor of creating his own ideal society, which he describes in *The Republic*. In Plato’s republic, the state would be unified and self-sufficient. Each person would be put to the best use for which nature prepared him or her. All children would be the property of the government and would owe primary loyalty to the state rather than to their mother and father. In this way, power would never be hereditary; and each person would be educated and judged suitable for a certain role based only on her or his own skills and merits. There would be a careful division of labor so that the rulers would never also be warriors, and vice versa. Philosopher-kings would make the laws, and those skilled in administration would enforce them. The philosopher-kings would be chosen for their intelligence. All rulers would live communally; they would receive no pay and would not be allowed to own property—this rule would prevent them from making decisions based on greed and thus guard against the possibility of tyranny. Another group in Plato’s republic was the populace (people). Although the state was supposed to exist based on their consent and to act in their interests, Plato assigned to the populace the primary duty of obedience.



- **What were three groups in Plato’s ideal republic?**
- **What role did the philosopher-king fill?**
- **What was the duty of the populace?**



## Biographical Briefing on Mary Wollstonecraft

**Directions:** The following information will help your group prepare for the press conference in which one of you has been assigned to play Mary Wollstonecraft and the rest of you have other roles to play. To prepare for the press conference, each group member reads a section of the handout and leads a discussion of the questions following that section.

Mary Wollstonecraft, born in London in 1759, was one of the first women during the late eighteenth century to actively call for the rights of women. Wollstonecraft, the daughter of a silk weaver, left home at the age of 19, angry that all her family's small resources went to the oldest son (she was the oldest daughter). At that time, laws supported men's control of the family's money. For instance, even if a woman entered a marriage with money inherited from her family, it was immediately turned over to her husband. If she worked, all her wages were given to her husband. Wollstonecraft did not want to get married and be controlled by her husband like many other women she knew. Instead she established her own small school. Later, she left to work as a servant to a wealthy widow, then as a seamstress, schoolteacher, and finally governess to the Viscount and Lady Kingsborough in Ireland. During the French Revolution in 1789, she lived in France, where she worked and wrote about the rights of women and the French Revolution. She was not married when her first daughter, Fanny, was born in 1794. The next year, Wollstonecraft tried to commit suicide. Eventually she married the famous writer William Godwin after she became pregnant with his child. Godwin, like Wollstonecraft, did not believe in the institution of marriage. He wrote that only his love for her and nothing else "could have induced me to submit to an institution which I wish to see abolished." Wollstonecraft died soon after giving birth to their daughter, Mary Shelley. Even after her marriage, society still condemned her for her unconventional behavior, and after her death she was renounced (spoken badly of) as a prostitute and a monster.



- **Why did Wollstonecraft leave home?**
- **What kind of work did she do after she left home?**
- **How did Wollstonecraft view marriage?**

Women led a restricted life during Wollstonecraft's time. Men generally thought that women had an inferior intellect and considered them weak by nature. Wollstonecraft attributed human nature and behavior to environment, as opposed to heredity. She believed that all people are equal and that every person possesses the natural right to determine his or her own destiny. Human nature can be perfected if education is improved and oppression ended. Oppressive systems—which include the rule of masters over slaves as well as the rule of husbands over wives—corrupt both the oppressed and the oppressor. Thus, all of society would benefit from equality and the end of male domination over women.



- **What was the general attitude of men toward women in the late 1700s?**
- **What did Wollstonecraft believe determined human behavior?**
- **How did she believe human nature could be improved?**

“I am about to display ‘the mind of a woman, who has thinking powers,’” Wollstonecraft wrote in the introduction of her book, *A Vindication of the Rights of Women*. During this period in England, women had virtually no rights of political participation. They could not receive an education, vote, or run for public office. In addition, women were not allowed access to the court system—they could not file a complaint, appear in court, or hire a lawyer. Women were not allowed to hold jobs in government, medicine, or a number of other occupations. Inequality between men and women is not the result of natural differences, Wollstonecraft believed, but rather the result of the powerful tyranny (cruel and unjust rule) of men. Women do not have the opportunity to prove their equality because men have kept them in inferior positions. “Let men prove [that women are weaker],” she wrote. If men truly want to confirm women’s inferiority, they must first treat women as equals, she believed.



- **Describe the status of women in eighteenth-century England.**
- **To what did Wollstonecraft attribute inequality?**
- **What did she argue that men must do if they want to prove women are inferior?**

While most of her writing centered on issues of equality between women and men in the home as a way to improve society, Wollstonecraft was also concerned with women’s role in civic life. She believed that humanity’s progress is held back by the fact that women are not allowed to fully contribute to society. She demanded that women, whether married or single, must participate in civic and political life, and that they be able to study professions such as medicine, politics, and business. Wollstonecraft compared the unjust rule of kings over their subjects to the unjust rule of husbands over their wives. She was opposed to monarchy (rule by a king or queen), as well as to all patriarchal (dominated by men) systems. Power corrupts, Wollstonecraft believed, and therefore is the enemy of society. She referred to the reign of monarchs and the color symbolizing royalty as the “pestiferous (harmful) purple,” and wanted to return to a state where every person was her or his own master. “Society will not be whole,” Wollstonecraft wrote in *Vindication of the Rights of Women*, “until the last king is strangled with the guts of the last priest.”



- **To what does Wollstonecraft compare the dominance of husbands over their wives?**
- **What role did she believe women should have in civic and political life?**
- **How did she feel about monarchs?**





## Biographical Briefing on Jean-Jacques Rousseau

**Directions:** The following information will help your group prepare for the press conference in which one of you has been assigned to play Jean-Jacques Rousseau and the rest of you have other roles to play. To prepare for the press conference, each group member reads a section of the handout and leads a discussion of the questions following that section.

Jean-Jacques Rousseau was born in Geneva in 1712. By the time he was 13 his mother had died and his father, a failed watchmaker, had been forced to leave Geneva to avoid being imprisoned for fighting a duel. Virtually abandoned, Rousseau was forced to serve as an apprentice to an engraver who brutally mistreated him. Partly to free himself from bitter servitude and partly to embark on an adventure, Rousseau fled the Swiss capital at the age of 16, and wandered about Europe. In his travels, Rousseau befriended several wealthy people who took him into their homes and provided the time and money for him to receive an excellent education in music and philosophy. At the age of 30, he moved to Paris and quickly established himself as one of the most outstanding philosophers of the eighteenth century. He died in 1778.



- **What was Rousseau's early family life like?**
- **Why did he leave Geneva?**
- **How was Rousseau educated?**

Unlike most other philosophers of his time, Rousseau believed that people are born good, independent, and compassionate. If left to their own devices in a state of nature (a society with no government or laws, like on a deserted island) people would naturally live happily and peacefully. In fact, such a society would be free and ideal, much more satisfying than the inequalities brought by modern society. Influenced by the peace and stability he saw in simple, traditional Swiss villages, Rousseau believed the luxury, corruption, and greed of modern nations harm the individual, giving too few people too much power over many others. In modern countries, for example, political control ends up in huge capital cities far away from most of the people. Further, he believed that society's institutions, like government, schools, the arts, and the media, corrupt naturally good individuals. Rousseau thought that modern civilization, for all its progress, has made humans neither happier nor more virtuous (morally good).



- **How did Rousseau believe people would act in a state of nature?**
- **According to Rousseau, what corrupts the natural goodness of human beings? Why?**
- **Based on Rousseau's views of human nature, do you think he thought people can be trusted to govern themselves?**

Rousseau's Swiss background had an enormous influence on the type of government he advocated (supported). Unlike its surrounding autocratic (government with unlimited power by one person over others) neighbors, Switzerland for centuries had been divided into small districts. Decisions were made locally, not far away in a royal palace in the capital city. The manner in which people in these traditional villages gathered regularly to make decisions was an example of democracy (government by the people), whereby a simple majority vote by the adult male citizens enacted a law. Each adult male voted on laws himself, without anybody representing him. This form of direct democracy also flourished briefly in ancient Athens and Rome. Although direct democracy was extremely rare outside of Switzerland at that time, Rousseau believed it was the ideal way for people to make decisions. He referred to how nondemocratic governments in Europe had corrupted modern people when he wrote in his book *The Social Contract*, "Man was born free, and everywhere he is in chains." He believed that even representative democracy (where people vote for other people to represent them)—as in England and the United States—is corrupt. "Any law which the people has not ratified in person is void; it is not law at all. The English people believes itself to be free; it is gravely mistaken; it is free only during the election of Members of Parliament; as soon as the Members are elected, the people is enslaved."



- **How were decisions made in the Swiss villages where Rousseau grew up?**
- **What did Rousseau believe is the ideal way of making laws for government?**
- **Give examples from your life where you have participated in decision making like that of a direct democracy.**

Many philosophers during Rousseau's time believed that people must choose to enter into a "contract" (agreement) with society and be ruled by a monarch, or stay outside of society and be free. They believed that only the rule of a monarch would ensure that society is stable and secure. Freedom, for many philosophers, meant chaos or anarchy (no government). In contrast, Rousseau believed that people can be both ruled and free if they rule themselves. He thought that governments should exist on the basis of a democratic "social contract," where people have direct say in the way their society is governed. Only through direct democracy, Rousseau felt, can people's freedom be preserved. While Rousseau believed that all adult males should help make the laws in assemblies, those who administer or carry out the laws (like presidents and prime ministers) can be elected as representatives of the people.



- **In Rousseau's time, what did most philosophers think about freedom?**
- **How did Rousseau's idea differ from theirs?**
- **What two parts did Rousseau's ideal government consist of?**