

Why Government?



This lesson combines two readings from the iCivics Influence Library and adds activities that bridge the two topics: Thomas Hobbes and John Locke.

Time Needed: One class period

Materials Needed:

Student worksheets

Copy Instructions:

Reading (2 pages; class set)

Activity (2 pages; class set)

Learning Objectives. Students will be able to:

- Identify the basic ideas on government from Thomas Hobbes and John Locke.
- Define the terms: state of nature, natural rights, sovereign.
- Trace the development of the idea of the social contract from Thomas Hobbes to John Locke.

STEP BY STEP

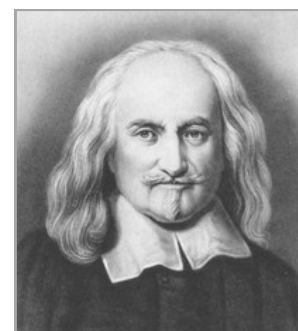
- ANTICIPATE** by asking the following questions: "Why do people create governments? What purpose do they serve? Where did we get our ideas about government?" Then explain that these questions have kept scholars busy for centuries! They will learn about two of them today.
- DISTRIBUTE** the reading pages to students.
- READ** through page one on Thomas Hobbes with the class, discussing as appropriate.
- ASK** students if they think Hobbes was right about human nature and if they agree with his outlook on the 'right' kind of government.
- READ** through page two on John Lock with the class, explaining that he was not too far behind Hobbes as a scholar of government. Discuss as appropriate.
- ASK** students if Hobbes would agree with Locke's idea of natural rights. Then ask if students prefer Hobbes' or Locke's ideas about government. (*Note: Although Hobbes doesn't really focus on the idea of natural rights, he does agree that people will fight for these types of things in a state of nature.*)
- DIRECT** students to use the information they learned in the reading to complete the *Sketch It Out* activity.
- DISCUSS** the students' cartoons.
- ASSIGN** the remaining activities on the worksheet.
- REVIEW** the worksheet with the class.
- CLOSE** by asking students to recall one idea Hobbes and Locke had in common and one idea they did not share. Have students share what they remember with a partner, or call on students to share with the class and record the answers on the board.

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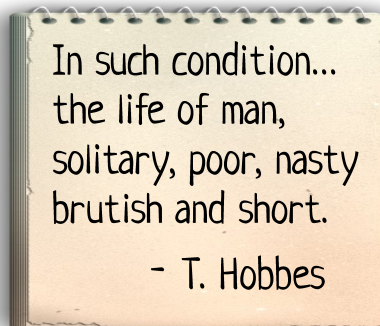
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Nope, Not the Cartoon Tiger (the *other* Hobbes)

Thomas Hobbes was an English scholar and philosopher. He was born in 1588 and later became a tutor to a very wealthy family. As a tutor, Hobbes had access to many books, traveled often, and met many important thinkers. Hobbes lived in Paris through the English Civil Wars and was interested in the nature of government. He wrote about many topics, including politics, geometry, physics, religion, and history. Hobbes was one of many scholars who tried to answer the question, "Why do we have government?"



Thomas Hobbes

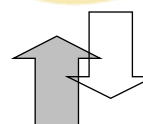


Poor, Nasty, Brutish, and Short

Hobbes saw humans as naturally selfish and quick to fight. He believed that before there were governments, people lived in a **state of nature**. In a state of nature, everyone had a right to everything. In order to get what they wanted, people would always be at war with everyone else. Nobody would produce anything like inventions, art, or even crops or tools because they would be afraid other people would take them away. Hobbes didn't paint a very pretty picture of life without government.

Social Contract

Hobbes lived at a time when many philosophers were thinking about the nature of government. He was one of the first of his era to discuss the idea of a **social contract** between people and their government. A *contract* is an agreement in which both sides agree to something in order to reach a shared goal. In Hobbes' view, people agreed to give up some rights and power in exchange for protection. But for Hobbes, the social contract was no two-way street. He believed that once the people agreed to hand over power in exchange for protection, they lost the right to overthrow, replace, or even question the government.



Leviathan

Hobbes wrote a book called *Leviathan* (luh-VI-uh-then) to explain how he thought governments should work. Hobbes wrote *Leviathan* during the English Civil War. He wrote about the social contract, and he spent much of the book trying to show that a strong central authority was the only way to avoid the evils of war. Hobbes believed a single **sovereign**, or ruler, should have total authority over the people. He believed in a monarchy led by a king. That's because he thought that government would work best if all the power rested in one place. No three branches for Hobbes!



Cover art from *Leviathan*.

Monarchy? Not Democracy?

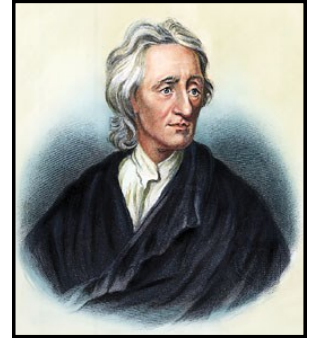
Many political thinkers—including America's Founding Fathers—built on Hobbes' ideas, especially the idea of a social contract. Hobbes was more concerned with protection and order than rights. But people like John Locke and Jean-Jacques Rousseau changed the focus from monarchy to democracy—power with the people instead of a sovereign. They began to see that people have rights that must be protected even from government.

Why Government?

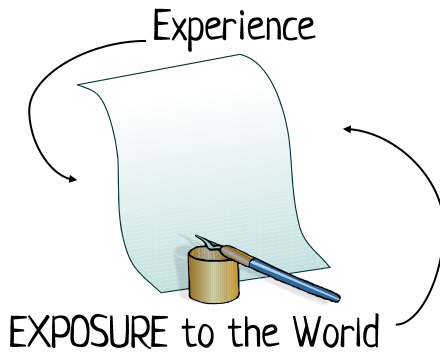
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A Man with Many Hats

John Locke was born in England in 1632, at about the same time that Hobbes was about to begin his life's work as a philosopher. Locke considered becoming a minister, started his career as a doctor, but ended up as a philosopher and political scientist. He had many interests and produced a number of writings that influenced future leaders. One of those leaders was Thomas Jefferson, who helped America gain independence from Britain nearly 150 years after Locke was born. Jefferson studied Locke's writings, and Locke's ideas show up in our own Constitution.



John Locke



The Blank Slate

One of Locke's books, called *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, took over 18 years to write! In it, he says that people are born with a mind like a **tabula rasa**, which means a blank slate or page. During life, that blank slate gets filled up with the things a person experiences with the five senses. He said people learn and develop differently because they are exposed to different things. The one thing people have in common is that they are human and share a human nature that is the same for all people everywhere.

Natural Rights

Locke imagined a set of **natural rights** that human beings share. These are the right to life, liberty, and property. **Life** refers to the fact that people want to live and will fight to survive. **Liberty** means that people want to be as free as possible to make their own decisions. **Property** represents the fact that people want to own things that help them survive, such as land, food, and tools. Locke believed these rights aren't given to people—people are born with them.

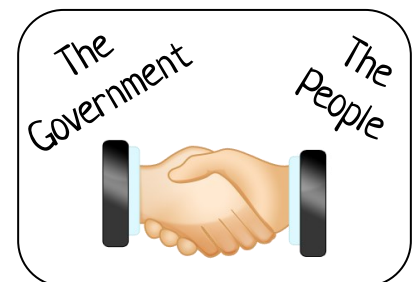


Why do we need a government?

Locke also wondered what life would be like if people didn't have a government. Like Hobbes, he believed this would lead to a **state of nature** with no rules, no one in charge, and no way for people to protect their natural rights. He believed the purpose of government is to end the state of nature and give people certain protections. But Locke also believed that governments should protect people's natural rights.

Social Contract

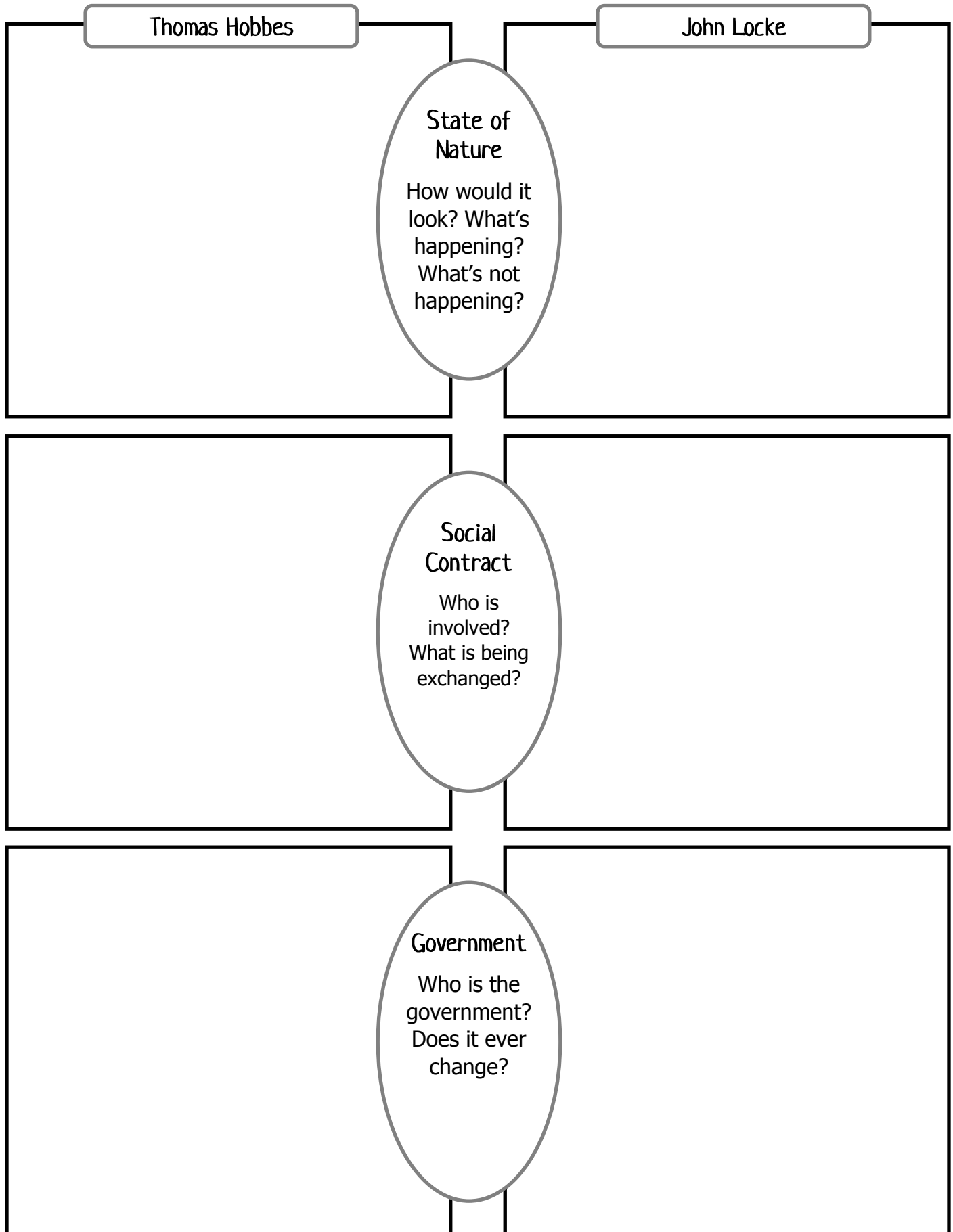
Locke believed a government can only be legitimate, or valid, if it is based on a social contract with citizens. For Locke, the social contract between a government and its people worked both ways: The people agree to give up some freedoms, but only if the government agrees to protect everyone's rights. If the government fails to deliver, the people have the right to revolt like the colonists did during the American Revolution. This two-way exchange between citizens and government was very different from Hobbes' view.



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A. Sketch it out. Use words and images to create cartoons showing the 'big ideas' of Hobbes and Locke.

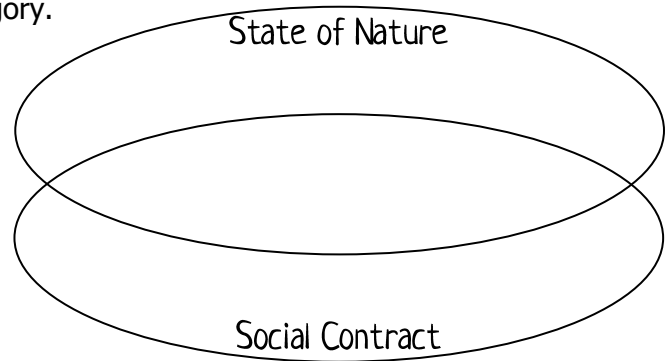


Why Government?

Name: _____

B. Venn. Put the number of the word in the right category.

- | | |
|-------------------|---------------------------|
| 1. Natural Rights | 6. No laws |
| 2. Life | 7. Laws |
| 3. Liberty | 8. Compromises are made |
| 4. Property | 9. You are on your own! |
| 5. Government | 10. Rights are protected. |



C. What's the connection? Describe how the words listed are connected to one another.

1. Life / Liberty / Property

2. State of Nature / War

3. Government / Social Contract

D. Agree or Disagree? Read each statement and determine if Hobbes and Locke would agree.

There are no laws in a state of nature, and people are always at war.

Agree or Disagree

Government is needed to create laws, protect people and provide services.

Agree or Disagree

The ruler should be someone that has complete power and cannot be overthrown if the people are unhappy.

Agree or Disagree

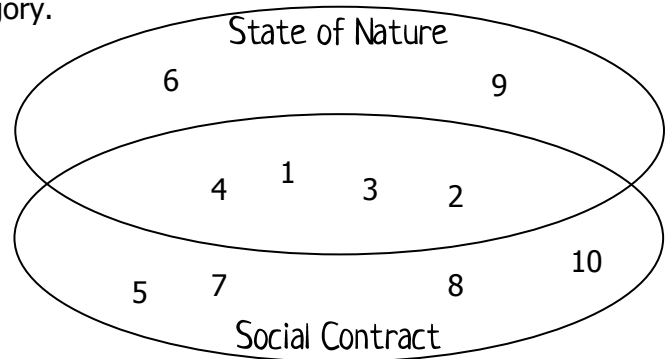
On the statement where they disagree, explain how Locke saw things differently.

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** TEACHER GUIDE **

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C. What's the connection? Describe how the words listed are connected to one another.

1. Life / Liberty / Property

Life, liberty and property are all natural rights that people are born with, according to Locke.

2. State of Nature / War

In a state of nature, people are constantly in a state of war because there are no laws.

3. Government / Social Contract

A social contract happens when the people agree to give up some power and rights in exchange for protection and services.

D. Agree or Disagree? Read each statement and determine if Hobbes and Locke would agree.

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On the statement where they disagree, explain how Locke saw things differently.

Hobbes thought a monarchy was best, and that the people could never overthrow the sovereign power. Locke believed that the government should be overthrown by the people once it failed to serve and protect them.