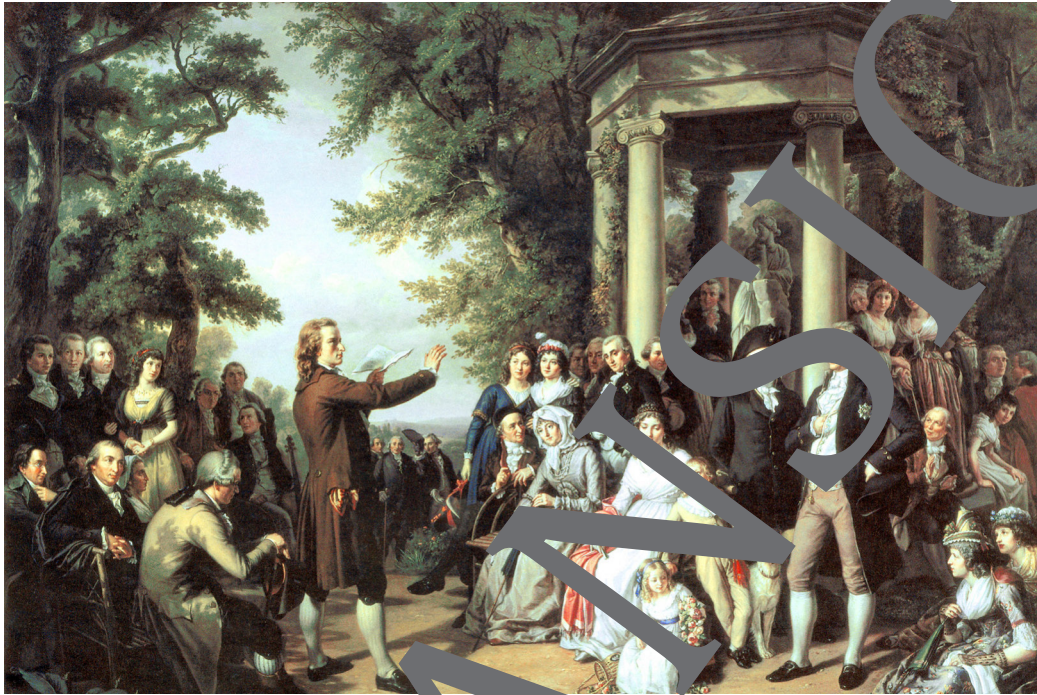


II.D.2

Absolutism and Enlightenment

Dare to Know – The Age of Enlightenment

Dr. Bernd Klewitz



Das Zeitalter der Aufklärung wird häufig mit der *Age of Reason* identifiziert, in dem führende europäische Philosophen und Wissenschaftler Gedankenfreiheit und liberale Werte forderten und voranbringen wollten. Folgen der (literarischen) Aufklärung wirken bis in die Gegenwart hinein und sind insbesondere für die jüngere, lernende Generation von hoher Relevanz, wie das literarische Beispiel der *Dead Poets Society* exemplarisch zeigt.

KOMPETENZPROFIL

Klassensstufe: 10–13

Dauer: 75 Unterrichtsstunden

Kompetenzen: Umgang mit Primär- und Sekundärquellen, Sozialkompetenz, interkulturelle Kompetenz, Hör-/Sehverstehen, historische Analysefähigkeiten, Perspektivenwechsel, literarische Gestaltung und Evaluation

Thematische Bereiche: Contemporary History/ "Landeskunde" Zeitalter der Aufklärung, Absolutismus, Glorious Revolution, Amerikanische und Französische Revolution, Folgen der Aufklärung

“How dare you ...?” – Confronting authorities

M 1

Traditional American Colleges prided themselves to prepare the elite of the country; as an outward sign students had to follow a certain dress code and wear school uniforms, right up to the end of the 1950s when male boarding schools prevailed like the Vermont Welton Academy.

1959: the fictional elite boarding school Welton Academy in Vermont

N.H. Kleinbaum's novel *Dead Poets Society* is set in Vermont and was adapted to a film of the same name in 1989 by the Australian film director Peter Weir, starring – among others – Robin Williams and Ethan Hawke. It was a huge success with a box office of \$ 235 million; a theatre version was shown in NYC in 2016.

Dead Poets Society (youtube clips)

Mr. Keating is the new English teacher in Welton Academy, where he once had been a student himself (and a member of a so-called Dead Poets Society, meeting in a cave near Welton for reading poetry and debating life). Although it has remained a very traditional school, he encourages his students to think for themselves and become wary of authorities in general. He lets them, for example, rip out the introductory pages of a formal anthology of poetry, written by the school's principal, Gale Nolan. In his first lesson at the academy he talks about “Carpe Diem” – seize the day. Following unusual teaching methods, like making his students lean in on alumni's pictures in the commemorative college hall, he teaches his students to make the most of their lives while alive and to be extraordinary (**episode1 – 4'25**).

Keating's colleagues, rigorous and hopelessly old-fashioned, and Welton's principal don't like him much; things come to a head when Nolan accuses Keating of making the students read from his anthology – only to be told that Keating made them rip out the introduction. He fires Keating on the spot and wants him to leave the school immediately. But Keating's students disobey him and – in spite of Nolan's “*How dare you?*” (at 1'55) – get up in protest and stand on the classroom tables intoning “*Captain my Captain*” – referring to Keating's favourite poet by Walt Whitman (**episode 2 – 3'44**).

Did one of Keating's students **dare too much**?

Neil Perry, played by Ethan Hawke, dares to act against his authoritarian father, when he is offered a leading part in a school production of Shakespeare's “*Midsummer Night's Dream*”. His performance of Puck is spectacular, but his father – who had forbidden him to take the role – confronts him after the play and tells him that he will have to leave the Vermont school and attend a military academy instead. Neil, completely shocked by the news, shoots himself with his father's revolver the same night.



Videos

Episode 1 – **Keating's first lesson**: “They’re not that different from you, are they? Same hormones. Full of hormones, just like you. Invincible, just like you feel. The world is their oyster. They believe they’re destined for great things, just like many of you, their eyes are full of hope, just like you. Did they wait until it was too late to make from their lives even one iota of what they were capable? Because, you see gentlemen, these boys are now fertilizing daffodils. But if you lean real close, you can hear them whisper their legacy to you. Go on, lean in. Listen, you hear it? – Carpe, hear it? – Carpe, carpe diem, seize the day boys, make your lives extraordinary.”

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=E5t3ZzV8_U

Episode 2 – Gale Nolan: “**How Dare You?**” (3’44)

The scene is taken from “Dead Poets Society” where the students pay tribute to their teacher Mr. Keating (Robin Williams) who taught them to think differently, to seize the day (carpe diem) and to stand up for what is right. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=j64...Kmqk>

Tasks

Watch the two film clips and discuss the following questions in class (think-pair-share format):

1. What were Keating’s aims and objectives in teaching his students?
2. Why would his colleagues dislike his aims?
Was he successful as a teacher in the end?



The Origin, Principles and Results of the Enlightenment

M 5

According to the famous definition of Immanuel Kant Enlightenment was “man’s emergence from his self-imposed immaturity”¹. The professor of mathematics and philosophy at the (Prussian) University of Königsberg wrote in his answer to the question “What is enlightenment?": “Immaturity is the inability to use one’s understanding without guidance from another. This immaturity is self-imposed when its cause lies not in lack of understanding, but in lack of resolve and courage to use it without guidance from another. Sapere aude! [dare to know] Have courage to use your own understanding! That is the motto of enlightenment.”

Whereas it is fairly easy and consensual among historians to determine the end of this historical phenomenon as an intellectual and social movement with the outbreak of the _____ [1] (1789) – marking its ending in the double sense of success and defeat – to agree on the date of its beginning is much harder and not undisputed.

Many historians label the 18th century as a whole the “Age of Enlightenment”, although methods and topics shaping this movement were already appearing much earlier. In fact by the middle of the 17th century: the principle of _____ [2] and _____ [3], the _____ [4] from theology and the social contract based on _____ [5]. Originally developed and driven by intellectuals, scholars and scientists, the term Aufklärung cannot be connected with any particular decisive point in history that ushers in the beginning of an epoch. Respective events were different in different countries: the _____ [6] (1648) in central Europe, the _____ [7] (1688/89) in England or the _____ [8] (1685 – revocation de l’édit de Nantes²). There is, however, one common denominator applicable to the Enlightenment and aptly formulated by Kant – namely to subject all matters to _____ [9].

It can therefore be assumed that the Scientific Revolution, spreading across Europe from the middle of the _____ [10] (also labelled as the Age of Reason) was at the root and eventually led to the Age of Enlightenment. Interestingly enough, and due to the aforementioned different events in European countries, there were different terms in use as well. In French, the period in question is referred to as “_____ [11]”, the English term is “_____ [12]” notwithstanding the German word “... [13]”. And other sources even define the origin of the movement and their aims in a different way.

In one definition Enlightenment is called an “18th-century ... [14] movement stressing the importance of reason and the critical reappraisal of existing ideas and social institutions” (Collins

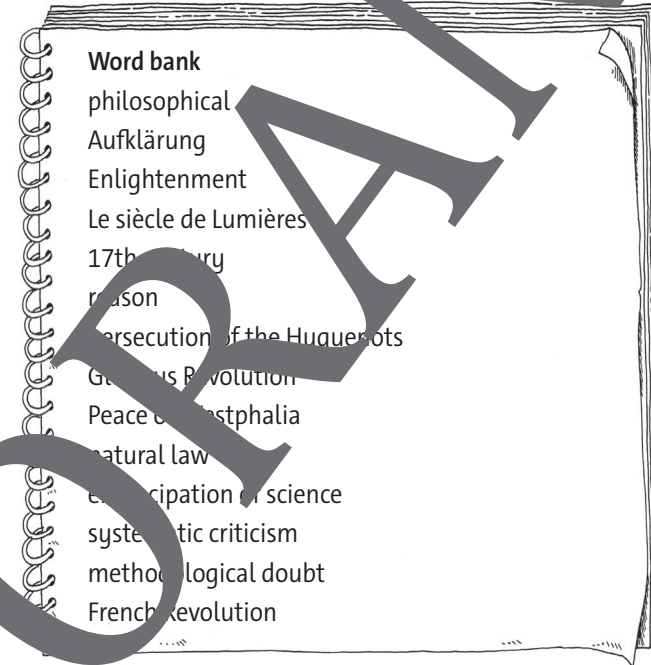


Dictionary). John Hirst even locates the beginning of “Le siècle de Lumières” in France and offers his own explanation of the movement’s origins.

The Australian scholar leaves no doubt about the violence involved: “The Enlightenment began and was strongest in France. The scholars of the Enlightenment saw the world as governed by ignorance and superstition. The two great irrational forces in the society were the church, that is, the Catholic church, and the king, the absolute monarch in France. The church and the king maintained their positions by relying on the ignorance of the people. The church peddled stories of miracles and everlasting punishment in hell to keep the people in order. The kings peddled claims that they were ordained by God and that it was irreligious to question their authority; that people had no choice but to obey. One of the men of the Enlightenment summed up its program in this way: ‘I should like to see the last king strangled with the guts of the last priest’³”.

John Hirst. *The Shortest History of Europe*. Devon: Old Street Publishing, October 2012. p.37.

1 cf.: <https://www.thoughtco.com/kantian-ethics-philosophy-immanuel-kant-4045398#toc-kants-concept-of-enlightenment>. Kant’s “*Kritik der reinen Vernunft*” (1781) is one of the key documents of the German *Aufklärung*. – 2 The original Edict of Nantes (1598) had guaranteed religious freedom to the French Protestants, the Huguenots. – 3 Original quote by Diderot (1713–1784): “Men will never be free until the last king is strangled with the entrails of the last priest” in: *Poésies Diverses* (1875).



Task

Fill in the gapped text and explain, in your own words, some of the keywords pertaining to the concept of Enlightenment (in the **wordbank**). Work with a partner and compare results in plenary.

Thinkers and Philosophers

M 7

Renaissance and Reformation fed into the Age of Enlightenment, with different results in different countries: in England Cromwell's republic (1640-1660) and the Glorious Revolution (1688/89) finished Absolutism, which – on the other hand – peaked under Louis XIV in France at the end of the 17th century. The Enlightenment had a number of very practical results. In England the Bill of Rights (1689) strengthened the rights of parliament against the crown; in North America the Declaration of Independence (1776) was the first constitution based on the theories of Locke, Rousseau and Montesquieu, followed by the Bill of Rights (James Madison) and the American Constitution (1787); the Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen of 1789 was integrated into the French Constitution two years later. The Declaration of the Rights of Woman and the Citizen of the same year, however, did not find official recognition (cf.: **Olympe de Gouges**).

Tasks

1. Create role cards based on the philosophers' profiles – work in tandems.
2. Split the class into actors and audience and act out a conversation between Hobbes, Locke, Paine, Olympe de Gouges, Mary Wollstonecraft, Hume, Montesquieu, Voltaire, Rousseau ...
3. Evaluate results of the conversations.

Scenario

Based on role cards, discussions between different protagonists are arranged; it might be particularly interesting to connect personalities from different countries (and even different times). Use your phantasy and do some further research if necessary before you present these conversations in plenary (in pairs or groups).

In a third space, meeting will occur disregarding place and time, discussing common and controversial ideas of the times of the Enlightenment. Base your conversations on the following **profiles** after creating role cards.

Philosophers' profiles

Thomas Hobbes (1588-1679)

English philosopher, born at the time of the coming Spanish Armada, is best known for his book *Leviathan* (published in 1651), in which he developed his famous social contract theory and in this context investigated into the question what life would be like without government – calling it a state of nature. In *De Cive* (1642) he demonstrates “that the state of men without civil society ... is nothing else but a mere war of all against all”. Therefore, government had to be created as a protection of people, surrendering their freedom to the state and monarchy was the most effective form of rule to maintain order and security. Hobbes wrote his work (including the *Leviathan* of 1651) during the English Civil War and in the light of prevailing violence and chaotic situations argued in favour of a social contract and the rule of an absolute sovereign. In his opinion only a strong undivided government could avoid civil war and the brute situation of a state of nature where man was man's enemy.

M 8

The Sun King: “A nul autre pareil”

The Age of Absolutism was the period around the 17th and 18th centuries when Europe (kind of) was ruled by very powerful monarchs. Monarchs with absolute control. Thus, the Age of Absolutism. Absolute monarchs were rulers who held all the power in a country. Under their rule there were no checks and balances on their power, and there were no other governing bodies that shared the power with. These monarchs also ruled by divine right or the belief that their power came from God. To oppose them was to oppose God. (BT 295-6)

**Keywords**

Longest reigning monarch

Mazarin and Le Fronde (cf.: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Fronde)

Officially crowned 1654

Personal control of government 1661 (disempowers nobility)

Extravagant palace in Versailles

Hunger for war

Edict of Nantes revoked (1685: French Protestants leave France in the 100,000s)

Spain united with France – 1700 huge colonial empire

Died as a tragic figure – 1715: love for war and luxury left France broken, exhausted and bankrupt

**Video**

“Mini Bio: Louis XIV” Louis XIV was born in France 1638 and became king in 1643. His rule effectively started in 1661 when he began to ‘reform’ France. He engaged in frequent wars (1667 invasion of the Spanish Netherlands, 1672 Franco-Dutch War). By the 1680s he retreated to Versailles and died in 1715.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=...6R6d0>

<https://library.achievingthecore.org/tccworldciv2/chapter/mini-bio-louis-xiv/>

Timeline

17/18 century: Movement of Enlightenment in Europe

1618-1648: ...

Personal reign 1661-1715: ...

1672-1678: ...

1684: Truce of Regensburg – Spain forced to accept French occupation for 20 years

1682-1684: Louisiana ...

1661: major works started ...

1678: Hall of Mirrors built ...

1685: ...

1715: ...

Sie wollen mehr für Ihr Fach?

Bekommen Sie: Ganz einfach zum Download im RAABE Webshop.



✓ **Über 5.000 Unterrichtseinheiten**
sofort zum Download verfügbar

✓ **Webinare und Videos**
für Ihre fachliche und
persönliche Weiterbildung

✓ **Attraktive Vergünstigungen**
für Referendar:innen
mit bis zu 15% Rabatt

✓ **Käuferschutz**
mit Trusted Shops

Jetzt entdecken:
www.raabe.de

