

Study Materials on Great Educational Thinkers

Brief Life History of Rousseau

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Jean-Jacques Rousseau:

Brief Life History (1712–1778)

Rousseau rose from a troubled and wandering youth to become one of the most influential philosophers of the Enlightenment. His ideas on natural education, freedom, democracy, and human dignity continue to inspire modern education and society.

Early Life

- Born: 28 June 1712, in Geneva, Switzerland.
- His mother, Suzanne Bernard, died shortly after his birth; father, Isaac Rousseau, was a watchmaker.
- Grew up with little formal education, mostly self-taught through reading.
- Apprenticed to an engraver at 13 but left due to harsh treatment.
- At 16, left Geneva and began wandering in France, Italy, and Switzerland.

Formative Years

- Influenced by Madame de Warens, who guided his early intellectual and emotional life.
- Worked as a tutor, secretary, and music copyist.
- Developed a love for nature, freedom, and human dignity, which later shaped his philosophy.

Career and Major Works

- Gained fame in 1750 with his essay *Discourse on the Arts and Sciences*, criticizing civilization for corrupting human goodness.
- Wrote *Discourse on the Origin of Inequality* (1755), highlighting social injustice.
- His most influential work, *Émile, or On Education* (1762), proposed naturalistic, child-centered education.
- Published *The Social Contract* (1762), declaring “Man is born free, and everywhere he is in chains,” influencing democracy and revolution.

Later Life

- Faced opposition from Church and State; *Émile* and *Social Contract* were banned in France and Geneva.
- Lived in exile in Switzerland, England, and France.
- Spent later years writing autobiographical works, including *Confessions*.
- Died: 2 July 1778, at Ermenonville, France.
- His remains were later moved to the Panthéon in Paris (1794) as a national tribute.

Legacy

- Known as the Father of Naturalism in Education.
- Influenced modern educational thinkers like Pestalozzi, Froebel, Dewey, and Montessori.
- Inspired revolutionary thought in politics, philosophy, and education worldwide.