SS.7.C.1.1
Recognize how Enlightenment ideas including Montesquieu’s view of separation of powers and John Locke’s theories related to natural law and how Locke’s social contract influenced the Founding Fathers.

SS.7.C.1.1 Benchmark Clarification 1: Students will identify and describe the Enlightenment ideas of separation of powers, natural law, and social contract.

During the 1700’s a movement developed in Europe called the Enlightenment. The core ideas of the Enlightenment focused on the importance of learning and reasoning. Enlightenment thinkers believed education was key to solving society’s problems. Several ideas about the relationship between government and the governed were formed. Those ideas included separation of powers, natural law and social contract.

Separation of powers is a system where power in government is divided into three branches each with their own specific responsibilities. This was a new concept in Europe because most governments had one person or group holding all the power, like a king or queen. While separation of powers divides power into three branches, checks and balances allows each branch to limit the powers of the others. Natural law is another idea from the Enlightenment. Natural law is the idea that human nature is based on reason; human beings are entitled to certain rights such as life and freedom. Because these rights are guaranteed to human beings simply because they are born, these rights are considered to be universal, which means that these rights are guaranteed to everyone. Natural rights are revealed in laws and government action that reflect natural law. A social contract is created when an organized society defines rights, duties and limits for the people and 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