

# Locke and the Declaration of Independence

## Guiding Question

- How did John Locke's ideas influence the Founding principles in the Declaration of Independence?

## Objectives

- Identify and explain John Locke's key philosophical ideas, especially those related to natural rights and government by consent.
- Analyze primary sources to identify and articulate how John Locke's ideas influenced the Founding principles in the Declaration of Independence.
- Compare and contrast the ideas of John Locke with those expressed in the Declaration of Independence using a Venn diagram.
- Critically assess the extent to which John Locke's ideas influenced the Declaration of Independence, providing a reasoned argument supported by evidence from the primary sources.

## Materials

- Optional: background essay
- Optional: background slides
- Primary sources: John Locke and the Declaration of Independence
  - Scaffolded version: Locke and the Declaration of Independence.
  - Long version: [Comparing the Second Treatise to the Declaration](#)
- Extension handout: photo frame

## Engage

- Think, turn, talk: What does it mean to influence someone? Explain.
- Influence is common in art and music. For instance, Beyonce's music is influenced by the styles of Tina Turner, Aretha Franklin, and Diana Ross. The artist Vincent van Gogh was influenced by Claude Monet and Rembrandt.
- Ask students: What are some other examples of influences in music, art, fashion, gaming, or other cultural mediums? Ask for volunteers to share their responses.

## Explore

- Say: Government and politics are also influenced by ideas and philosophies that exist around them. Today we are going to investigate how the Declaration of Independence was influenced by Enlightenment philosopher John Locke.
- Distribute the Student Primary Source Handout, and review directions with the class.
  - Scaffolding note: There are two versions of the primary sources. Version 2 is shorter and has additional scaffolding supports. Version 1 contains longer excerpts from the primary sources.
- On poster paper, create a Venn diagram comparing the ideas of John Locke and the main ideas in the Declaration of Independence. At the bottom of the Venn diagram, write a thesis statement that answers the guiding question: How did John Locke's ideas influence Founding principles in the Declaration of Independence?
  - This activity could be completed independently, in small groups, or as a whole group led by the teacher.

## Assess and Reflect

Have students respond to the following questions as a class or individually. Remind students to provide a reasoned argument supported by evidence from the primary sources.

1. On a scale of 1 (low)–10 (high), how strongly did John Locke's ideas influence the Declaration of Independence? Explain your ranking.
2. Locke was one of many influences on the Declaration. What is one idea in the Declaration that does not appear to be influenced by Locke?
3. Would John Locke support the principles of natural rights and self-government? Cite evidence from the sources to support your answer.
4. Why do you think Thomas Jefferson altered the natural right of property to the pursuit of happiness in the Declaration?
5. How is freedom to create and consume culture like music and art related to the idea of "pursuit of happiness"?

## Extend

Offer the activities below as a choice board for your students. Each activity is flexible enough for you to scaffold or extend to meet the needs of your students. You could also choose one option for all students to complete.

1. Create an imagined dialogue between Locke and Jefferson. Your dialogue should include references to the main ideas of each primary source, as well as information about the contexts in which each lived.
2. Create a photo frame for either John Locke or Thomas Jefferson using the extension handout.
3. Create a simulated interview between John Locke and Thomas Jefferson in a podcast.
4. Create a narrated slideshow about the main ideas of both John Locke and Thomas Jefferson.