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.
**Baron de Montesquieu**  

**Roots of Our Government.** Use the word bank to fill in the graphic organizers to see the similarities and differences between the US and English governments. (We gave you two to start out.) One word will show up twice!

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Senate</th>
<th>Courts</th>
<th>King</th>
<th>Parliament</th>
<th>House of Lords</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Congress</td>
<td>House of Commons</td>
<td>President</td>
<td>House of Representatives</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**To Serve and Protect.** There are many rules out there that are meant to keep you from harm. Think of a rule important to you. Then draw it.

**Rule:** ________________________________________

____________________________________________________

_____________________________________________________

**Big Ideas.** Each statement below is wrong. Cross out the incorrect parts and correct it on the line.

1. Montesquieu’s thinking only influenced people in France.
   ________________________________________

2. Montesquieu thought liberty means people can do whatever they want.
   ________________________________________

3. Separation of powers happens when everyone follows the law.
   ________________________________________

4. Montesquieu believed a king should have most of the power.
   ________________________________________

5. Checks and balances means no branch can limit the power of another branch.
   ________________________________________
Baron de Montesquieu

To Serve and Protect. There are many rules out there that are meant to keep you from harm. Think of a rule important to you. Then draw it.

**RULE:** __________________________________________
____________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________

Answers will vary.

Big Ideas. Each statement below is wrong. Cross out the incorrect parts and correct it on the line.

1. Montesquieu's thinking only influenced people __________
   in France. __________
   in America and all over the world.

2. Montesquieu thought liberty means people can do whatever they want: have a peace of mind and feel safe.

3. Separation of powers happens when everyone follows the law: government was divided into parts, and each part had its own purpose.

4. Montesquieu believed a king should have most of the power. share

5. Checks and balances means no-branch can limit the power of another branch. any

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