Baron de Montesquieu

UNDERSTANDING THE PRINCIPLES OF GOVERNMENT AND LAW OF BARON DE MONTESQUIEU
Look at the picture and answer these questions:

- What is the cartoonist trying to illustrate in this picture?
- Why is Andrew Jackson standing on the U.S. Constitution?
- How is President Jackson violating the philosophy of separation of powers?
Warm Up

- What is the cartoonist trying to illustrate in this cartoon?
- Why is it important that the bald eagle is trying to regain his position?
- How does this cartoon represent the belief in equality under the law?
Charles Louis de Secondat was born in Bordeaux, France, in 1689 to a wealthy family. Despite his family’s wealth, he was placed in the care of a poor family during his childhood. De Secondat studied science and history in college, eventually becoming a lawyer in the local government. After his father’s death, he was placed under the care of his uncle, Baron de Montesquieu. When his uncle died, de Secondat acquired his title and his fortune.
Montesquieu’s book, *On the Spirit of Laws*, published in 1748, was his most famous work. It outlined his ideas on how government would best work. He believed that all things were made up of rules or laws that never changed. He set out to study these laws scientifically with the hope that knowledge of the laws of government would reduce the problems of society and improve human life. According to Montesquieu, there were three types of government: a monarchy (ruled by a king or queen), a republic (ruled by an elected leader), and a despotism (ruled by a dictator). Montesquieu believed that a government that was elected by the people was the best form of government. He argued that the best government would be one in which power was balanced among three groups of officials—and idea he called “separation of powers.” His ideas became the basis for the United States Constitution.

This biography was excerpted from [www.rjgeib.com/thoughts/montesquieu/montesquieu-bio.html](http://www.rjgeib.com/thoughts/montesquieu/montesquieu-bio.html)
Discuss what you think these key words mean:

- **separation of powers** is the principle of dividing the powers of a government among different branches to guard against abuse of authority. A government of separated powers assigns different political and legal powers to the legislative, executive, and judicial branches.

- **republican government** a type of government which is ruled by an elected leader, rather than a monarch or dictator.

- **equality under the law** is the belief that all people receive fair and equal protection by the government through written law.
Since you’ve been introduced to Baron de Montesquieu and his main ideas, reword his quotes on the sheet you’ve been handed out, and rate how much you either agree or disagree with his statements.

Be prepared to discuss your interpretations and opinions on Montesquieu with the class.
#1: “When the legislative and executive powers are united in the same person, or in the same body of magistrates, there can be no liberty; because apprehensions may arise, lest the same monarch or senate should enact tyrannical laws, to execute them in a tyrannical manner.

- What does this mean to you? Do you agree with him?
#2: “The great advantage of representatives is, their capacity of discussing public affairs. For this the people collectively are extremely unfit, which is one of the chief inconveniences of a democracy.”

- What does this mean to you? How much do you agree/disagree with him?
#3: “In republican governments, men are all equal; equal they are also in despotic governments: in the former, because they are everything: in the latter, because they are nothing.”

- What idea is Montesquieu trying to convey? Do you agree with him?
#4: In a true state of nature, indeed, all men are born equal, but they cannot continue in this equality. Society makes them lose it, and they recover it only by the protection of laws.”

- What is Montesquieu saying? Do you agree with this idea?
Now that you’ve learned about Montesquieu’s main ideas, discuss or write a response to the following questions, drawing upon what you’ve just learned.

- How do you think Montesquieu would respond to the political cartoon *King Andrew the First*? What problems would he see with this picture?
- Would Montesquieu agree with Bill Mauldin in the *I Want My Seat Back* cartoon? What is the importance of laws and whom do they protect in this illustration?
- Do you agree with Montesquieu’s thoughts about a republican government? What advantages does he believe this form of government has over a democracy?