

Primary and Secondary Sources Activity

The logo for 'networks' features the word 'networks' in a bold, lowercase sans-serif font. To the right of the text is a stylized graphic consisting of several thin, intersecting lines that form a starburst or network pattern.

Conflict and Absolutism in Europe

Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan* John Locke, *Two Treatises of Government*

Background

During the struggle for power that dominated English life in the 1600s, the differing political views of Thomas Hobbes and John Locke played significant roles in reinforcing, as well as inflaming, the attitudes of the two sides of the conflict: the monarchy and Parliament. As a result, both men were caught up in the upheaval, enjoying, on the one hand, the support and protection of those who agreed with them, and fearing, on the other, the retaliation of those who disagreed. At times during this period, both men, fearing for their safety, fled England to live in exile. At the heart of the issue was the ongoing dispute over what kind of monarchy would rule England. Simply put, Hobbes supported an absolute monarchy, in which the king had complete and sole power. Locke believed in a limited monarchy, in which the king and parliament shared power. These different views of government and the political conflicts that resulted from them were far more complicated than the above summary might suggest, but the eventual outcome of the dispute was clear and uncomplicated. With the ascension of William and Mary to the throne in 1689, supporters of a limited monarchy had won a permanent victory.

Directions: The following selections are excerpted from Hobbes's *Leviathan*, published in 1651 and from Locke's *Two Treatises of Government*, published in 1690. Read both selections. Then answer the questions.

There is a sixth doctrine, plainly, and directly against the essence of a commonwealth, and 'tis this, *that the sovereign power may be divided*. For what is it to divide the power of a commonwealth, but to dissolve it? for powers divided mutually destroy each other. And for these doctrines, men are chiefly beholding to some of those, that making profession of the laws, endeavour to make them depend upon their own learning, and not upon the legislative power.

—Thomas Hobbes, from *Leviathan*, 1651

Primary and Secondary Sources Activity *Cont.*



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When any one, or more, shall take upon them to make Laws, whom the People have not appointed so to do, they make Laws, whom the People have not appointed so to do, they make Laws without Authority, which the People are not therefore bound to obey; by which means they come again to be out of subjection, and may constitute to themselves a *new Legislative*, as they think best, being in full liberty to resist the force of those, who without Authority would impose any thing upon them. Everyone is at the disposal of his own Will, when those who had by the delegation of the Society, the declaring of the publick [sic] Will, are excluded from it, and others usurp the place who have no such Authority or Delegation. . . . When such a single Person or Prince sets up his own Arbitrary Will in place of the Laws, which are the Will of the Society, declared by the Legislative, then the *Legislative is changed*.

— John Locke, from *Two Treatises of Government*, 1690

- 1. Comparing and Contrasting** When Hobbes uses the term *legislative power*, to whom is he referring? To whom is Locke referring when he uses the term *Legislative*? Who is the “single Person or Prince” Locke mentions?

- 2. Analyzing Central Issues** Why does Hobbes believe that power in a commonwealth should not be divided?

- 3. Drawing Conclusions** According to Hobbes, what do people mistakenly assume when they advocate that a division of powers is good for a commonwealth?

Primary and Secondary Sources Activity *Cont.*



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4. **Making Inferences** When Locke says that people are not obligated to obey laws that are made without their authority and have a right to install a new government under such circumstances, what is he implying about their rule in a commonwealth?

5. **Making Connections** At the end of Lesson 2, your textbook points out that Locke's views on government influenced some of the ideas in the U.S. Declaration of Independence and the U.S. Constitution. What ideas in the excerpt from *Two Treatises* can you find to support this statement?
