**A Baron is Born**

Charles Louis de Secondat was born in 1689 in the city of Bordeaux, France. At age 27, he became Baron de Montesquieu (MON-teh-skew) when he inherited his uncle’s fortune and title. Montesquieu was one of the great thinkers of the 17th and 18th centuries. He spent a lot of time thinking about how governments should be created and maintained. His ideas guided the Founding Fathers when they wrote the United States Constitution. Even today, Montesquieu’s thinking influences the way people think about government around the world.

**Follow the Rules**

The term liberty means different things to different people. Some think liberty means being able to speak and act without being held back by laws and rules— in other words, being able to do whatever you want. But Montesquieu believed that liberty is the peace of mind that comes from being safe. He believed safety can only exist if everyone follows the law. If governments could provide and enforce clear laws that everyone would follow, it would increase liberty, reduce the problems of society, and improve human life.

**Separate...**

Montesquieu studied the laws, customs, and governments of European countries to see how they created and enforced laws. He admired the government of England. The English government had three parts: a king to enforce laws, Parliament to create laws, and courts to interpret laws. The government was divided into parts, and each part had its own purpose. Montesquieu called this the separation of powers.

**…but Equal**

Dividing the powers of government was just the first step. Each part of the government needed to be balanced with the other parts. Montesquieu thought that each of the parts, or branches, of government should be equal. He worried that if one branch had more power than the others, people would suffer and lose their liberty. To avoid this, he suggested that each branch have the ability to limit the power of the other two branches. In England, if the king tried to take too much control, the Parliament or the courts could act to stop him. Today, we call this the system of checks and balances.

**Sound Familiar?**

James Madison, the “Father of the Constitution,” liked the idea that each branch of government should have a clear role. As a result, the U.S. Constitution clearly explains what each branch is supposed to do: Congress makes laws, the President enforces laws, and the Courts interpret laws. Each branch has the power to check, or limit, the other branches. This keeps all branches of government balanced and equal.

INFLUENCES FROM THE ENLIGHTENMENT | BARON DE MONTESQUIEU

 According to the text, what document did Montesquieu influence? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

**According to the text, how did Montesquieu define liberty and how did he explain the relationship between liberty and government? What evidence in the text led you to your answer?**

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| --- | --- |
| **Evidence from Text** | **Answer** |
|  |  |

**Vocabulary Graphic Organizer** *Directions: while you read identify and write down the evidence from the text that defines the term. Define the term in your own words and create a picture, symbol or visual representation of the term.*

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| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Concept** | **Evidence from Text** | **Definition in your own words** | **Visual Representation** |
| **Separation of Powers** |  |  |  |
| **Checks and Balances** |  |  |  |

Impact of Montesquieu’s Influence:

**According to the text, how did Montesquieu’s ideas influence the U.S. Constitution? What evidence in the text led you to your answer?**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Evidence from Text** | **Answer** |
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