

Excerpts from *Common Sense* by Thomas Paine

February 14, 1776

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Of the Origin and Design of Government in General, with Concise Remarks on the English Constitution

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Society in every state is a blessing, but Government, even in its best state, is but a necessary evil; in its worst state an intolerable one: for when we suffer, or are exposed to the same miseries BY A GOVERNMENT, which we might expect in a country WITHOUT GOVERNMENT, our calamity is heightened by reflecting that we furnish the means by which we suffer. Government, like dress, is the badge of lost innocence; the palaces of kings are built upon the ruins of the bowers of paradise. For were the impulses of conscience clear, uniform and irresistibly obeyed, man would need no other lawgiver; but that not being the case, he finds it necessary to surrender up a part of his property to furnish means for the protection of the rest; and this he is induced to do by the same prudence which in every other case advises him, out of two evils to choose the least.

Author

Comment [1]: So this was written by Thomas Paine. I remember reading about how active he was supporting the Revolutionary War. A lot of Americans wanted independence but many were still Loyalists. Bet things were kinda crazy then! (sourcing, contextualization)

Author

Comment [2]: So Paine wrote this at the beginning of the war. (contextualization)

Author

Comment [3]: It appears that Paine is going to share his thoughts on why there is a government and how he feels about the English Constitution. [prediction]

Author

Comment [4]: The word "but" signals something opposite. So maybe he's saying society is a blessing but government is the opposite, an evil. Hmmm. I need to think about that. Why is government evil? (self-questioning, vocabulary, close reading)

Author

Comment [5]: Paine is saying that a bad government is worse than no government; AND to make matters worse, we have to pay to support this bad government. [close reading, paraphrasing]

Author

Comment [6]: (reread) Maybe he's referring to Adam and Eve when they lost their innocence and started to wear clothes. We need government because we don't live in Paradise and aren't all people are innocent. I know people at that time were religious and referred to the Bible often. [monitoring comprehension, background knowledge, inference]

Author

Comment [7]: If everyone controlled themselves and acted appropriately, we wouldn't need government. (paraphrase)

Author

Comment [8]: We have to pay for protection of what we have. (paraphrase)

Author

Comment [9]: Although this is not the best option, it is the lesser of two evils. (paraphrase)

Wherefore, security being the true design and end of government, it unanswerably follows that whatever form thereof appears most likely to ensure it to us, with the least expense and greatest benefit, is preferable to all others.

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I draw my idea of the form of government from a principle in nature which no art can overturn, viz. that the more simple any thing is, the less liable it is to be disordered, and the easier repaired when disordered; and with this maxim in view I offer a few remarks on the so much boasted constitution of England. That it was noble for the dark and slavish times in which it was erected, is granted. When the world was overrun with tyranny the least remove therefrom was a glorious rescue. But that it is imperfect, subject to convulsions, and incapable of producing what it seems to promise is easily demonstrated.

Absolute governments, (tho' the disgrace of human nature) have this advantage with them, they are simple; if the people suffer, they know the head from which their suffering springs; know likewise the remedy; and are not bewildered by a variety of causes and cures. But the constitution of England is so exceedingly complex, that the nation may suffer for years together without being able to discover in which part the fault lies; some will say in one and some in another, and every political physician will advise a different medicine.

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Retrieved from: www.constitution.org/tp/comsense.htm

Author

Comment [10]: The reason we have gov't. is to provide security. I guess that could mean economic security as well as protection against enemies. (inferencing, extending thinking)

Author

Comment [11]: "unanswerably"? Does this mean that there is no answer or only one answer? "un" usually means not, so is this "not able to be answered?" I need to read some more. (vocabulary/morphology)

Author

Comment [12]: Thereof? That's old language! I think it refers to a form of government. (vocabulary/context)

Author

Comment [13]: What does "it" refer to? Let me go back and reread. Oh! "it" refers to security. So whatever form of government gives us security, and is the least expensive, is the one people prefer. (referent, checking understanding)

Metacognitive thoughts modeled with the Paine text illustrate use of:

Comment	Metacognitive Thinking
1	Sourcing (author, time period) & contextualization (what people were thinking then)
2	Predicting from title what this text might be about
3	Vocabulary, self-questioning, close reading, rhetorical devices
4	Close reading, paraphrasing
5	Self-monitoring, rereading, making inferences, utilizing background knowledge
6	Paraphrasing, checking understanding, rereading
7	Paraphrasing, checking understanding
8	Paraphrasing
9	Paraphrasing, making inferences
10	Making inferences, extending thinking
11	Vocabulary morphemic analysis (use of prefixes, suffixes, and root)
12	Vocabulary, use of context
13	Linguistic analysis: referent of "it", checking understanding