Colonial Influences

Where did America get its ideas about government?
What’s the big idea?

• Rule of Law
  o All people must follow the laws, and the laws should be enforced fairly.

• Self Government
  o People can make decisions on how their government should work.

• Due Process
  o People have the right to fair and reasonable laws. Officials have to follow rules when enforcing laws and need to treat all people in the same way.

• Limited Government
  o A government that has been limited in power by a constitution, or written agreement.

• Rights
  o A set of things that people believe they should be free to do without restrictions.
Hey! Anyone Have Any Good Ideas?

Our Founding Fathers did not invent the American system of government out of thin air. They, like the other colonists, were influenced by many different ideas and traditions. The biggest influence came from their British heritage. (Remember the colonists WERE British until the American Revolution!) Events in British history and things that were happening during their own time affected the way the Founders thought government should work.

The Founders didn’t have the Internet, so they got their ideas from books and other printed materials. What would have been on the minds of American colonists on the verge of a revolution? Let’s take a peek at what might have been on the shelf of a private colonial library ...
Way back in the Middle Ages, England was ruled by a king who shared some of his powers with the wealthy nobility. The nobility would carry out the king’s wishes, and the king would allow the nobles to make some local decisions. But in the early 1200s, King John tried to take all the power for himself! The angry nobles fought back...
In 1215, they created a document called the *Magna Carta* that limited the power of the king and protected certain rights for the nobles. The nobility was powerful enough to force King John to sign the *Magna Carta*. This was a big deal because it introduced the concepts of limited government, rule of law, and due process. It also helped create the nation’s Parliament (kind of like Congress in the U.S.).
The Magna Carta was a government document that limited the power of the king of England and protected the rights of the nobility. It was written by the English nobility in 1215.

**Big Ideas:**
- Limited Government
- Rights
- Rule of Law
- Due Process
I Think We Took a Wrong Turn!

Fast forward over 400 years. The next document in the colonial library is the *Mayflower Compact*. It was written to solve a basic problem: Who is in charge?

The Pilgrims left England in a ship called the Mayflower headed for the Virginia colony in 1620. A strong storm blew the ship off course, and they ended up up in what is now Massachusetts.
I Think We Took a Wrong Turn!

This area was not under the control of the company that sent them, so the Pilgrims were in independent territory. They needed a Government- fast!

The men agreed to create a new government and to follow its rules. In exchange, they would all protect each other. This is called self-government.

The Mayflower Compact

When we land, we will:
- create our own government
- agree that the laws will be followed by everyone
- make sure that the new government will serve the common good
The Mayflower Compact was an agreement among individuals that created a government that would provide order and protect the rights of the colonists. It was written by a group of English Pilgrims as they traveled to Massachusetts in 1620.

Big Ideas:
- Self Government
- Rule of Law
King v. Nobles: Round Two

Meanwhile, back in England, the Parliament had been battling it out with the king in a series of civil wars. Parliament eventually came out on top and passed the *English Bill of Rights* in 1689. Like the *Magna Carta*, this document expanded the rights of the Parliament and the people, while limiting the powers of the king even more. This document was well-known because it affected people living in Britain and the new British colonies in America.

*The English Bill of Rights*

As Englishmen, we demand:
- Free elections to Parliament
- The rights to bear arms, to petition the government, and to a fair trial
- No excessive bail or fines or cruel and unusual punishment
The *English Bill of Rights* was a government document that expanded the powers of the English Parliament and expanded the rights of the people, as well as further limited the rights of the king. It was written by the members of the English Parliament in 1689.

**Big Ideas:**
- Limited Government
- Rights
- Due Process
- Rule of Law
In the 1720s, authors using the fake names Cato the Elder and Cato the Younger published a series of newspaper editorials in Britain. The authors argued against the king’s heavy-handed rule. These articles were titled *Cato’s Letters*, and they were also published in colonial American newspapers. *Cato’s Letters* became so popular that they were collected into a book. Half of the private libraries in colonial America owned a copy! *Cato’s Letters* discussed many different ideas, such as freedom of expression, which became very influential in the colonies.
Cato’s Letters

Cato’s Letters were made up of a collection of newspaper articles published to convince people to support the freedom of expression and to fight against the heavy handed rule of the British government. They were written by two anonymous English journalists in the 1720’s.

Big Ideas:

• Rights
• Rule of Law
Calling For Independence

By the 1700s, King George III and Parliament were making more and more demands on the colonies. Many were getting fed up and began to meet and discuss breaking away from Britain. In the mid-1770s, representatives from most of the 13 colonies met in Philadelphia. Here, the Founders discussed the options for the future.
Calling For Independence

While these meetings were happening, a journalist named Thomas Paine published a pamphlet called *Common Sense* in 1776. In *Common Sense*, Paine did not introduce any new ideas. Instead, he explained the arguments for independence in a way that was easy for everyday colonists to understand. He encouraged them to support the fight for independence from Britain. Just six months later, the Declaration of Independence was signed.
Common Sense was a pamphlet written to convince the American colonists to support becoming independent from England. It was written by a colonial journalist and circulated in 1776.

Big Ideas:
- Self Government
- Rights
From Big Ideas to the Constitution

The movers and shakers in the colonial period spent a lot of time thinking about these big ideas, and how to put them into practice.

Give it a try yourself by matching each aspect of the U.S. Constitution to the big ideas that you just learned about.
From Big Ideas to the Constitution

“From Big Ideas to the Constitution and the laws of the United States ... shall be the supreme law of the land.” All government officials “shall be bound by an oath to support this constitution.”

U.S. Constitution, Article VI

**Self- Government:** popular or representative system where the people create and run their own government

**Rule of Law:** the idea that all people must follow the laws, and that the laws are enforced fairly

**Due Process:** People have the right to fair and reasonable laws. Officials have to follow rules when enforcing the laws and treat all people in the same way.

**Rights:** A set of things that people believe they should be free to do without restrictions

**Limited Government:** the power of government is limited by the Constitution, and each branch is limited in what it can do
From Big Ideas to the Constitution

The first ten amendments in the Bill of Rights guarantee certain rights and freedoms that include:
- Freedom of speech, the press, and religion
- Right to petition the government and to bear arms
- Prohibition of excessive bail or fines, or cruel and unusual punishments for crimes

**Self- Government:**
A popular or representative system where the people create and run their own government

**Rule of Law:**
The idea that all people must follow the laws, and that the laws are enforced fairly

**Due Process:**
People have the right to fair and reasonable laws. Officials have to follow rules when enforcing the laws and treat all people in the same way.

**Rights:**
A set of things that people believe they should be free to do without restrictions

**Limited Government:**
The power of government is limited by the Constitution, and each branch is limited in what it can do
The U.S. Constitution created three branches of government. Each branch is given the power to check, or limit the power of the other two. The system of checks and balances keeps any one branch from getting too powerful.

**Self-Government:** popular or representative system where the people create and run their own government

**Rule of Law:** the idea that all people must follow the laws, and that the laws are enforced fairly

**Due Process:** People have the right to fair and reasonable laws. Officials have to follow rules when enforcing the laws and treat all people in the same way.

**Rights:** A set of things that people believe they should be free to do without restrictions

**Limited Government:** the power of government is limited by the Constitution, and each branch is limited in what it can do
From Big Ideas to the Constitution

**Self-Government:**
A popular or representative system where the people create and run their own government.

**Rule of Law:**
The idea that all people must follow the laws, and that the laws are enforced fairly.

**Due Process:**
People have the right to fair and reasonable laws. Officials have to follow rules when enforcing the laws and treat all people in the same way.

**Rights:**
A set of things that people believe they should be free to do without restrictions.

**Limited Government:**
The power of government is limited by the Constitution, and each branch is limited in what it can do.

---

**U.S. Constitution, 5th Amendment**

No person shall...be deprived of life, liberty, or property, without due process of law”
From Big Ideas to the Constitution

“WE THE PEOPLE of the United States...do ordain and establish this Constitution for the United States of America.”

Preamble to the Constitution, 1787

**Self-Government:** popular or representative system where the people create and run their own government

**Rule of Law:** the idea that all people must follow the laws, and that the laws are enforced fairly

**Due Process:** People have the right to fair and reasonable laws. Officials have to follow rules when enforcing the laws and treat all people in the same way.

**Rights:** A set of things that people believe they should be free to do without restrictions

**Limited Government:** the power of government is limited by the Constitution, and each branch is limited in what it can do
So what are you going to do?

Choose a modern method of communication (text stream, Facebook, Twitter, etc.) and show a conversation/stream with two of the inspiration documents debating who’s more important to the Constitution!
Colonial Influences

Use modern communication technique to discuss who is the most important—must have at least 10 “exchanges”.

- Magna Carta
- Mayflower Compact
- English Bill of Rights
- Cato’s Letters
- Common Sense
- Collection of Good Ideas