

Education was important to Enlightenment thinkers as a way to equality, though few included women in their plans. Perhaps surprisingly for a *philosophe*, Jean-Jacques Rousseau had definite ideas about the harm caused by certain kinds of education. Later, English writer Mary Wollstonecraft described an equal education for women as one of the important rights they were denied. ♦ *As you read, think about your own ideas on education. Then, on a separate sheet of paper, answer the questions that follow.*

Enlightenment Views on Education

Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1750) From our very first years a senseless education adorns our mind and corrupts our judgment. Everywhere I see huge establishments in which young people are brought up at great expense to learn everything except their duties. Your children will not know their own language, but they will speak others which are nowhere in use; they will be able to compose Verses which they will hardly be able to understand; without being able to disentangle error from truth . . . but they will not know the meaning of the words magnanimity [generosity], equity, temperance, humanity, courage. . . .

I would as soon, said a Wise man, that my pupil had spent his time on the tennis court, at least his body would have been fitter for it. I know that children have to be kept busy, and that idleness is the danger most to be feared for them. What then should they learn? That is certainly a fine question! Let them learn what they ought to do when they are men, and not what they ought to forget.

Source: "Discourse on the Sciences and Arts" edited by Roger G. Masters and Christopher Kelly, Vol. 2 of *The Collected Writings of Rousseau* © 1992 by the Trustees of Dartmouth College, reprinted by permission of University Press of New England.

Mary Wollstonecraft (1792) Men and women must be educated, in a great degree, by the opinions and manners of the society they live in. In every age there has been a stream of popular opinion that has carried all before it, and given a family character, as it were, to the century. It may then fairly be inferred, that, till society be differently constituted, much cannot be expected from education. . . .

Consequently, the most perfect education, in my opinion is, such an exercise of the understanding as is best calculated to strengthen the body and form the heart. Or, in other words, to enable the individual to attain such habits of virtue as will render it independent. In fact, it is a farce to call any being virtuous whose virtues do not result from the exercise of its own reason. This was Rousseau's opinion respecting

men: I extend it to women. . . . I must declare, what I firmly believe, that all the writers who have written on the subject of female education and manners, from Rousseau to Dr. Gregory, have contributed to render women more artificial, weaker characters, than they would otherwise have been; and, consequently, more useless members of society.

Questions to Discuss

1. What is Rousseau's basic criticism of the schools of his time?
2. According to Wollstonecraft, how have society and other writers, such as Rousseau, affected the way women are seen?
3. **Determining Relevance** What kind of education do you think Rousseau would have designed? Could he and Wollstonecraft have agreed on some points of education?
4. **Making Comparisons** Mary Wollstonecraft says that every era or century has a certain "family character" formed by public opinion. How would you describe the "family character" of the time you live in?

Chapter 18

Biography Activity

Chapter 5

MODERN ERA
EDITION

The Enlightenment began in France with the brilliant circle of thinkers and reformers known as *philosophes*. Probably the most renowned throughout all Europe was the writer Voltaire, whose works people still enjoy today. ♦ *As you read, think about the courage it took at that time to criticize powerful institutions such as the church and the government. Then, on a separate sheet of paper, answer the questions that follow.*

Voltaire (1694–1778)

It is hard to imagine one single person today influencing people's thinking as deeply as did the French writer known as Voltaire. In his own time he was considered a great poet and playwright, while today people enjoy the wit and biting humor of his tales and essays. He ridiculed all kinds of rules, ideas, and behavior that he thought were intolerant, unfair, cruel, or simply stupid. People still enjoy the witty satire of his story *Candide*, in which the always-optimistic hero, despite the horrors and injustices he sees, still goes on saying that "All is for the best in this best of all possible worlds." *Candide* is so entertaining that American composer Leonard Bernstein made it the basis for a Broadway musical first presented in 1956.

Born in Paris, Voltaire's real name was François-Marie Arouet. He attended a Jesuit college and grew up among others who were "freethinkers." His first run-in with authority came when he was 23 and was imprisoned in the Bastille for some verses he had written. Later he spent several years in England, where people had more liberty to write and say what they thought about controversial subjects like religion. He greatly admired Britain's



constitutional monarchy, although he thought an enlightened authoritarian ruler was better for France.

Voltaire criticized many things about French society and government, including the unjust legal system, press censorship, and the power and intolerance of the Catholic Church. These ideas made him unwelcome in Paris for many years. He spent some time at the court of Frederick the Great of Prussia, an "enlightened" monarch who admired Voltaire's ideas. He spent most of the rest of his life at his chateau in Ferney, near Lake Geneva in Switzerland. Visitors, many of them uninvited, often traveled there just to meet the great man.

Voltaire was also a historian, setting a new style by including cultural and social ideas as well as political events in his histories. As a *philosophe*, he expressed his ideas in serious essays and philosophical poems and in clever tales and books such as *Zadig*, *Candide*, and the *Philosophical Dictionary*. His wit and ideas also appear in the thousands of letters he wrote to writers, friends, and monarchs all over Europe.

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Questions to Think About

1. What were some of the things about French society that Voltaire criticized?
2. Which of Voltaire's works is best known today?
3. **Making Comparisons** Voltaire admired the strict but "enlightened" rule of Frederick the Great in Prussia. How did this influence his ideas about the governments of France and Britain?