

Piquing Student Curiosity with Title Pages from Works by Hobbes, Locke, and Rousseau

Lee Ann Potter

In June 1815, Thomas Jefferson wrote to John Adams insisting, “I cannot live without books.” He was certainly not alone—the founding fathers of the United States of America tended to be avid readers. They treasured books and the knowledge, creativity, and ideas they transmitted.

Long before public libraries, online bookstores that ship directly to our homes, technologies that enable the downloading of publications directly to mobile devices, and social networks supporting virtual book clubs, eighteenth-century book readers relied heavily on literary societies, subscription libraries, and the advice of and selections made by colonial booksellers whose relationships with publishers—most of whom were in Europe—fostered the exchange of ideas. Henry Knox, who became the chief artillery officer of the Continental Army during the American Revolution and later served as the first secretary of war under President George Washington, was one such bookseller, owning the London Book Store in Boston.

The books they read varied from fiction to non-fiction titles, and from essays to multi-volume series. They dealt with wide-ranging subjects, including political philosophy. Title pages from such publications of the Enlightenment provide engaging points of entry for student research into the origins of

ideas contained in the Declaration of Independence, Constitution, and Bill of Rights.

If you presented students with one of the following statements:

- Ideas published in Europe in the decades prior to the American Revolution had a tremendous impact on the founding documents of the United States; or
- The revolutionary ideas contained in the founding documents of the United States actually came from Europe; or
- The founding documents of the United States ought to include bibliographies,

chances are, they would ask some interesting questions. They might ask

- What ideas?
- What founding documents?
- Whose ideas were they?
- When were they published?
- Were the ideas published in books?
- If that is true, how did men like

Thomas Jefferson and George Washington find out about them?

And, of course, they might ask, “So what?”

To combat the “so what” type questions and prompt students to seek answers to the others, share with them the title pages from such volumes as Thomas Hobbes’s *Leviathan*, John Locke’s *Two Treatises on Government*, and Jean-Jacques Rousseau’s *The Social Contract*.

Remind students that a title page is one of the most important parts of a book and that an ideal one includes the book’s complete title, the name of the person or organization responsible for its intellectual content, the name of the publisher, the place of publication, and the year of publication. One might also include artwork or illustrations. The three featured in this article come from volumes in the Rare Book and Special Collections Division of the Library of Congress and were featured in the World Treasures of the Library of Congress Exhibition (see www.loc.gov/exhibits/world/world-over.html).

Encourage students to study the title pages and annotate them with questions or observations to direct their research (see example on p. 172). Tell students

continued on page 173



TWO
TREATISES
OF

Government:

In the former,
The false Principles, and Foundation

OF

Sir ROBERT FILMER,

And his FOLLOWERS,

ARE

Detected and Overthrown.

The latter is an

ESSAY

CONCERNING THE

True Original, Extent, and End

OF

Civil Government.

LONDON,

Printed for *Awnsham Churchill*, at the *Black Swan* in *Ave-Mary-Lane*, by *Amen-Corner*, 1690.

DU CONTRAT
SOCIAL;
OU
PRINCIPES
DU DROIT
POLITIQUE.

Par J. J. ROUSSEAU, Citoyen
de Geneve.

Dicamus leges.

Federis æquas

Æneid. XI.

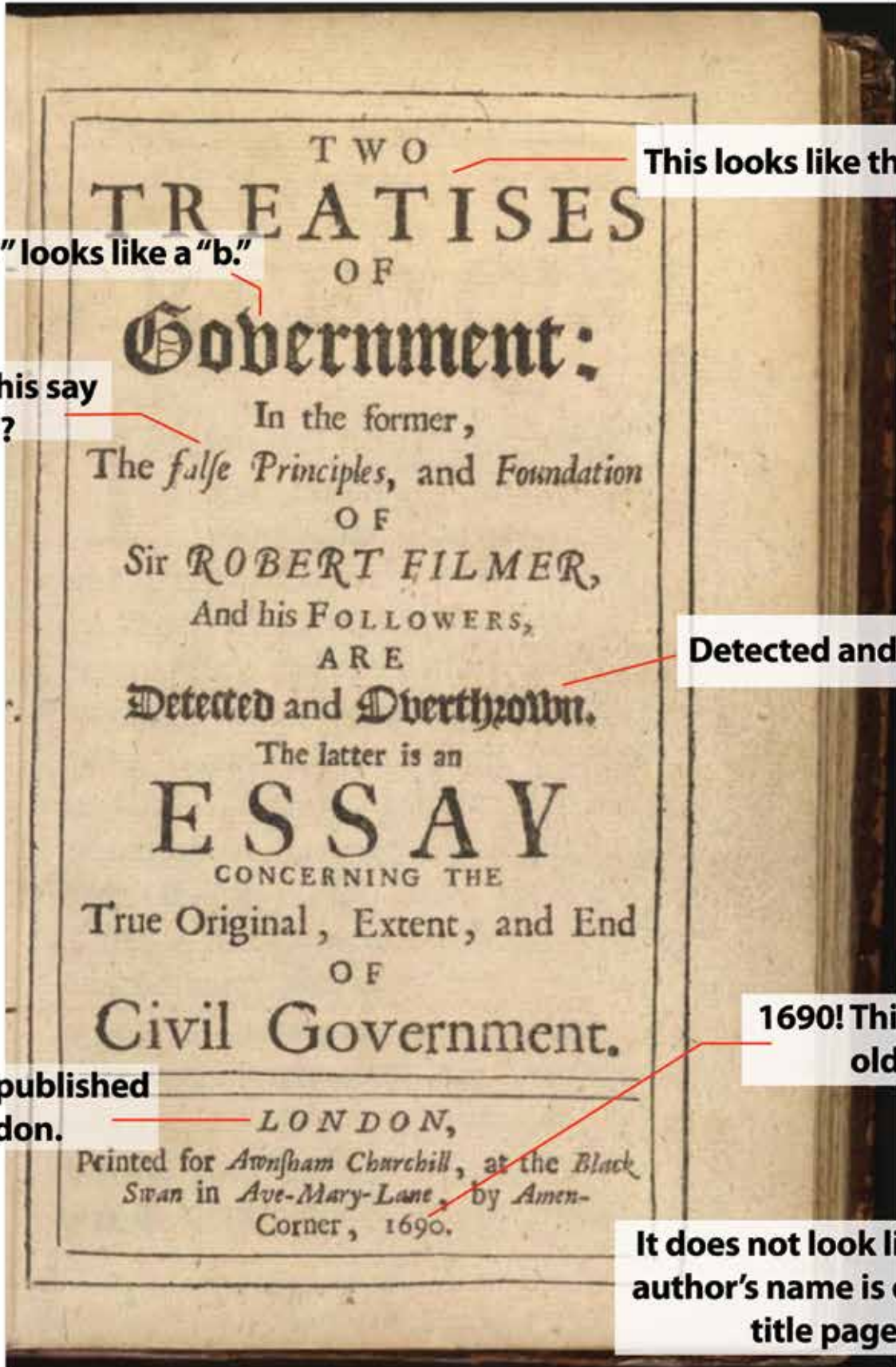
*Edition Sans Cartons, à laquelle on a ajouté
une Lettre de l'Auteur au seul Ami qui lui
reste dans le monde.*



A AMSTERDAM,
Chez MARC - MICHEL REY.

M. DCC. LXII.

What do you see?



This looks like the title.

This "v" looks like a "b."

Does this say
"false"?

Detected and *what?*

1690! This is an
old book.

It was published
in London.

It does not look like the
author's name is on this
title page. Why?

TITLE PAGES *from page 168*

to refer to either online or printed library resources and find out:

1. what big ideas were contained in the selected titles; and
2. whether the publications influenced others (if so, encourage students to create a chart to help them keep track of the names of those influenced, their big ideas, and their publication titles).

Invite students to share their findings with the class and keep a list of the big ideas they discover as well as the names of other philosophers, their big ideas, and their publications. Post this list in a place where students will see it as they study the founding documents and can periodically refer to it. Following such

With minimal searching, students will find that Hobbes (1588–1679) was an English philosopher who, in 1651 wrote the book *Leviathan*. In it, he described the social contract theory. He explained that rather than live in a chaotic state of nature, a rational individual will voluntarily consent to give up his or her natural freedoms to obtain the benefits of political order. Locke (1632–1704) was an English physician and philosopher. In 1689 he anonymously published *Two Treatises of Government*, outlining his ideas about civilized society based on the social contract theory and natural rights. Finally, Rousseau (1712–1778) was a philosopher and musical composer from Geneva. In 1762, he published *Du Contrat Social, Principes du Droit Politique* (*Of the Social Contract, Principles of Political Right*). In it, he argued against the idea that monarchs were divinely empowered to make laws. He argued that only the people have that right.

study, present students with one of the three statements included at the beginning of this article again. Ask students to elaborate on the statement; making specific reference to the works they were introduced to through their title pages. Also, now that they have learned

about the big ideas contained in these books, ask whether they understand more about the information contained in, or absent from, the title pages. This could be done as a class discussion or as a writing exercise.

If you try these suggestions, or a variation of them, with your students, tell us about your experience! During the week of September 22, 2013, the Teaching with the Library of Congress Blog at blogs.loc.gov/teachers/ will feature a post tied to this article and we invite you to comment and share your teaching strategies. 🌐

LEE ANN POTTER is the director of Educational Outreach at the Library of Congress, and serves as the editor of the Sources and Strategies feature. For more information on the education programs of the Library of Congress, please visit www.loc.gov/teachers/.

Related Resources from the Library of Congress

If your students seem intrigued by the influence of books...

At this year's National Book Festival on the National Mall in Washington, D.C., September 21–22, visitors to the Library of Congress's Pavilion will be invited to suggest *Books that Shaped the World*. You and your students can contribute your suggestions online at www.loc.gov/bookfest/. The results of the voting will be published online in a format similar to the list of Books that Shaped America, available at www.read.gov/btsa.html.

If your students want to know whether ideas contained in the founding documents of the United States might also appear in the founding documents of other nations...

The World Digital Library (WDL) makes available on the Internet, free of charge and in multilingual format, significant primary materials from countries and cultures around the world. A team at the Library of Congress developed the WDL, with contributions by partner institutions in many countries; the support of the United Nations Education, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO); and the financial support of a number of companies and private foundations. Included on the ever-expanding site are the constitutions of Japan, the Republic of Togo, the Republic of Rwanda, India, as well as the United States. See www.wdl.org.

If your students are curious about what books some of the founders read...

Thomas Jefferson's personal library actually formed the basis of today's Library of Congress. An annotated catalog of all of the books that Thomas Jefferson sold to Congress in 1815 is available online from the Rare Book and Special Collections Division at www.loc.gov/rr/rarebook/coll/130.html, and an online version of the physical exhibit at the Library of Congress of Jefferson's Library is available at www.loc.gov/exhibits/jefferson/jefflib.html.