

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Seat \_\_\_\_\_ Period \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Whitney High School  
9<sup>th</sup> Grade World History

Lesson 63 • Handout 130  
S. Rosenberg

The Age of Reason

## Messages from the Age of Reason

**INSTRUCTIONS:** Read the following excerpts from the writers of some of the great thinkers of the eighteenth century, taking notes as you go along. Answer the questions at the end on a separate sheet of paper in either pencil, or black or dark blue ink. Do not type! Each answer should be a well-thought out paragraph of 3-5 good sentences going beyond simply repeating the text, but with good analysis backed up by evidence.

Write out each question first and underline or highlight it for full credit. Skip lines between answers and number properly. Be prepared for class discussion based on the material. Staple your answers to this sheet and submit when due.

### **Reading 1: Marquis de Condorcet, The History of Human Progress (1794)**

Are we not arrived at the point when there is no longer anything to fear, either from new errors, or the return of the old ones; when no corrupt institution can be introduced by hypocrisy, and adopted by ignorance of enthusiasm, when no vicious combination can affect the infelicity of a great people? Accordingly would it not be of advantage to know how nations have been deceived, corrupted, and plunged into misery?

Everything tells us that we are approaching the era of one of the grand revolutions of the human race. What can better enlighten us as to what we may expect, what can be a surer guide to us, amidst its commotions, than the picture of the revolutions that have preceded and prepared the way for it? The present state of knowledge assures us that it will be happy. But is it not upon condition that we know how to assist it with all our strength? And, that the happiness it promises may be less dearly bought, that it may spread with more rapidity over a greater space, than it may be more complete in its effects, is it not requisite to study, in the history of the human mind, what obstacles remain to be feared, and by what means those obstacles are to be surmounted?

### **Reading 2: David Hume, "Of the Standard of Taste" (1757)**

The great variety of taste, as well as opinion, which prevails in the world, is too obvious not to have fallen under everyone's observation. Men of the most confined knowledge are able to remark a difference of taste in the narrow circle of their acquaintance, even where the persons have been educated under the same government, and have early imbibed the same prejudices. But those, who can enlarge their view to contemplate distant nations and remote ages, are still more surprised at the great inconsistency and contrariety. We are apt to call barbarous whatever departs widely from our own taste and apprehension; but soon find the epithet of reproach retorted on us. And the highest arrogance and self-conceit is at last startled, on observing and equal assurance on all sides, an scruples, amidst such a contest of sentiment, to pronounce positively in its own favor.

### **Reading 3: Voltaire, *The English Letters* (1733)**

Not long since the trite and frivolous question following was debated in a very polite and learned company, that is to say, Who was the greatest man, Caesar, Alexander, Tamerlane, Cromwell, &c.?

Somebody answered that Sir Isaac Newton excelled them all. The gentleman's assertion was very just; for if true greatness consists in having received from heaven a mighty genius, and in having employed it to enlighten our own mind and that of others, a man like Sir Isaac Newton, whose equal is hardly found in a thousand years, is the truly great man. And those politicians and conquerors (and all ages produce some) were generally so many illustrious wicked men. That man claims our respect who commands over the minds of the rest of the world by the force of truth, not those who enslave their fellow-creatures: he who is acquainted with the universe, not they who deface it.

### **Reading 4: Emmanuel Kant, *Perpetual Peace* (1795)**

A state of peace among men who live side by side is not the natural state (*status naturalis*), which is rather to be described as a state of war; that is to say, although there is not perhaps a always actual open hostility, yet there is a constant threatening that an outbreak may occur. Thus the state of peace must be *established*. For the mere cessation of hostilities is no guarantee of continued peaceful relations, and unless this guarantee is given by every individual to his neighbor—which can only be done in a state of society regulated by law—one man is at liberty to challenge another and treat him as an enemy.

### **Reading 5: John Locke, “*Of Innate Notions*” (1689)**

Since it is the understanding that sets man above all other animals and enables him to use and dominate them, it is certainly worth our while to enquire into it. The understanding is like the eye in this respect: it makes us see and perceive all other things but doesn't look in on itself. To stand back from it and treat it as an object of study requires skill and hard work. Still, whatever difficulties there may be in doing this, whatever it is that keeps us so much in the dark to ourselves, it will be worthwhile to let as much light as possible in upon our minds, and to learn as much as we can about our own understandings. As well as being enjoyable, this will help us to think well about other topics.

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## **The Questions**

1. Is Condorcet optimistic or pessimistic about the human race? Explain your answer.
2. Why should we study history, according to Condorcet?
3. Do you agree or disagree with Hume when he says that people tend to equate familiarity with propriety? (Look up these two terms if you don't know what they mean). Give modern, real-world examples to support your conclusion.
4. How does Voltaire define “true greatness”? Do you agree or disagree? Who might fit into that definition today?
5. Against what opinion was Voltaire arguing in the second half of the paragraph?
6. Is Kant's statement as true in our own day as it was during his lifetime? Support your answer.
7. According to Locke, what does it mean to understand something?
8. How are *understanding* and *knowing* synonyms?