Course Learning Outcomes for Unit III

Upon completion of this unit, students should be able to:

1. Demonstrate critical thinking skills required to analyze, synthesize, and evaluate assigned readings.
2. Identify cultural, historical, and philosophical forces revealed in and illustrated by assigned readings of Ben Franklin, Thomas Paine, Thomas Jefferson, Olaudah Equiano, and Phillis Wheatley.
3. Examine how images, figurative language, and other literary devices shape meaning in the writings of Phillis Wheatley.
4. Analyze elements in assigned readings, identifying and synthesizing themes related to universal human concerns such as human rights and equality, and other provocative subjects, particularly in the writings of Ben Franklin, Thomas Paine, Thomas Jefferson, and Olaudah Equiano.
5. Examine and express the role assigned readings have played in reflecting cultural and philosophical foundations of American history and culture.
6. Demonstrate the skills necessary to analyzing and synthesizing assigned readings into written composition that includes library research and information literacy.

Reading Assignment

Chapter 2:
Reason and Revolution: 1725-1800

- Reason and Revolution, pp. 249-253
- Benjamin Franklin, pp. 282-323
- Thomas Paine, pp. 333-352
- Thomas Jefferson, pp. 374-379
- Olaudah Equiano, pp. 390-400
- Phillis Wheatley, pp. 400-403

Benjamin Franklin


After accessing the above OLC website, click on Volume 1, which will access information and resources related to our textbook. This will bring up a screen listing Instructor Edition and Student Edition as links on the upper left side of the screen. Click on “Student Edition,” which will bring up a listing of resources on the left side of the screen, entitled “Course-wide Content.” From the dropdown menu that says “Choose one…,” click on Benjamin Franklin.

You are required to read the sections entitled “About the Author,” “Orientation,” and “Key Concepts.” If you wish, you can learn more about Ben Franklin by accessing the other links provided.

Phillis Wheatley


After accessing the above OLC website, click on Volume 1, which will access information and resources related to our textbook. This will bring up a screen listing Instructor Edition and Student Edition as links on the upper left side of the screen. Click on “Student Edition,” which will bring up a listing of resources on the left...
side of the screen, entitled “Course-wide Content.” From the dropdown menu that says “Choose one…,” click on Phillis Wheatley.

You are required to read the sections entitled “About the Author,” “Orientation,” and “Key Concepts.” Make sure you pay close attention to the tradition of poetry Wheatley follows known as neo-classical poetry. If you wish, you can learn more about Phillis Wheatley by accessing the other links provided.

**Marek Steedman**


Steedman’s book review is the subject of your Unit III article critique. You can find the book review in the Academic OneFile database of the CSU Online Library.

**Unit Lesson**

**NOTE:** In addition to being responsible for information in the assigned readings, students will also be responsible for the information in the unit lectures, so be sure to read them. Unit assessment questions and unit assignments may be based on information from either source.

To access an audio recording of the unit lecture, click [here](#)

The 18th century in America became known for its dominating ideas as the Age of Reason, the Age of Neoclassicism, the Age of Enlightenment, and the Age of Revolution. The Age of Reason developed first in 17th-century England, spread to France and Europe, and came to the English colonies in America during the 18th century.

Men of the Age of Reason, such as Benjamin Franklin, rationalized relations between humans, God, and nature. They sought order everywhere in the natural world—and found it, not in religion but in new scientific theories shaped by Isaac Newton. Newton offered a single mathematical law that accounted for the movements of the tides, the earth, even the stars, and thus contributed to the beginning of modern science with the idea of an intelligible universe. By extension, forward thinkers such as Franklin and Thomas Jefferson believed that men could assume greater control of nature without offending God.

Their rationalizations, applied to theology, produced Deism, the belief that reason and observation of the natural world are sufficient to determine the existence of God. Franklin, in particular, illustrated the ideas of the Age of Reason and Enlightenment in both his writings and behavior. He emphasized societal reform using the powers of reason and challenging ideas grounded in tradition and faith. During his early years, Franklin sought to achieve moral perfection.

Faith in a Newtonian universe and in a deistic God led men such as Franklin to believe that human society must also operate by natural laws. By discovering and applying such laws, mankind could achieve almost infinite improvement. The idea of progress became one of the dominant concepts of the age. As the idea of progress converged with Christian sentiments, there arose movements for social betterment and humanitarianism to redress the ills of the oppressed.
At age 35, Thomas Paine came to Philadelphia with letters of introduction from Benjamin Franklin. There, he supported himself as a journalist, speaking out against slavery and publishing *Common Sense* (1776), a pamphlet in which he encouraged Americans to separate from Britain. *Common Sense* helped to establish the rhetorical style of American political writing.

If you have been reading American literature chronologically, *Common Sense* may strike you as verbal revolution, an affirmation of plain speech and simple language—and the principles of the rebellion against England. The English language has two great word-streams in it: the Romantic stream, which poured in through Latin and French; and the Anglo-Saxon, which gives us a vast legacy of taut, strong, vivid words. Unlike many of his 18th-century contemporaries, Paine favored the Anglo-Saxon. In American public discourse, from the Preamble to the Constitution through Martin Luther King Jr.’s "I have a dream" speech, many American orators have followed Paine’s lead.

Like Franklin, Paine’s writing is influenced by the scientific and philosophical writings of Isaac Newton and John Locke. Locke argued in favor of a worldview that accepted the ability of individuals to puzzle through and understand the universe. He placed a premium on mutual sympathy, or "sentiment," to guide moral action rather than religious grace alone.

In his *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (1690), Locke held that predestination and total depravity were religious fictions (a sentiment echoed by Thomas Paine’s "Age of Reason"). Locke argued that the human mind at birth was a *tabula rasa*, a blank sheet of paper; therefore, human beings were born neither good nor bad—whatever they became was the result of experience. This view is also reflected in the *Letters from an American Farmer* by St. Jean de Crevecoeur (1782/2007), who declared that “men are like plants”—their goodness “proceeds from the peculiar soil . . . in which they grow” (p. 56)—clearly an environmentalist point of view. With the rise of humanitarianism, environmentalism, and faith in human goodness and the dignity of man, there came increasing demands for human liberties.

As people became more interested in how their actions related to the social well-being of their neighbors than in their own spiritual progress, readers became more eager to read the accounts of ordinary individuals. They thoughtfully responded to the feelings and experiences of others, such as those in Benjamin Franklin's *Autobiography*. Enlightenment thought drove many to reject the previous Puritan belief in the innate depravity of human beings in favor of the assumption that people were basically good, and therefore capable of living together in sympathy and understanding. Enlightenment thought evolved into a celebration of political change. It became an age of political dissent, an age of revolution. There arose in the colonies increasing demands for human liberties and sentiments of Nationalism (also called Federalism). Paine spoke out for the rights of man (and of woman), and Jefferson argued for “life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.” These sentiments have persisted; even today, we hear echoes of them in political debates shaping a 21st-century United States. Much debate still goes on about how the Founding Fathers of the United States' "Declaration of Independence" from British rule could, on the one hand, argue that "all men are created equal" and, on the other hand, continue promoting and supporting slavery. An 18th-century African-American writer, Olaudah Equiano, was active in advocating justice for slaves. Equiano established a pattern for numerous slave narratives that followed: presenting the everyday details of
slave life and the agonies of Christian slaves who were oppressed by owners who also professed to be Christians, believers in the same compassionate faith.

Like the poetry of Equiano’s contemporary, Phillis Wheatley, much of Equiano’s autobiography is devoted to description of his spiritual growth and to his struggle to retain his faith in the midst of suffering. Equiano is featured in a 2006 movie about England’s struggles to condemn the slave trade. The movie is entitled *Amazing Grace* and you should check out this film; you can view the trailer on YouTube.

Equiano’s report of his worldly adventures includes a story of travel from youthful innocence to mature awareness of the world in which he was destined to live. It echoes the form of picaresque adventure stories that have always fascinated readers.

Equiano’s self-portrait holds out the promise that, whatever the crippling reality, it can be possible to escape even the most oppressive life and become, like Olaudah Equiano himself, a person whose life story would help to shape his world for the better. It contains elements of Enlightenment thinking and romantic dreaming that are still displayed in the numerous “rags-to-riches” stories that continue to capture the American imagination.

Like Olaudah Equiano, Phillis Wheatley also contributed her voice to the rights of men and women in her time. Like Anne Bradstreet before her, Wheatley drew on Neoclassical poets such as Alexander Pope, with much of her sentiments and verse written in heroic couplets (rhyming couplet in iambic pentameter) in the manner of her English models. Whereas Bradstreet became “America’s first poet,” Phillis Wheatley became “the first important African-American poet,” even though much of her poetry seemed not so much concerned with freedom from slavery as with abstract liberty, the patriotic theme of the years before the Revolution. Although Wheatley was brought from Africa to America as a slave, she was well treated by a kindly mistress. Wheatley adopted the devout religion of New England and achieved rare status in the society of Boston.

In the 19th century, her work was reprinted, and during the rise of the abolition movement in New England of the 1830s and 1840s, Wheatley’s poems were used as evidence to bolster the emerging philanthropic creed that Blacks possessed intellectual powers that were by no means inferior to those of any other humans. Like the other writers we study in this unit, Wheatley’s writings provide us with insights into the trials and triumphs of...
the people who helped shape our country as we know it today—a “melting pot” of individual voices still striving to capture or represent what we collectively call the American dream.

References


**Learning Activities (Non-Graded)**

Interactive Unit III Terms and Definitions Flash Cards

Interactive flash cards with the definitions for Unit III’s literary terms are available as a link in Blackboard. Using these cards to learn the literary term definitions can help you when writing your responses to assignments and assessments. The more familiar you become with the terms and what they mean, the more easily you will be able to use them when responding.

**Key Terms Flashcards**

To study and/or review the Unit III Key Terms, click below to access interactive Unit III Flashcards.

- Unit III Flashcards—SWF version

**Revolution and Independence**

Learn more about the key figures and dates from the Age of Reason by viewing “The Age of Reason: Click here to access the PowerPoint presentation. The American Revolution and the Declaration of Independence,” a PowerPoint presentation created by McGraw-Hill Higher Education. This was a momentous time in American history. Much of our culture and history were shaped during this period.

**Internet Exploration**

Use a search engine and learn more about the topics in this unit through rich multimedia resources available on the Internet. To further your understanding of the assigned readings, and to see how they relate to current matters being debated in the U.S., use a search engine such as Google or visit your local library and watch one (1) or more of the following videos for “Reason and Revolution”:
- **Making a Revolution.** Vol. 3. Focuses on the movement toward the Revolution and the War itself. 52 min.
- **Inventing a New Nation.** Vol. 4. Discusses the Constitution, Jefferson’s Monticello, and the Bill of Rights. 52 min.
- **Gone West.** Vol. 5. Discusses the Louisiana Purchase, the Lewis and Clark Expedition, conflict with Indians, and the Gold Rush of 1849. 52 min.
- **Colonials to Revolutionaries (1620-1820).** Part I of A Survey of American Literature from 1620 to the Present. Distributed by Filmic Archives. 80 min. The first video in this five-part set discusses Bradford, Franklin, Jefferson, Mather, Paine, and Wheatley.
- **The Reluctant Revolutionaries.** Vol. 1. 2 hrs. Covers the years 1763-1776, ending with a discussion of Common Sense and The Declaration of Independence.
- **The Times That Try Men’s Souls.** Vol. 2. 2 hrs. Focuses on the Revolution, includes Washington’s crossing the Delaware and surprise victory at Trenton, Franklin’s role in France, and concludes with British General John Burgoyne’s defeat at Saratoga.
- **Are We to Be a Nation?** Vol. 3. 2 hrs. Discusses Washington’s victory at Yorktown, the Treaty of Paris, the challenges of freedom, the debates over slavery and the Constitution, the Bill of Rights, and The Federalist.
- **George Washington—The Man Who Wouldn’t Be King.** PBS Video. David Sutherland, producer. 1992. 60 min. Takes an unconventional look at Washington as bumbling but ambitious, as a volunteer for his country but one who insisted that his expenses be reimbursed, and as a poor battlefield tactician whose record was 3 wins and 9 losses, but whose retreats were brilliant. But, unambiguously, Washington insisted that the United States be a democracy.
- **Thomas Jefferson: Philosopher of Freedom.** A&E Biography. Distributed by Teacher’s Video. 1995. 50 min. Considers Jefferson as statesman, scientist, architect, and President – a Renaissance man whose personal life was not as successful as his public life. Discusses his relationship with Sally Hemmings (his slave) and his debt at the time of his death of over $100,000.

After watching a video, write a minimum one-page review. How does the video fit in with literature selections you read for this unit? Can you see any influences that may have shaped the writings of the unit authors?

**Get to Know Ben Franklin**

Using an Internet search engine such as Google, go to the PBS website (pbs.org) and type in “PBS Ben Franklin” (without quotes). Click on “Benjamin Franklin A to Z,” which should be listed under the first hit that comes up in your search results. Read the list and identify the top three (3) things about Franklin that you find most impressive or interesting. What did you learn that surprised you the most? In a minimum one-page paper, discuss the characteristics you found most interesting, and why you chose them.

**What Is An Almanack?**

In addition to being a prominent politician, Benjamin Franklin was also a prolific writer. His best-known work is possibly Poor Richard’s Almanack, which is still widely read today. What is an almanack (or “almanac” as we write it today)?

Research and explore the origins and history of almanacs and learn about standard features of historic, as well as current, almanacs. In a minimum one-page paper, compare an almanac event during Franklin’s time to an almanac event described in a 2012 almanac. Use APA format when writing your paper.

**Apply What You Have Learned**

To assess your synthesis of the learning concepts in the unit, complete one or more of the following assignments. Provide your response in a minimum one-page paper for each assignment you choose to pursue. Use APA format when writing your paper(s).
In “Common Sense,” Thomas Paine finds the “origin and rise of government” made necessary “by the inability of moral virtue to govern the world. In your own words, explain Paine's implied view of human nature and discuss how it reflects both Puritan and Enlightenment concepts about the nature of man. Use quotes from the assigned reading to support your points.

In your own words, discuss Thomas Jefferson's “Declaration of Independence” and what ideas about the nature of man are reflected in his famous statement “all men are created equal,” and “endowed” with “unalienable Rights” to “Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.” What is the basis of his argument that Americans should free themselves from the burdens of European institutions and the European past? Use quotes from the assigned reading to illustrate your points.

Discuss how “The Life of Olaudah Equiano” illustrates the harsh truths of slavery and the paradox of Christian faith and Enlightenment thoughts on equality.

Compare and contrast how ideas of “Liberty” and/or religious and/or Enlightenment thoughts are reflected in the works of Phillis Wheatley and Olaudah Equiano.

Non-graded Learning Activities are provided to aid students in their course of study. You do not have to submit them. If you have questions contact your instructor for further guidance and information.