**Aim #4: To what extent were the “Enlightened Despots” enlightened?**

**Topic: Enlightened Despots (mid-1700’s)**

**I. Introduction**

The Enlightenment philosophers had a great impact on several rulers during the 1700’s. Based on the writings of the Enlightenment philosophers, several monarchs (kings and queens) created reforms (changes) in the way they ruled and their laws. Because they both had absolute power but made reforms, they were known as **Enlightened Despots (tyrants – ruler with absolute power).**

**Task:**

1. **Complete the Graphic Organizer for each ruler.**
2. **Answer the two summary questions at the end of the graphic organizer in one T.E.A.L. paragraph each:** 
   1. ***To what extent should these rulers be considered “enlightened?”***
   2. ***Which of these rulers was the best ruler? Explain.***

**Enlightened Despot #1 - Frederick the Great of Prussia**

Frederick II ruled Prussia from 1740-1786. He led his nation through multiple wars with Austria and its allies. His daring military tactics expanded and consolidated Prussian lands, while his domestic policies transformed his kingdom into a modern state and formidable European power. As an enthusiastic patron of the arts and sciences, a gifted musician and a correspondent with the top minds of the Enlightenment, Frederick sought to embody the Platonic ideal of a “philosopher-king.”

He enacted a number of major reforms and domestic projects. He began to revamp and standardize Prussia’s justice system along [Enlightenment](https://www.history.com/topics/enlightenment) lines; banning torture and arguing for a uniform national criminal code. He liberalized (freed) control of the press and supported a moderate level of religious freedom. He worked to economically consolidate Prussia, lowering internal duties, building canals to encourage trade and enacting protective tariffs. Frederick built up Berlin as a cultural capital with grand buildings and rejuvenated the scientific work of the Berlin Academy

After The Seven Years War (1763), Frederick resumed his domestic programs, reorganizing the Prussian government into separate ministries to allow rational division of tasks and easy executive control. He ordered the development and colonization of unused land in his expanded kingdom, and introduced the turnip and potato as major food crops. However, Frederick never freed the serfs (peasants) on these farms and manors.

*“I am the first servant of the state.”*

*“No man was born to be the slave of his equal.”*

**Enlightened Despot #2 - Joseph II of Austria-Hungary Empire**

Joseph II reigned from 1765-1780. During his reign, Joseph put forth an average of 690 decrees a year. Joseph's reforms included abolishing serfdom (peasants being tied to the land), ending press censorship and limiting the power of the Catholic Church. And with his **Edict of Toleration**, Joseph gave minority religions, such as Protestants, Greek Orthodox and Jews, the ability to live and worship more freely. He also encouraged education, tried to separate both Church and State and the executive (ruler) from the judiciary (judges).

Joseph's main aim was to make the empire more efficient and financially secure. Believing that he was doing what was right and necessary, Joseph did not bother to smooth the way with nobles or clergy who felt threatened by his changes. Hungarian nobles tried to reject Joseph's decrees on the grounds that he had not gone through an official coronation there. Even peasants were often more concerned with the taxes that the empire demanded than with their new freedoms. Joseph also encountered difficulties outside his empire. To counter Prussia's strength, Joseph forged an alliance with Catherine II of Russia, which brought the empire into a conflict in Turkey. This stretched the empire's resources and also opened the door for more unrest.

By 1790, Joseph faced numerous problems in his empire, including a loss of control in the Austrian Netherlands. In a weakened state after being ill for years, Joseph made the painful decision to undo his reforms in Hungary in order to maintain the empire's power there.

Joseph died believing that his reforms had weakened his empire instead of strengthening it. However, his support for ideals like religious tolerance led to lasting changes in Europe, and he paved the way for the complete abolition of feudalism in 1848. Although Joseph felt he had been a failure, history would show he did make a difference.

***Quotes:***

*“The present system of taxation and the inequality of the taxes which are imposed is too important to ignore.”*

*“Each of my subjects must be given back their native liberties.”*

**Enlightened Despot #3 - Catherine the Great of Russia**

Catherine considered herself to be one of Europe’s most enlightened rulers. She wrote numerous books, pamphlets and educational materials aimed at improving Russia’s education system (including creating a boarding school just for females to improve women’s education). She was also a champion of the arts, keeping up a lifelong correspondence with Voltaire, Diderot (who named her “Catherine the Great”) and other prominent minds of the era, creating one of the world’s most impressive art collections in St. Petersburg’s Winter Palace (now home to the famed Hermitage Museum) and even trying her hand at composing opera. She tried to model her rule after Peter the Great and said she was following in his footsteps. She did make some efforts toward social and political reforms. She put together a document, known as the "Nakaz," on how the country's legal system should run, with a push for capital punishment and torture to be outlawed and calling for every man to be declared equal. She brought citizens of all social and economic backgrounds together for the first time to try to make these new laws. Catherine had also sought to address the dire situation of country's serfs, workers who were owned by landowners for life. The Senate protested any suggestion of changing the feudal system and the serfs were never freed. With the Charter of the Nobility in 1785, more people were even put back into serfdom to give the upper class more power. She also helped to Russia expand its borders into Poland, the Ottoman Empire and the Crimean Peninsula and the important trade network of the Black Sea.

Quotes:

*“The purpose of the monarchy is to attain the supreme good.”*

*“The use of torture is against nature and reason.”*

*“No man should be looked upon as guilty until he has received his sentence.”*

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| **Enlightened Despot** | **Social (how people live) Effects** | **Economic (money, jobs and trade) Effects** | **Political (government, laws, power) Effects** |
| **Frederick the Great of Prussia** |  |  |  |
| **Joseph II of Austria-Hungary Empire** |  |  |  |
| **Catherine the Great of Russia** |  |  |  |