

## Madison & Montesquieu | Lesson Plan

How did Montesquieu's ideas inspire James Madison?

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Students learn about the issues discussed in the Constitutional Convention, the French political philosopher Montesquieu, and how his ideas influenced the Founding Fathers in constructing a new form of government.

### Learning Objectives:

- Identify the purpose of the Constitutional Convention.
- Identify the meaning of "separation of powers" and "checks and balances."
- Analyze Montesquieu's ideas and their effect on James Madison's writing of the Constitution and the construction of the United States government.
- Identify the three branches of government and each of their specific roles.

### Key Vocabulary:

- **Constitutional Convention:** A meeting where delegates from all thirteen states met in Philadelphia to try to form a new and better government.
- **Articles of Confederation:** The first written constitution of the United States, adopted in 1781. It established a loose alliance of sovereign states with a weak central government, which led to various challenges and, ultimately, its replacement by the U.S. Constitution in 1789.
- **Separation of Powers:** A fundamental principle in the U.S. government system that divides governmental responsibilities into three distinct branches: legislative, executive, and judicial. This division is designed to prevent any branch from gaining too much power and ensure a system of checks and balances.
- **Constitution:** The supreme law of the United States, ratified in 1788, establishing the framework of the national government and its fundamental laws and guarantees certain basic rights for its citizens. The first of its kind in the world, it outlines the structure of the federal government, delineates the powers of its three branches, and includes amendments, such as the Bill of Rights, to protect individual freedoms.
- **Checks and Balances:** The idea that each branch of government will have some power over the other branches to prevent any one branch from becoming too powerful.

**Educational Standards:** CCRA.R.7, CCRA.W.2, CCRA.W.4, CCRA.W.9, CCRA.SL.1, CCRA.SL.2, CCRA.SL.3, CCRA.L.1, CCRA.L.6

**Academic Subject Areas:** Biography, American Values, Historical Figures

### What You'll Need

- Video: *Madison & Montesquieu: The Men Who Gave Us Checks and Balances* (Watch [Here](#))
- Worksheet: *Madison & Montesquieu: The Men Who Gave Us Checks and Balances* (Click [Here](#))

Scan to watch episode:



- A brief clip from a popular movie or TV show where a character abuses power
- Pictures of James Madison and Montesquieu
- *Optional*: Excerpts from Montesquieu's works and Madison's Federalist Papers

## Lesson Plan (45 minutes)

### Warm-Up: (15 minutes)

1. Start the lesson by showing a brief clip from a popular movie or TV show where a character abuses power (something like a scene from *The Lion King*, *Aladdin*, *Shrek*, *Avatar: The Last Airbender*, etc.). Ask students:
  - What could stop this character from abusing power if this were real life?
2. Transition to the lesson's objectives by explaining that the U.S. Founders faced a similar question when creating a government, leading to the creation of the Constitution.
3. Show students pictures of Montesquieu and James Madison. Introduce Montesquieu's ideas about the separation of powers. Discuss how these ideas influenced Madison, often called the "Father of the Constitution."
4. *Optional*: Have students read selected excerpts from Montesquieu's works and Madison's Federalist Papers (such as Federalist Nos. 47, 48, and 51), then discuss. Do they see how Madison might have been inspired by the works of Montesquieu? What examples can they cite?
5. Pose a question about how the U.S. government is structured to prevent any branch from having too much power. Explain that they will watch a video that will explore these concepts, specifically how Montesquieu influenced James Madison.
6. Hand out the accompanying worksheet for students before watching the video, asking them to pay special attention to the terms "separation of powers" and "checks and balances."

### Watch and Complete: (20 minutes)

1. Watch the video as a class.
2. Guide students in completing the worksheet as they watch the video. Depending on the age of students, pause throughout the video to allow students to answer questions—especially short answer responses. If necessary, model short answer responses, restate the question, and write a complete sentence.

### Wrap-Up: (10-15 minutes)

1. Give students some time to finish their worksheets. Collect them as a formative assessment, or opt for a class-wide discussion.
2. Discuss Montesquieu's impact on James Madison and the formation of the U.S. Constitution. Pose questions about the importance of power distribution among the three branches of government and what might happen if one had too much power.

## Don't have time for the full lesson? Quick Activity (15-20 minutes)

Distribute the worksheet and allow students to complete it while they follow along with the video.