Influence of Enlightenment Thinkers

John Locke’s Ideas
Locke believed that people are born free and equal with the right to life, liberty, and property. He also believed that people have the ability to govern themselves and that government is based on the consent of the people. The purpose of the government is to protect people’s natural rights. If the government fails to do this, the people have the right to overthrow it.

1. Identify the ideas that John Locke believed were important about people.
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2. What concepts about government did John Locke promote?
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Baron de Montesquieu’s Ideas
Montesquieu believed the powers of government should be separated. One branch should make the laws. One should carry out the laws. One should decide what the laws mean. Each branch limits the others.

3. What did Montesquieu believe about the powers of government? Why was this system important?
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Jean Jacques Rousseau’s Ideas
Rousseau believed that a direct democracy is the only good type of government. In a direct democracy people make a social contract. They give up some freedom to protect the common good. Like Locke, Rousseau believed that the government gains its power from the people. He believed that all people are equal and that there should be no nobles.

4. Why did Rousseau believe a direct democracy is the only good type of government?
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Influence of Enlightenment in America
Enlightenment ideas had a great influence on the American Founders. Thomas Jefferson used Locke’s ideas about natural rights in the Declaration of Independence. The colonists based their rebellion against Britain on Locke’s idea that people can overthrow the government if it does not protect their rights. Americans also used Enlightenment ideas in the U. S. Constitution:
• Representative government and limiting the power of the government — Locke
• Three branches of government and checks and balances — Montesquieu
• Public election of the president and congress — Rousseau

5. Which Enlightenment ideas did Thomas Jefferson use in the Declaration of Independence?
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6. How did the Enlightenment influence the U.S. Constitution? Name the ideas.
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