

America & Mr. Smith

Did a Scotsman influence the founding of America?



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Video Page



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Teacher's Guide

This Teacher's Guide includes the following:

- Suggested Lesson Plan
- Preview Questions
- Key Terms
- Viewing Guide
- Discussion Questions
- Activity: Who Chooses
- Quiz
- Enrichment and Integration Activities
- Answer Key
- Appendix

Suggested Lesson Plan

These materials may be used in a variety of ways. For maximum benefit, we suggest the following lesson plan:

- As a class, discuss the Preview Questions and Key Terms.
- Distribute copies of the Viewing Guide for students to use as a note-taking tool during the video.
- Play the video, pausing if needed to facilitate understanding and note-taking.
- Review and discuss answers to the Viewing Guide using Answer Key as a guide.
- Use Discussion Questions to spark class discussion, or assign these questions as homework.
- As a class or in small groups, complete the Who Chooses Activity.
- Replay the video as preparation for the Quiz.
- Administer and grade the Quiz using Answer Key as a guide.
- Optional: Assign one or more Enrichment Activities as homework.

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Preview Questions

(These are meant to be read aloud by the teacher.)

1. Who were the Founders?
2. Where did the Founders get their ideas for establishing the United States?
3. What was the Enlightenment?
4. What was Great Britain's relationship to its colonies in the 18th century?

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Key Terms and Definitions

Economics – the study of human behavior as a relationship between ends and scarce means which have alternative uses

Founders – the individuals of the Thirteen British Colonies in North America who led the American Revolution against the authority of the British Crown and established the United States of America. Key individuals were John Adams, Benjamin Franklin, Alexander Hamilton, John Jay, Thomas Jefferson, James Madison, and George Washington.

Founding Principles – ideas that form the basis of our system of government, including: the rule of law, unalienable rights, equality, consent of the governed, and limited government.

Institution – a custom or behavior pattern that is important to the social order. Examples include marriage, family, religion, schools, medicine, language, and law.

Mercantilism – the economic theory that trade generates wealth, and therefore governments should encourage exports and discourage imports, in order to accumulate gold and silver.

Parliament – the legislature of Britain, consisting of the House of Lords and the House of Commons

Self-interest – one's personal interest or advantage

Virtue – moral excellence and righteousness; goodness

Wealth – the value of all the assets of worth owned by a person, community, company or country; the accumulation of resources

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The Scottish Enlightenment

The Enlightenment was a movement in Europe and Britain which held that if we went about pursuing knowledge in the right way, we could gain vastly more of it and improve society in the process. Sir Francis Bacon and others developed the scientific method. Rene Descartes came up with an influential understanding of what the mind is and how it relates to the rest of reality. Scientific discoveries by Newton, Galileo, and others lent support to the idea that we could learn more with new ways of thinking. The Enlightenment was partly an effort to understand society in new ways.

Some Enlightenment thinkers, including many in the Scottish Enlightenment, emphasized the limits of human reason in acquiring knowledge. Rather, they held that any knowledge we possessed had come from our senses. Any theories that we formed had to be tested against observation.

Because reason is only a limited source for knowledge, the differences in people's mental abilities was relatively unimportant to these thinkers. We all have senses and common sense. Similarly, we all have what Adam Smith called moral sentiments, instincts telling us what is right and wrong. We do not need reason or any moral authority to tell us what is right and wrong, in this view; people of ordinary mental ability have these moral sentiments.

Similarly, we do not need to (and cannot), in the Scottish Enlightenment view, rely on people with great minds to use reason to create systems and direct people. Rather, we all have a little bit of reasoning ability, enough to get by in ordinary tasks and respond to our particular situations. Knowledge was, in this view, decentralized, spread among people who knew the particular things relevant to their own decisions. It was not centralized in great minds.

Name: _____

Date: _____

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1. Adam Smith's ideas flowed through the heart of the American _____.
2. Smith thought that the Americans were victims of the _____ system.
3. [Adam Smith] believed that the best for both sides would be open and free _____.
4. Adam Smith...couldn't see any way in which the colonies would ever be _____ to Britain.
5. In 1776, just months before America's seething discontent bursts into outright rebellion, _____ is published.
6. Colonial _____ found Smith very interesting because...his books...offer them a blueprint on how to create a nation.
7. Included [in the Library of Congress] collections is the personal library of..._____...a lifelong admirer of Adam Smith.
8. The nature of the Constitution; the nature of the revolution...the whole philosophy of _____ as it is in the United States...is embedded in that collection.
9. Jefferson didn't just read Smith's book; he frequently studied it, _____ it, and recommended it to others.
10. Both Madison and Smith believed that human beings are strongly motivated by _____, but also capable of _____.
11. What you see in the Constitution is an attempt to implement and integrate into a governmental plan some of the ideas Smith had, about what could allow for a _____ society.
12. "The sovereign is completely discharged from a duty [for which] no human wisdom or knowledge could ever be sufficient; the duty of superintending the _____ of private people."
13. When faced with the challenge of how to create and structure a new nation, the Founders turned to the _____—and to Adam Smith—for guidance.

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Discussion Questions, page 1

1. Who was Adam Smith? Why was he interested in the American colonies?
2. What was mercantilism? How did mercantilist thinking affect Britain's relationship to the American colonies?
3. What did Adam Smith think would be the best arrangement between Britain and the colonies?
4. Why did Britain need such a large navy back in the 18th century?
5. Why did Britain want to control its colonies to monopolize trade? (Bonus: Find a reference to this in the Declaration of Independence.)
6. Why was *The Wealth of Nations* widely read in the American colonies, including by many of the Founders?
7. What happened to Thomas Jefferson's personal library over the years? What is its status now?
8. Why did Thomas Jefferson have so many books? What can we learn about Jefferson's thinking by studying his book collection?
9. How do we know what Thomas Jefferson thought about *The Wealth of Nations*?
10. Who was James Madison? How did his views on government compare with Adam Smith's?
11. How did Adam Smith's ideas influence America's founding principles?
12. "The Founders were dealing with things like how to structure a government, an economy, the banking system, the church, the military." What does the narrator mean by "structuring an economy"? The Founders certainly structured our government, but did they structure the economy? If so, in what sense?
13. "Here you have a groundbreaking book in how to run an economy." Is this a good description of *The Wealth of Nations*, based on the information in the film? Explain.

14. “There has to have been a moment in which Jefferson and Hamilton had a conversation that was at least laced with Smithian philosophy...” Who was Hamilton? What would he and Thomas Jefferson have discussed or debated in which Adam Smith’s ideas could have come up? How could both have found Smith insightful, despite disagreeing with each other?
15. “Both Madison and Smith believed that human beings are strongly motivated by self-interests, but also capable of virtue.” What do you think Fleischacker means by self-interest and virtue? How can people be self-interested and still capable of virtue? How can you design institutions that rely mainly on self-interest, and do not rely too much on virtue? Can you create institutions that don’t rely on virtue at all?
16. In what ways do we count on people’s virtue to make our political or economic systems work? If people were only motivated by rewards and punishments, how would things be different? In what ways do our laws, customs, and system of government accommodate people’s self-interest, or make use of this self-interest? What kinds of political systems rely solely on people, or some group of people, to be virtuous, while not allowing a role for self-interest?
17. Do governments always result from people creating them deliberately, and thinking about blueprints for government? What are some other examples of governments created by people who thought about blueprints for government? How can we measure their success?
18. Why do you think both Smith and the Founders gave a lot of thought to blueprints for government, and about human nature? Why do you think they came to similar conclusions?
19. “The sovereign is completely discharged from a duty [for which] no human wisdom or knowledge could ever be sufficient; the duty of superintending the industry of private people.” In your own words, explain what this means. Why is human knowledge or wisdom insufficient to manage people’s industry (the economy)? What does this tell us about Adam Smith’s views about the role of government in the economy?

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Activity:

Who chooses? Who benefits? Who pays? What's fair?

[These four questions can be a useful tool for evaluating any policy or system. Posing the questions is a great way to stimulate critical thinking.]

As a class, or in small groups, discuss the following:

(For each question, think broadly about all the possible people or groups of people who may be affected, and remember there may be non-monetary costs and benefits.)

If a system of government relies heavily on people to act contrary to their self-interests, how does that affect the level of freedom people can have to make choices? Who will have to make these choices? Who will benefit? Who will pay?

If a system of government works well for people who are free to act according to their self-interests, who will make most of the choices? Who will benefit from these choices? Who will pay any consequences?

How is virtue related to choice? If people have a choice in how to act, how does this affect their ability to exercise virtue? If people lack a choice in how to act, how does this affect their ability to exercise virtue?

Name: _____

Date: _____

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1. Adam Smith was a/an _____ thinker and writer.
 - A) American
 - B) French
 - C) Scottish
 - D) English

2. Adam Smith wrote *The Wealth of Nations* around the time of _____.
 - A) The American Revolution
 - B) The U.S. Civil War
 - C) World War I
 - D) The Glorious Revolution

3. Smith thought the Americans were victims of the _____ system.
 - A) capitalist
 - B) socialist
 - C) mercantilist
 - D) fascist

4. Adam Smith favored _____ between Britain and the American colonies.
 - A) mercantilism
 - B) war
 - C) severing all ties
 - D) free trade

5. Thomas Jefferson's book collection is preserved at _____.
 - A) Monticello
 - B) The Smithsonian
 - C) The National Archives
 - D) The Library of Congress

6. Who did Adam Smith think should direct the “industry of private people”?
- A) the individuals themselves
 - B) the sovereign ruler
 - C) the local government
 - D) the educated elites
7. What was the reaction to *The Wealth of Nations* in the American colonies?
- A) Few people read the book because most colonists were illiterate.
 - B) The book was popular because its ideas were relevant to creating a new nation.
 - C) It was dismissed as propaganda by most of the leading intellectuals.
 - D) Colonists did not have access to the book due to the time and expense of shipping.
8. How do we know what Thomas Jefferson thought about *The Wealth of Nations*?
- A) He underlined and wrote notes in the book.
 - B) He included excerpts from the book in the Declaration of Independence.
 - C) We can read his references and recommendations of the book to others.
 - D) We have no evidence about what he thought; we can only speculate.
9. Who among the American Founders was/were admirers of Adam Smith’s work?
- A) only Thomas Jefferson
 - B) only James Madison
 - C) both Jefferson and Madison
 - D) only Alexander Hamilton
10. What was the British government’s single largest expense in Adam Smith’s day?
- A) welfare
 - B) the military
 - C) interest on the debt
 - D) agricultural subsidies

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Enrichment and Integration Activities

- I. Research: The Library of Congress. What is it? What is its purpose? How is it organized? How does it serve the public? How is it funded? Create a report using PowerPoint or a video and present it to the class. Be sure to include photos of some of the famous artwork on display in the building.
- II. Writing: Mercantilism. Read the excerpt in the Appendix from *The Wealth of Nations* about British mercantilism and its effects on the colonies. Imagine you are an American colonist living under these conditions. Write a letter to Parliament explaining why you think Britain should change its trade policies toward the colonies. Be sure to explain how you are personally affected by the current policies.
- III. Writing: Founders' Debates. Research the arguments Alexander Hamilton and Thomas Jefferson made about the Bank of the United States. Create a dialogue between the two on the subject. How could each use "Smithian ideals" to justify his position? What kinds of government projects are consistent with the idea that "every man...is left perfectly free to pursue his own interest in his own way?" How could Hamilton argue that the Bank of the United States is consistent with this idea, or even helps make it possible? How could Jefferson argue otherwise? How could Jefferson argue that an agrarian economy better promotes virtue than the kind of economy Hamilton wanted? How could Hamilton counter this argument?
- IV. Writing: Human Nature and Political Systems. Read Federalist #10. Write an essay comparing the ideas of James Madison and Adam Smith. In your own words, explain how Smith and Madison viewed human nature as it related to politics. What did it mean for people to be self-interested, politically? How did both men favor designing political systems with that human nature in mind, to channel people's self-interest for the common good? Extend your essay by studying some of the Anti-Federalist writings. How might an Anti-Federalist, under a similar understanding of human nature, argue that Madison was wrong, and that we should not adopt the Constitution?
- V. Research: Founding Principles. What were the foundational ideas behind the American Revolution? How were these ideas expressed in the Declaration of Independence? How did the Constitution establish a government based on these first principles? Create a written or oral report and present it to the class.
- VI. Research: Mercantilism. What was mercantilism? What were its goals and how was it supposed to work? When was it popular? Which countries practiced it? Why did mercantilism eventually fall out of favor? What kind of policies replaced it? Create a written or oral report and present it to the class.
- VII. Research: Scottish Enlightenment. What was the Enlightenment? When and where did it happen? How did Enlightenment thinking differ from pre-Enlightenment thinking? What were some of the most important Enlightenment ideas? Who were the important Scottish Enlightenment thinkers? How did Scottish Enlightenment thinkers differ from French Enlightenment thinkers? In what ways did the Enlightenment change the world? (Resource: *How the Scots Invented the Modern World* by Arthur Herman) Present your research in a written report. Be sure to cite your sources.

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Viewing Guide Answer Key

1. Constitution
2. mercantilist
3. trade
4. profitable
5. *The Wealth of Nations*
6. Americans
7. Thomas Jefferson
8. politics
9. referenced
10. self-interest; virtue
11. prosperous
12. industry
13. Enlightenment

Quiz Answer Key

1. C) Scottish
2. A) The American Revolution
3. C) mercantilist
4. D) free trade
5. D) The Library of Congress
6. A) the individuals themselves
7. B) The book was popular because its ideas were relevant to creating a new nation.
8. C) We can read his references and recommendations of the book to others.
9. C) both Jefferson and Madison
10. B) the military

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Appendix

Adam Smith on Mercantilism (from *The Wealth of Nations*)

The liberality of England, however, towards the trade of her colonies has been confined chiefly to what concerns the market for their produce, either in its rude state, or in what may be called the very first stage of manufacture. The more advanced or more refined manufactures even of the colony produce, the merchants and manufacturers of Great Britain choose to reserve to themselves, and have prevailed upon the legislature to prevent their establishment in the colonies, sometimes by high duties, and sometimes by absolute prohibitions....

While Great Britain encourages in America the manufactures of pig and bar iron, by exempting them from duties to which the like commodities are subject when imported from any other country, she imposes an absolute prohibition upon the erection of steel furnaces and slitmills in any of her American plantations.*63 She will not suffer her colonists to work in those more refined manufactures even for their own consumption; but insists upon their purchasing of her merchants and manufacturers all goods of this kind which they have occasion for....

Of the greater part of the regulations concerning the colony trade, the merchants who carry it on, it must be observed, have been the principal advisers. We must not wonder, therefore, if, in the greater part of them, their interest has been more considered than either that of the colonies or that of the mother country. In their exclusive privilege of supplying the colonies with all the goods which they wanted from Europe, and of purchasing all such parts of their surplus produce as could not interfere with any of the trades which they themselves carried on at home, the interest of the colonies was sacrificed to the interest of those merchants....

When, by the Act of Navigation, England assumed to herself the monopoly of the colony trade, the foreign capitals which had before been employed in it were necessarily withdrawn from it. The English capital, which had before carried on but a part of it, was now to carry on the whole. The capital which had before supplied the colonies with but a part of the goods which they wanted from Europe was now all that was employed to supply them with the whole. But it could not supply them with the whole, and the goods with which it did supply them were necessarily sold very dear. The capital which had before bought but a part of the surplus produce of the colonies, was now all that was employed to buy the whole. But it could not buy the whole at anything near the old price, and, therefore, whatever it did buy it necessarily bought very cheap....

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