



Founders' Influence:  
SS.7.CG.1.4  
**Enlightenment Influences**  
**READING #1**

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_



**SS.7.CG.1.4 Benchmark Clarification 1:** Students will identify and describe the Enlightenment ideas of separation of powers, natural law, and social contract.

In the 1700's, a movement developed in Europe called the **Enlightenment**. The main idea of the Enlightenment was the importance of learning and reasoning. Enlightenment thinkers believed education would solve society's problems.

These thinkers focused on the relationship between government and the people being governed. Their ideas included **separation of powers**, **natural law**, and the **social contract**.

Separation of powers means that power in government is divided into three branches. Each branch has its own unique responsibilities. This was a new idea in Europe because most governments had one person with all the power, like a king or queen. The idea of **checks and balances** allows each branch to limit the powers of the other branches.

Natural law is the Enlightenment idea that all human beings are born with and entitled to certain rights, such as life and freedom. Natural law is universal, which means that these rights are guaranteed to everyone simply because they are born. Locke and Montesquieu believed that government laws and actions must respect **natural rights** and reflect natural law.

Finally, Locke and Montesquieu believed in the idea of a social contract. A social contract is created when an organized society agrees on the relationship between the government and the people. This relationship defines the rights and duties of the people and the limits and responsibilities of the government.

**checks and balances** - a principle of the federal government, according to the U.S. Constitution, that allows each branch of government to limit the power of the other branches

**Enlightenment** - a period in European history when many educated people stressed the importance of learning and reasoning; education was considered the key to understanding and solving society's problems

**natural law** - laws passed by government to protect natural rights

**natural rights** - the belief that individuals are born with basic rights that cannot be taken away by governments

**separation of powers** - the structure of the federal government, according to the U.S. Constitution, that sets up three branches with their own distinct powers and responsibilities

**social contract** - an implied agreement among the people of an organized society that defines the rights, duties, and limitations of the governed and the government