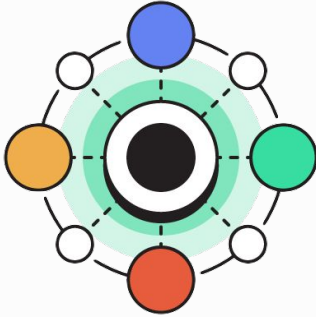


## Formative Assessment: Contextualization and Sourcing



**Thinking historically means interpreting historical events, developments, or processes in light of the surrounding historical context. It also means understanding key information about a historical source, such as its purpose, perspective, and reliability as a piece of evidence.**

**Directions:** Read the following primary source. Then, answer the questions on contextualization that follow. The multiple choice questions for this formative assessment are Weighted Multiple Choice (WMC) Questions. This means that there is only one *incorrect* answer, but the other 3 choices are weighted. The *best* answer is 3 points, the *second-best* answer is 2 points, and the *third-best* answer is 1 point. The *incorrect* answer is 0 points.

# Formative Assessment: Contextualization and Sourcing

Source: Charles de Montesquieu, *The Spirit of the Laws*, 1748.

BOOK II.: OF LAWS DIRECTLY DERIVED FROM THE NATURE OF GOVERNMENT.

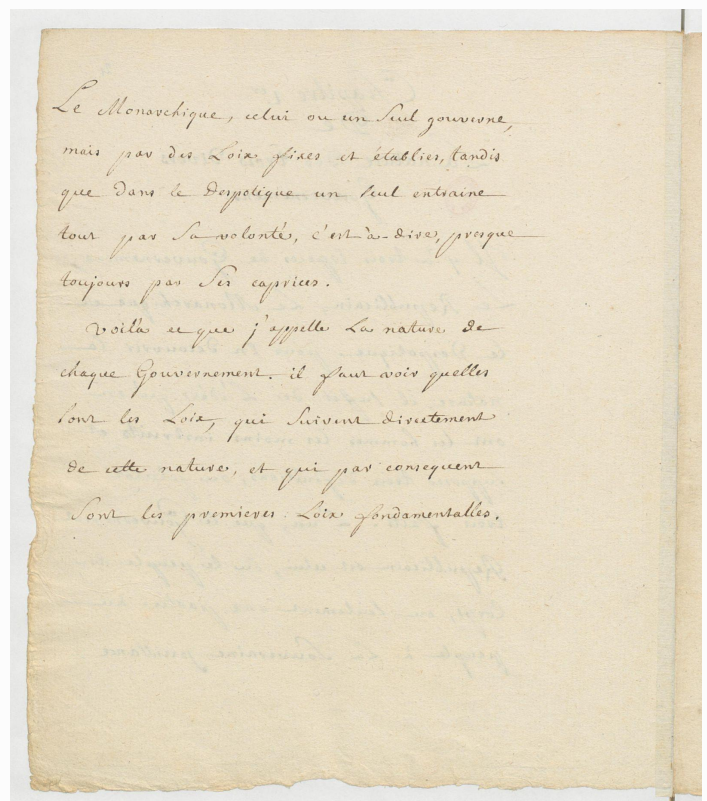
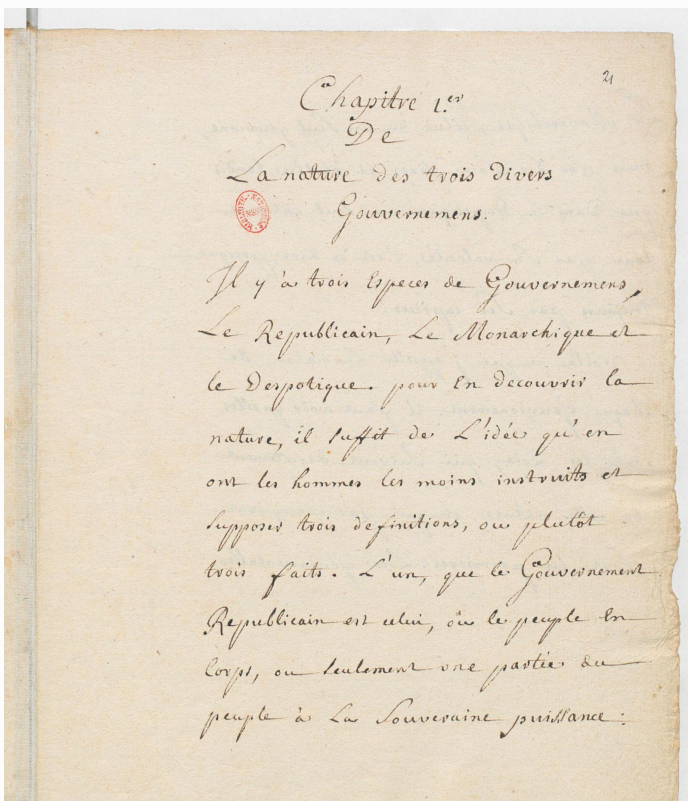
CHAP. I.: Of the Nature of three different Governments.

THERE are three species of government; republican, monarchical, and despotic. In order to discover their nature, it is sufficient to recollect the common notion, which supposes three definitions, or rather three facts: "That a republican government is that in which the body or only a part of the people is possessed of the supreme power: monarchy, that in which a single person governs by fixed and established laws: a despotic government, that in which a single person directs every thing by his own will and caprice."

This is what I call the nature of each government: we must now inquire into those laws which directly conform to this nature, and consequently are the fundamental institutions.

Source: Manuscript Montesquieu's *The Spirit of the Laws*, 1748. [Library of Congress](#) (Images 45-46).

Note from Library of Congress: Presented here is an incomplete manuscript of the penultimate version of the text prior to publication, from the hand of several secretaries, with notes and passages signed by Montesquieu. The division of chapters differs significantly from that in the original publication.



1. What information do you know about this source?

2. Which **two questions** would best help to better understand the purpose of this document?

- A. What did the French Government look like in 1748?
- B. What kind of experience did Montesquieu have in government and/or political philosophy?
- C. How did Montesquieu's ideas about government influence the United States?
- D. Who did Montesquieu want to read this book? Did it reach that audience?

3. Explain why the two questions you chose could best help you to better understand the purpose of this document.



# Formative Assessment: Contextualization and Sourcing

1. What information do you know about this source?

By looking at the source section, we know that Montesquieu was most likely French (by his name). We know that it was written in the middle of the Enlightenment and before major democratic revolutions (like American and French). We can assume that he will address the purpose of laws and how they should be executed by a government.

2. Which **two questions** would best help to better understand the purpose of this document?

- A. What did the French Government look like in 1748? **(2 points)**
- B. What kind of experience did Montesquieu have in government and/or political philosophy? **(1 point)**
- C. How did Montesquieu's ideas about government influence the United States? **(0 points)**
- D. Who did Montesquieu want to read this book? Did it reach that audience? **(2 points)**

3. Explain why the two questions you chose could best help you to better understand the purpose of this document.

Choice A and Choice D are worth two points, since knowing their answers would help best understand the purpose of Montesquieu's book. In 1748, France was ruled by King Louis XV, who concentrated his power and believed in his divine authority. Montesquieu's argument for separating powers would have been a direct comment on the King's rule. Similarly, noting Montesquieu's audience is critical for understanding why he wrote the book. He published it anonymously since it contained controversial claims. Choice B is worth one point. It does not necessarily reveal his purpose, but knowing the answer would help establish Montesquieu's authority. Lastly, Choice C is worth 0 points, because it answers an effect of his work on a government 50 years later, which would not help to understand his purpose.



## 1. Short Answer: Known Information

1 point	0 points
Information available in source section of primary source—author, title, and date—is clearly identified.	Student does not identify the information available in the “source” section of the primary source.
<b>Subtotal: _____ / 1</b>	

## 2. Weighted Multiple Choice

<b>Choice 1</b>	2 points (Choice A or C)	1 point (Choice D)	0 points (Choice B)
<b>Choice 2</b>	2 points (Choice A or C)	1 point (Choice D)	0 points (Choice B)
<b>Subtotal: _____ / 4</b>			

## 3. Short Answer: Most Helpful Questions

3 points	2 points	1 point	0 points
Clear reasons are provided for why the two questions (worth 1 or 2 points) that the student chose would be most helpful for better understanding the document. Student explains why answers to those questions would better contextualize the document.	Mostly clear reasons are provided for why the two (worth 1 or 2 points) questions that the student chose would be most helpful for better understanding the document.	Student attempts to provide reasons for why the two questions they chose would be most helpful for better understanding the document, but those reasons remain unclear.	Student does not attempt to provide reasons for why the two questions would be most helpful for better understanding the document.
<b>Subtotal: _____ / 3</b>			

**Total: \_\_\_\_\_ / 8**

