



# The Bill of Rights and the Founders: PHILOSOPHICAL & HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

## LESSON 1: ORIGINS OF THE BILL OF RIGHTS

### LESSON OBJECTIVES

Students will be able to:

1. Describe the ideas of “the rights of Englishmen” and natural rights.
2. Analyze how the history behind English Common Law and the concept of natural rights influenced the American Revolution and the Founders’ notion of just government.
3. Deduce how the colonial experience, leading up to and including the Revolution, impacted the development of the Bill of Rights.

### LESSON INTRODUCTION

America was created as a nation of rights. The Founders saw themselves as heirs to a legacy of increasing freedom stretching back to Magna Carta. Unlike the original English system, wherein power derived from the king, the Founders of the Constitution believed that power resides in the people. Learning from centuries of British history and the American colonial experience, the Founders attempted to create a government that could effectively govern with the limited power they granted it.

### VOCABULARY, CONCEPTS, AND NOTABLES

Common Law  
 Founders  
 John Locke  
 James Madison  
 Natural Rights  
 Right  
 Thomas Jefferson

### NATIONAL HISTORY STANDARDS

#### NATIONAL CENTER FOR HISTORY STANDARDS

#### Era 3: Standard 1

The causes of the American Revolution, the ideas and interests involved in forging the revolutionary movement, and the reasons for the American victory.

**Standard 1A:** The student understands the causes of the American Revolution.

**Standard 1B:** The student understands the principles articulated in the Declaration of Independence.

### MATERIALS

Background Essays:  
 “The Colonial Experience”  
 Vocabulary Page  
 Worksheet FWK1  
 Video

### NATIONAL STANDARDS FOR CIVICS AND GOVERNMENT

#### CENTER FOR CIVIC EDUCATION

- II. What are the foundations of the American political system?
- A. What is the American idea of constitutional government?
  - D. What values and principles are basic to American constitutional democracy?