

An Individualist Talks with His/Her Society

6

Main Goals

Students will recognize character traits frequently evident in free and independent thinkers.

They can analyze historical situations in which free and independent thought changed the course of history and resulted in social progress.

Affective: Nurture students' appreciation that the different drummer's actions or views may be, in the long run, of benefit.

Subgoal

To have students scrutinize historical figures who were nonconformists in one or more ways, seeing if they detect any *inquisitiveness* or *skepticism* or *divergent thinking* in relation to the nonconformance.

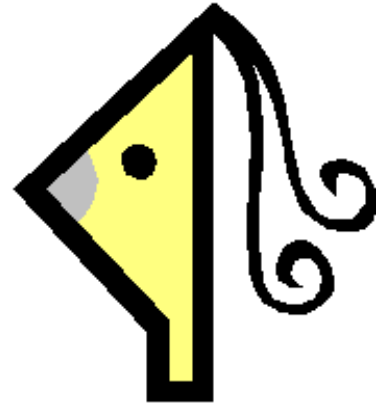
Lesson Context

Knowledge and Cultural Understanding		Skills Attainment and Social Participation	
X	<i>Historical Literacy</i>	X	<i>Basic Study Skills</i>
	<i>Ethical Literacy</i>	X	<i>Critical Thinking Skills</i>
X	<i>Cultural Literacy</i>	X	<i>Participation Skills</i>
	<i>Geographic Literacy</i>	Democratic Understanding and Civic Values	
	<i>Economic Literacy</i>		<i>National Identity</i>
X	<i>Sociopolitical Literacy</i>		<i>Constitutional Heritage</i>
Check the Table on page 4. This lesson relies on prerequisite concepts in Row 1.		X	<i>Civic Values, Rights, and Responsibilities</i>

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Concept Building Objective

Given biographical information on some historical figure whose positions or actions are nonconforming to those of contemporary society (or a reference group within it) at the time, the student will demonstrate that she *understands both sides of the question* by constructing an imaginary dialogue between the individual and the group.



Materials

1. Per student (or grouping): Duplication Sheets 1-2—“**Bio-briefs**” [These bio-briefs are condensed information on creative and multifaceted individuals who think differently—Chaucer; Descartes, Lavoisier, and/or other historical figures teacher may select to highlight a departure of thinking from tradition or authority.]

<i>Person</i>	<i>Former Idea</i>	<i>New idea or Contrast</i>
Chaucer	Educated people write in Latin Religious purpose pervades most written material	I prefer to use contemporary English I'll show more sides of life (e.g., raunchy, everyday spunk)
Descartes	Ancient philosophy rules knowledge	It's a mess; I'll start <i>from scratch</i>
Lavoisier	Phlogiston theory explains fire	It has lots of holes; I'll measure and find out for myself

(Use the blank form provided to make your additional bio-briefs)

2. Per student (or grouping): Duplication Sheet 3—“Nonconformist Dialogue” (a fold-into-a-booklet page)
3. Designated textbook portions which relate to selected figure(s), if appropriate
4. (Optional) Such resource materials as encyclopedias, biographical summaries, computer on-line references, and so forth as needed for any student research efforts suggested by the teacher

Strategies

Advance Note: If you plan to emphasize the lesson's subgoal (see lesson's title page), then Concept Lesson 4—or equivalent in student readiness—is prerequisite to this activity. (Lesson 5 is helpful, too.) Otherwise, you may skip steps 1-b below and concentrate on the narrower lesson objective above.

Feel free to revamp procedures to better match your own teaching style. The following instructions are provided for instructing students to write a dialogue *independently*. However, you may wish to rework procedures to permit your

clustering students for all or portions of the tasks. (Concept Lesson 4 uses such a grouping strategy.)

1. a) Identify appropriate figure(s) of history for students to study.
 - b) Ask students to scrutinize all forthcoming information they acquire concerning the individuals they will be investigating.

They should be on the lookout for *any* of the three habits of mind — inquisitiveness, divergent thinking, or skepticism — that people who depart from tradition or authority sometimes exhibit.

Tell students you expect they will inform all others who are studying the same historical figure about any “thinking style evidence” they may uncover about their individual.

2. Provide students a “bio-brief” that highlights the contrast in thinking between the person and some contemporary reference group (or the whole of society at the time). Students may also use textbook materials to study the individual and his/her society.
3. (Optional) Direct students to do additional research on the figure using suggested resources.
4. Outline for students the nature of the forthcoming task. They are to *seek to understand the person’s mode of thinking* concerning a circumstance or episode. Then they are to be creative in capturing the flavor of the two-sided situation via a fictional conversation between the central characters.
5. CREATIVE WRITING TASK: For the dialogue, have student put the name of the nonconforming thinker on the left-hand side of panel, and the name of the independent thinker’s reference group on the right. Fold the page and turn it over to write the person’s nonconforming view(s) and the reference group’s position(s).

Appraisal of Understanding

1. Evidence: As class work each student has completed a booklet.
2. Assessment. Students can be asked to write a summary “cover sheet” for their dialogue. (You might suggest the situation in which they are planning to cast their dialogue for a class role play, and they will want to provide an overview for the actors who will be trying out for roles in performing the two sides of the controversy.)
3. Transfer: You could provide students a variety of independent thinkers from history and engage them in creating a similar analysis.

Continuation Activity

1. Students conduct their dialogues before the class (tape recording or videotaping is suggested).
2. Students post their dialogue booklets on a bulletin board for viewing, grouped by historical figure. Artwork or additional information (particularly any “evidence” uncovered about the individual’s “thinking” may accompany the cluster of booklets.

Bio-Brief

Geoffrey Chaucer



Chaucer lived in England from 1340-1400. He was a court page. He served in the army. He was a diplomat. Today we remember him most as a writer.

Chaucer wrote many controversial books. He wrote *Legend of Good Women* at a time when people were not interested in classical heroines. He wrote one of the great love poems in English.

Chaucer wrote *The Canterbury Tales* about a group of travelers telling stories. Some stories are quite humorous. Some are serious. The tales reveal much about medieval attitudes toward love, marriage and religion.

Today we recall Chaucer most for his *The Canterbury Tales*. It can be found many libraries. Some of Chaucer's contemporaries thought the stories were too controversial to read. Many people today think that, too.

Bio-Brief

Rene Descartes



Descartes lived in the 1600s. As a child, he was frail. He was often kept home from school. His father called him, "my little philosopher," because he read the classics and was thoughtful and asked many questions.

Learned people of that time believed the ancient philosophers. Not Descartes.

As an adult, he discarded their authoritarian systems and began with universal doubt. He started with the idea "doubt everything." Then he decided, "doubt everything except doubt."

Descartes thought the mind was the starting point of all knowledge. Doubting everything along the way, he started building new ideas. He expanded his knowledge step by step. In the end, he admitted the existence of God and the reality of the physical world. He believed the body was divorced from the mind. His ideas influenced many people who studied them.

Some people now doubt even God's existence, and many doubt the mind and body are separate things after all. But today we consider Descartes one of history's most influential thinkers. From his reasoning came analytic geometry.

BIO-BRIEF

Antoine Lavoisier



Lavoisier lived from 1743 to 1794. He was curious about many things. But mostly he was fascinated by chemistry. He wanted to know about the basic elements that make up matter. He was curious about atoms and molecules. The inquisitive Lavoisier studied a lot, trying to satisfy his curiosity. He set up one of the finest laboratories in Europe. He insisted on exact measurements.

Lavoisier did many experiments. He found the difference between elements and compounds. He was curious about heat, and how it moved from object to object. When most people thought heat was a substance called Phlogiston, he found that heat was not a substance after all. He also doubted 18th century chemists' ideas about fire, so he made measurements of burning things and proved their error.

The people of France did not appreciate Lavoisier's curiosity. They hated the fact he was rich and educated and intelligent. He was killed during the French revolution. Today we do appreciate Lavoisier's research and call him the founder of modern chemistry. He developed a naming system for chemicals. His explanation of burning changed the whole science of chemistry.

BIO-BRIEF

**Open this side to
read the views of the
nonconforming
thinker**



Independent thinker

Fold along this line. Then write the independent thinker's views on the reverse (right half).

**A nonconformist talks
with a group**

This dialogue is the work of:

Fold along this line. Write the opposing or traditional views opposite the nonconformer's.



Name of Group

**Open this side to
read the views of the
people in opposition**