

Context:

Enlightened Absolutism

AP European History, 10<sup>th</sup> grade

Time – One block, approximately 100 minutes

Were the Enlightened rulers really enlightened?

- The students should come to a consensus over this question by the end of this lesson. Although it is presented as a yes or no question, at the end of the lesson the students may find the answer to be somewhere in the middle.

Overview:

This lesson is on the absolute monarchs during the Enlightenment period in Europe. The three rulers that are most closely associated with enlightened absolutism are Frederick the Great of Prussia, Joseph II of Austria, and Catherine the Great of Russia. Frederick the Great corresponded with the philosophes (writers and critics during this time) and even provided Voltaire with a place at his court. Catherine the Great read the works of the philosophes prior to coming to the throne, but she also consciously sought to create the image of being enlightened. She gave them compliments and finances in the hopes of receiving favorable comments from them in return. Joseph II imposed a series of religious, legal, and social reforms derived from the suggestions of the philosophes. However, the relationship between these rulers and the writers of the Enlightenment was more complicated than appearances suggest. The monarchs were also motivated by other factors such as the search for new revenues and increasing their own power and military strength. Consequently, they used rationality to pursue many goals admired by most philosophes, but also to further what some philosophes considered irrational militarism.

Instructional Model:

This lesson uses the Structured Academic Controversy model. Students will be introduced to the issue at the beginning of the lesson. They will then be put into groups of four. Two students in each group will argue yes, and the other two students will argue the no side. They will do this by analyzing a data set prepared by the teacher. Each pair will read the information given to them, take notes, and decide what arguments to use based on the evidence. Every student will be required to speak. Each pair will have a few minutes to present their side, and the opposing pair will have the chance to ask clarifying questions. Then the pairs will switch sides so that everyone in the class has received information about and argued both sides. (Try not to use the word ‘argue’ in class so students do not get the idea that this is a debate with winners and losers.) Next students will talk in their groups and try to come up with a consensus. Students will report out to the whole class on what they decided. This is a good model for this topic because it is a controversy among historians since there is compelling evidence for both views.

## Objectives:

(Although this is an AP course, my CT will still include WHII SOLs in his curriculum as they apply.)

- The students will be able to identify the Enlightened Absolutists Frederick the Great of Prussia, Catherine the Great of Russia, and Joseph II of Austria. (WHII.6b, NCSS power/authority/governance)
- The students will be able to explain how the Enlightened Absolutists were influenced by the Enlightenment ideas and if they were really enlightened. They will understand both sides of the issue. (WHII.6d, NCSS time/continuity/change)
- The students will be able to form their arguments based on evidence.
- The students will recognize that there are multiple and competing viewpoints on historical figures and events. (AP standards, multiple causality)

## Assessment:

- Students will be assessed as they participate in the discussions in their groups. The cases they present should be based on the evidence found in the data sets, and they should demonstrate the ability to argue effectively for both yes and no answers.
- Students will be assessed on their efforts to reach a consensus and the rationale they present for the conclusions that they reach at the end of the lesson.
- Exit ticket – Each group will write up their conclusion to turn in at the end of the block.

The first type of assessment should tell me how the lesson is going and if I need to make any changes as the lesson continues or for future teachings. The second and third assessment should show if the students have learned information about the enlightened monarchs, as well as if they are able to reach agreements with their peers and form reasons based on evidence. Students will receive verbal assessment from me as I notice if certain students are struggling or off track. The exit ticket is for me to assess how the lesson went, and it will not be graded.

## Content and Instructional Strategies:

Perennial issue: How did the Enlightenment affect government?

Case issue: Were the Enlightened monarchs really enlightened? This case issue is a question that historians actually disagree over, and there is evidence for both sides.

I. Hook: The painting will be presented to the class. I will ask them what they see or if anyone has seen the painting before. Then I will tell the students about the painting and its connection to the Enlightenment. David painted Socrates as sacrificing himself for the pursuit of secular truth, an ideal martyr for the Age of Enlightenment. This will help students to review the ideals of the philosophes before entering into a discussion of whether or not the rulers were truly enlightened.

David's Death of Socrates (smarthistory.org)



I will present the case issue to the students in form of the question above. I will explain that historians disagree over this point, so there is no clear correct answer. They will look at both sides of the issue and attempt to reach a consensus at the end. At this point, I will introduce the SAC method to the students. I will explain that they will be in groups of four, and they will work with their pair on one side of the issue by reading the sheets and taking notes in order to present their case. We will go over the norms for discussion which include sitting up straight, speaking clearly, and looking at the pair you are trying to convince.

The classroom is set up so that students sit in pairs. The groups will be formed by having pairs get together to form groups of four. The students should not need to move much in order to do this. A couple of outlying pairs will be put together to form a group. In one section of this class, many of the students are quiet and may not get into this lesson as much. For this class, I will design groups ahead of time (with the assistance of my cooperating teacher, who knows their demeanors better at this point). The groups will be listed on the board before class begins, so that students can get in their groups immediately.

I will then explain to the students that each pair will have one side of the controversy, but they will end up explaining both positions. This way, anyone who has already formed an opinion on this topic will not be upset at having to defend the other side. They will need to try and persuade

the other side that their view is the correct view while not getting into an argument. I will explain the exact procedure of the SAC lesson, and that I will watch the clock and instruct them when to move on to the next step.

## II. Round 1 Present Positions:

I will then tell the students that they will have 3 minutes each side to present their case. I will watch the clock for them. After one side is finished presenting, the other side will have a couple of minutes to ask clarifying questions. I will make sure that the students understand that clarifying questions are to clear up anything that they didn't understand. This is not the time to bring in new arguments or challenge the presenters. I will hand out the position sheets, and students will read them and take notes. I will instruct students that they can mark up the sheets given to them, but they should also make notes in their class notebooks in order to develop an effective argument. They should come up with a thesis to start their argument. Then they will talk to their partner to work out who will present which points. Students will know that each person will be speaking and presenting a part of their position. Students must work together in order to do this.

## III. Round 2 Reverse Positions:

I will hand out the position sheets to the students. These sheets will have different information from the first sheets. Students will repeat the steps from round one. I will remind them of the procedures again at this point.

## IV. Reach Consensus:

Students will attempt to reach a consensus on the question. I will instruct students to discuss with their group and to reach a consensus and support it with evidence. Students will know that they can choose yes, no, or somewhere in between. Some groups may even decide that one enlightened monarch was more enlightened than the others. Each group will share their decision and their rationale with the whole class. Students who disagreed or were unconvinced by their group's consensus will be invited to share their opinions. This will open up into a class discussion/debriefing. By this point students will know that there is no one right answer.

## Resources:

- Computer with PowerPoint / Internet
- White board and markers
- Position sheets – 2 versions of Yes and 2 versions of No (each sheet will be given to half the students)

## Differentiation:

The hook adds a visual element to the lesson which should help to grab students' attention at the beginning of the lesson. Students will work in pairs and groups. They will write down some notes and plan with their partner. They will also be responsible as individuals to orally present their case. This lesson challenges students to put together and present a persuasive case in a relatively short amount of time. They also have to try to come to a consensus over the issue in the end. This lesson will be a good change for the AP class which is so focused on writing because of the AP test. The students will still be learning content and developing persuasive arguments, but it will be done more orally than in writing.

#### Adaptations:

There are no students with IEPs and 504s in this class, but this lesson is built to work for students of all kinds. The class is structured and repetitive for students who need that type of environment, but there is variety in the material because each side will receive different position sheets. The structure should help to keep students focused and not get off topic in their groups. This lesson is appropriately challenging and still achievable for students.

#### Reflection:

I am concerned that the position sheets only present portions of the content that students need to know about the enlightened monarchs because the sheets are meant to help them see the main points of each side, not necessarily learn about *everything* that each of these three monarchs did. This is why they will have read the section in their textbook prior to coming to this class. This lesson is having students take their understanding of the ideals of the Enlightenment era and attempting to apply them to these monarchs. There will also be a review of the enlightened rulers in subsequent lessons or maybe even at the end of this lesson if there is extra time.

There may be some management issues with students getting off topic and start chatting with each other instead of presenting their cases. In general, students may not be very interested in a debate in the historian community, so their attention may wane. I will try to introduce the topic in an interesting way in the beginning to hopefully get students excited about taking sides on a topic that historians actually disagree on. Some students may be excited at the prospect of arguing anything, so that energy may become contagious. This would be good because students will be motivated, but it may also cause issues of staying on task. Only having a few minutes to present their case will help keep students on track because they won't have enough time to finish and start other conversations.

#### Post-Reflection:

This lesson went well overall. One issue that arose at the last minute was that my cooperating teacher had been absent the lesson before I taught this lesson, so the students had not yet read the section on the enlightened monarchs in their textbook. My CT agreed that it would be helpful for students to at least look over this section in order to review the Enlightenment and have a

little background information. Knowing the students a bit, I did not think that my lesson as it was designed would take the full 100 minutes of the block. These students work quickly when they are focused. At the suggestion of my CT, I gave students about 10-15 minutes to review the textbook section with their pair before starting in on the heart of the lesson. Between the opening and the textbook, students were able to effectively review prior to beginning. I did not run out of time for the whole lesson in any of the three sections, so it worked out fairly well in that respect.

This lesson was a good learning experience as a future teacher because much of it is left up to the students. It is a completely different experience to walk around monitoring students than to stand in front of them for a lecture or other types of whole class instruction. Even though I had walked around to groups during some of my CT's lessons, it was valuable to do this in a lesson of my own. I was able to help students remain focused, answer questions, shore up some enthusiasm, and challenge them to think more deeply on their consensus write-ups. In every section of the course, students said they wanted to have a whole class debate at some point, so that might be something to consider for future unit/lesson planning for this class.

PASS Standards:

Higher Order Thinking: 4 One of the main purposes of this lesson was to have students synthesize all of the information in the lesson to arrive at their own conclusion and interpretation of whether or not the enlightened monarchs were truly enlightened. Students challenged each other to more fully explain their decisions with supporting evidence. This happened especially during the time when students were reaching a consensus and writing it up, which took up a substantial amount of the lesson. I did not give this a 5 because the sheets given to students were developed by the teacher and provided scaffolding for them in the process of collecting and synthesizing information. Although some students questioned the reliability of the opinions in the sheets, most of them accepted historians' points of view as reliable, so they did not have concern themselves with validating the information presented to them.

Deep Knowledge: 4 Students used reasoning and arguments to demonstrate the complexity of the controversy. Many students sustained focus on the topic and demonstrated their understanding by arriving at a reasoned, supported conclusion, as evidenced by their written conclusions and by what I observed in the groups. This did not score a 5 because some students lacked focus, and some groups tried to go through the write-up too quickly without really thinking it through.

Substantive Conversation: 4 The focus of this lesson was conversation. Parts of that conversation were highly structured, although not scripted. The talk was almost always about the subject matter, the conversations were not scripted or controlled by the teacher, except for the structured section in terms of time limits. The students built upon one another in the consensus and final whole group sections of the lesson. This section does not score a five due to the highly

structured nature of most of this lesson, and the fact that some groups went off-topic occasionally.

Connections to the World Beyond the Classroom: 2 I told students that this was a controversy that historians actually have debated, and they seemed to understand that with some of them even looking more interested in the lesson after learning that this was not a useless debate. However, even historical debates are of an academic nature, and the lesson did not go beyond that in terms of connecting the world outside the classroom. It helped students build skills that they may use outside of school like building an argument based on evidence, but there is nothing to show that they made this connection themselves.

Ethical Valuing: 2 This was a purely academic controversy, but a few students were debating the ethics of how the enlightened monarchs used the ideals of the Enlightenment to their advantage and not for the good of their people. However, this was not the focus of most of their conversations.

Integration: 3 Students were building knowledge and skills relevant to their lives by practicing building an argument based on evidence. They know that they cannot just make a claim without supporting that claim. This section did not score higher because only this one type of integration was truly used. Technology was in the lesson, but only briefly as a hook.

It may seem as though I have scored myself high in many of the PASS standards, but the nature of this lesson and how it played out in the classroom was dependent upon the students as well. For that reason, I believe that the high scores represent them and their abilities as much as my lesson planning and teaching.

## YES

The bond among philosophes was their common desire to reform religion, political thought, society, government, and the economy for the sake of human liberty. Peter Gay wrote that this goal included “freedom from arbitrary power, freedom of speech, freedom of trade, freedom to realize one’s talents, freedom of aesthetic response, freedom, in a word, of moral man to make his way in the world.”

Immanuel Kant on enlightenment: “if it (the public) is only given freedom, enlightenment is almost inevitable.”

There is a widespread sense that the monarchs weren’t totally devoid of charitable motivation, and that humanitarian instincts and Enlightenment ideas were often present in their reforms.

Only a minority of the philosophes considered popular sovereignty to be a component of individual freedom, and most actually accepted or even advocated the advantages of absolutism, visualizing politics as a means to an end, not an end itself. This was clearly the case with the physiocrats. The argument could, in fact, be made that the acceptance of absolute authority was far more representative of Enlightenment thought outside France and Great Britain.

Voltaire was a very strong monarchist. He had a place at the court of Frederick the Great for some time. Diderot visited Catherine the Great. The physiocrats did not wish to limit the power of monarchs. They wanted to redirect that power toward the rationalization of economic and political structures and the liberation of intellectual life.

Joseph II of Austria imposed a series of religious, legal, and social reforms that contemporaries believed he had derived from suggestions of the philosophes. Joseph the II also granted peasants a wide array of personal freedoms, including the right to marry, to enter skilled trades, and to have their children trained in skilled trades without the landlord’s permission.

Catherine the Great read the works of philosophes and befriended them even before her reign began. She kept up her correspondence with the philosophes and treated them kindly. She also attempted to foster economic development by suppressing internal barriers to trade. Exports grew. She also favored the expansion of the urban middle class that was so vital to trade.



## NO

The bond among philosophes was their common desire to reform religion, political thought, society, government, and the economy for the sake of human liberty. Peter Gay wrote that this goal included “freedom from arbitrary power, freedom of speech, freedom of trade, freedom to realize one’s talents, freedom of aesthetic response, freedom, in a word, of moral man to make his way in the world.”

Many historians have viewed the monarchs as merely trying to compete on the international stage with France and Great Britain by minimizing internal opposition and maximizing tax receipts. Other historians have joined in the attack by asserting that the monarchs purposefully adopted policies in a dual attempt to catch up with the more economically advanced West and to forestall the inevitable bourgeois revolution.

Enlightenment always took second place to power when there was a problem or conflict. In addition to disputing the monarchs' motives, the critics have also questioned the compatibility of the authoritarian institutions of absolute monarchy with the basic libertarian principles of the Enlightenment. Even scholars who basically accept the notion that the monarchs were influenced by Enlightenment ideas have stressed the basic contradiction between individual freedom and those "organizing principles" of absolutism that placed no limits on the exercise of sovereignty. This has been termed "the dilemma of enlightened absolutism."

The relationship between the enlightened monarchs and the enlightened writers was complicated. The ideals of the philosophes were only part of what motivated the policies of the rulers. These policies also increased their military strength. The search for new revenues and internal political support was another incentive for implementing enlightened reforms.

In the case of Catherine the Great of Russia, the goal was territorial expansion to areas with warm water ports. This goal required warfare and eventually resulted in the partition of Poland among Prussia, Austria, and Russia. This militarism was seen as irrational to many philosophes.

Catherine the Great also consciously sought to create the image of being enlightened. She read and cited the works of the philosophes, provided financial subsidies to Diderot, and corresponded with Voltaire. She lavished compliments on the enlightened writers in the hopes that she would receive favorable comments from them.

During the late eighteenth century, all three enlightened rulers became more conservative and politically repressive. In Prussia and Austria, the nobles resisted the changes implemented by the monarchs. In Russia, fear of peasant revolt was the main factor. After the French Revolution broke out, Catherine the Great censored enlightenment books and thought. Oddly enough, the ideals of the Enlightenment encountered greater eventually rejection in the states governed by “enlightened” rulers.

## **YES: The Enlightened Monarchs were enlightened**

### **Religious Tolerance**

Frederick the Great of Prussia has the reputation of being a champion of religious tolerance. He allowed Catholics and Jews to settle in his land. He stated:

Religions must all be tolerated and all religions are equal and good, if only those people who profess them are honest people; and if Turks and heathens came and wanted to populate the country, we would build them mosques and churches.

Joseph II of Austria also favored a policy of religious toleration. In 1781, he extended freedom of worship to Lutherans, Calvinists, and the Greek Orthodox. They were permitted to have their own churches, schools, to enter skilled trades, and to hold positions in public service. Joseph also issued a series of enactments from 1781 to 1789 that extended the right to worship to Jews and relieved them of certain taxes.

### **Freedom of the Press**

Immanuel Kant writing on freedom of the press under Frederick the Great: “Argue as much as you like and about whatever you like, but obey!”

He referred to Frederick’s willingness to allow his subjects to make public use of their own reason in terms of legislation. They may put before the public their thoughts on better ways of drawing up laws, even if this entails forthright criticism of the current legislation. Kant alluded to the public discussion on the *Allgemeines Landrecht* (a civil code), starting in spring 1784. Lawyers, legal philosophers and writers in general were encouraged to present their views. Sixty-two proposals on how to change the legal document were received. Some criticized the acceptance of serfdom and absolutism. A newspaper (*Berlinische Monatsschrift*) published several anonymous articles on the new constitution. The discussion was public in the sense that the intellectuals communicated freely with each other.

### **Taxes**

Joseph II of Austria continued his mother’s policy of a more efficient system of tax collection in which funds were extracted even from the clergy and nobles. In 1789, he also proposed that all proprietors of the land were to be taxed regardless of social status. However, this did not go into effect because Joseph died in 1790.

## **NO: The Enlightened Monarchs were not enlightened**

### **Religious Tolerance...?**

Frederick the Great of Prussia rarely referred to the Enlightenment argument that the sovereign has no rightful power over the thinking and conscience of the citizens. He believed that religious tolerance was in the interest of the state. Frederick did not want to lose tax-paying subjects who would leave the country if they were prosecuted for their religious beliefs. Above all, Frederick feared that they might immigrate to the territories of his enemies, particularly the Habsburgs, support their economy, and add to their military strength. Frederick did not care what his subjects were thinking about religious topics. What really mattered was that they populated the country and behaved as good citizens and patriots.

### **Freedom of the Press...?**

Frederick granted freedom of the press, but only to some extent. Censorship was never completely abolished under Frederick. He allowed free publication in philosophy and religion, but never permitted criticism of the state. The editor of the *Berlinische Correspondenz*, was imprisoned for criticizing Prussian censorship and Joseph II. Editors thereafter practiced self-censorship and refrained from discussing political issues.

Alexander Radishchev, an enlightened Russian landowner and writer, criticized censorship in Russia under Catherine the Great:

Having recognized the usefulness of printing, the government has made it open to all; having further recognized that control of thought might invalidate its good intention in granting freedom to set up presses, it turned over the censorship or inspection of printed works to the Department of Public Morals. A single stupid official in the Department... may do the greatest harm to enlightenment... he may prohibit a useful discovery, a new idea, and may rob everyone of something great... The censorship of what is printed belongs properly to society... Once we have recognized the uselessness of the censorship, or, rather, its harmfulness in the realm of knowledge, we must also recognize the vast and boundless usefulness of freedom of the press.

Shortly after this publication, Catherine the Great, fearing the kind of unrest associated with the French Revolution might spread to Russia, had Radishchev arrested. He was given a period of Siberian exile.

### **Taxes**

Under Frederick the Great, the burden of taxation continued to belong disproportionately to peasants.

## **Bibliography**

- Cavallar, G. (1993). Kant's judgment on Frederick's enlightened absolutism. *History of Political Thought, 14* (1), 103-132.
- Ingrao, C. (1996). The problem of "enlightened absolutism" and the German states. *The Journal of Modern History, (58)*, S161-S180.
- Kagan, D., Ozment, S., & Turner, F.M. (2004). *The western heritage*. Upper Saddle River, New Jersey: Pearson Education.