

## THE BOTTLE CONJUROR - The Enlightenment and Gullibility

### LESSON MODULES

Common Core Alignment  
CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.9-10.1-6, 8-9  
CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.11-12.1-9

The Eighteenth Century marked a period when information began to become widely disseminated in writing, and people began challenging institutions, governments, scientific questions, mythology, and many of the “old ways” of doing things. This sometimes resulted in friction between groups of people, or in public debates about conventions or processes. These modules are meant to continue that public debate with an overarching question:

***Given the scope of history and comparable issues, in what ways are people from the past different from people living today?***

## Module 1

### MAIN MODULE

30-55 minutes

Read the OH article and primary/secondary source document, from *Dramatic Table Talk*.

**10-15 minutes.**

Discuss questions in the sidebar of the OH Article

**10-15 minutes**

**DEBATE:** According to the secondary source reading (Dramatic Table Talk), the intent of the hoaxers was to demonstrate the gullibility of the populace. Do you think the Bottle Conjurer riot was the outcome of the gullibility of the populace?

Yes or No? Take sides.

**10-20 minutes**

**ADD ON:** The OH article used selective quotes from the primary sources. Why do you think some of the primary source information was used in the article and other information was not? Do you think this was a good use of sources, or what would you have done differently if you were writing it?

**10 minutes**

**ADD ON:** Watch “The Bottle Conjurer” Video

**1:56**

Discuss how it compares to the primary material:

1. Primary Sources - Advertisement and Caricature
2. Or, in Primary/Secondary material - *Dramatic Table Talk*, primary sources 1 & 3

**10 - 15 minutes**

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## Module 2

### Caricatures - Reading a contemporary drawing as a primary text

10-30 minutes

Examine the Caricature the riots, “The Bottle Conjuror, From Head to Foot without Equivocation” and compare it to the primary source material describing the riots, from *Dramatic Table Talk*, primary source 3.

#### **DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:**

What are the differences between the two newspaper account and the caricature?

What are the similarities?

How does the title of the caricature frame how to “read” the picture?

Do you have to know the story of the Bottle Conjuror Riots to understand the caricature?

What is useful or not useful about a stylized drawing in comparison to a photograph today?

**10-20 minutes**

**ADD ON:** Further Research - Look up other caricatures and see how they compare to the Caricature primary source. See :The Bottle Conjuror video” (1:56min).

**10 minutes**

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### Module 3

#### Riots - Why do they occur?

15-30 minutes

The Bottle Conjuror riots were an unexpected consequence of a hoax played upon an audience. They resulted in only one injury, but great property damage done to the theater.

Read *Obscure Histories* Article, “The Bottle Conjuror.”

#### **DISCUSSION:**

What are some examples of riots throughout history, and what do you think were the motivations behind them?

#### **DEBATE:**

Are riots effective means for change? Yes or No? Take sides.

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### Module 4

#### Hindsight is 20/20

15-30 minutes

Compare the two advertisements within the Primary/Secondary document, from *Dramatic Table Talk*, primary sources, 1 & 2.

#### **DISCUSSION:**

It would appear that the potential answer for how the Bottle Conjurer achieved “going into a bottle” was always right in front of the audience, but things were not put together until after the fact. What are some examples of “hindsight is 20/20” from your own experience or in the news?

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## Module 5

### Automata and Computers

#### Flipped Classroom or In-Classroom Essay

55 - 80 minutes

**WATCH:** BBC 4 video on writing automata (4:48)

[http://youtu.be/bY\\_wfKVjuJM](http://youtu.be/bY_wfKVjuJM)

**WATCH:** Vaucanson's Duck (1:05)

<http://youtu.be/-wR6jAYgVPM>

**WATCH:** (Optional) Simon Schaffer on Enlightenment Science (27:32)

<http://youtu.be/ccfGq4Mqbj0>

**READ:** Vaucanson and the History of the Computer

<http://history-computer.com/Dreamers/Vaucanson.html>

#### SHORT ESSAY

Clockmakers and other engineers were responsible for some of the most spectacular mechanical contributions to the Eighteenth Century. These automata astonished their audiences with their near-lifelike capabilities, which confounded the viewer and led many debates as to whether human beings were simply machines, or more than the sum of their parts. While some of these questions would fall away with the rise of the industrial revolution, these automata were ancestors of computers and they could be “programmed” to perform certain actions.

#### CHOOSE ONE OR DEVELOP YOUR OWN QUESTION ABOUT THE MATERIAL

-How was entertainment a way of getting at important questions about biology and nature?

-Does the current quest for Artificial Intelligence (AI) have anything in common with the early automata? If so, how?

-Can we say that early automata are computers? If not, why?

-Can we say that computers still have a “spectacular” component to them, in that, do they have to be entertaining to teach something or provoke thought? (See: IBM's Big Blue)