

NOV
21

THIS DAY IN **HISTORY** (/THIS-DAY-IN-HISTORY)

Literary

1694

Voltaire's birthday

On this day in 1694, Francois-Marie Arouet, later known as Voltaire, is born in Paris to a treasury officer and his wife.

Voltaire studied law but abandoned it to become a writer. He won success with his plays-mostly classical tragedies at first. He also wrote histories and epic poetry. His writing brought him some measure of success, and his wise investments made him wealthy in his mid-30s. However, his epic poem *La Henriade*, a satirical attack on politics and religion, infuriated the government and landed Voltaire in the Bastille for nearly a year in 1717.

Voltaire's time in prison failed to quench his satire. In 1726, he again displeased authorities and fled to England. He returned several years later and continued to write plays. In 1734, his *Lettres Philosophiques* criticized established religions and political institutions, and he was forced to flee once more. He retreated to the region of Champagne, where he lived with his mistress and patroness, Madame du Châtelet. In 1750, he moved to Berlin on the invitation of Frederick II of Prussia and later settled in Switzerland, where he wrote his best-known work, *Candide*. He died in Paris in 1778, having returned to supervise the production of one of his plays.