

**The French Revolution,
Part One: April, 1789-September, 1791
Causes and Onset of the Rebellion**



Teacher's Guide

The French Revolution, Part 1: April, 1789-September, 1791
Causes and Onset of the Rebellion
Cat. No. 8857
ISBN No. 1-59380-387-7



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***THE FRENCH REVOLUTION,
Part One, April, 1789-September, 1791
Causes and Onset of the
Rebellion***

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**The French Revolution, Part One,
April, 1789-September, 1791
Causes and Onset of the Rebellion**

Grades 7-10

Viewing Time: 14 minutes with a one-minute,
five question Video Quiz

INTRODUCTION TO THE PROGRAM

This extremely useful program, filmed both in France and the United States, provides students with accurate and essential information about the causes and onset of the French Revolution.

Topics covered are:

- The Three Estates
- Specific Causes of the French Revolution (government financial crisis, unfair taxation, Enlightenment ideas, economic depression)
- Founding of the National Assembly (the first government of the French Revolution)
- Storming of the Bastille
- Laws enacted by the National Assembly
- *Declaration of the Rights of Man and the Citizen*
- Correlations to important events in the United States

LINKS TO CURRICULUM STANDARDS

World History Standard and Benchmarks (3rd Ed.)

Era 7 - An Age of Revolutions, 1750-1914

Standard 32- Understands the causes and consequences of political revolutions in the late 18th and early 19th centuries

Grades 5-6

Understands the ideas and events that shaped the Revolution in France (e.g., the causes, character, and

consequences of the American and French revolutions; the meaning of the revolutionary slogan in France, "Liberty, Equality, Fraternity," and the social ideals it embodied; the legacy of leading ideas of the revolution; how the wars of the revolutionary and Napoleonic periods changed Europe and Napoleon's effects on the aims and outcomes of the revolution; connections between political events in the Americas and France between 1770 and 1815)

Grades 7-8

Understands the diverse factors (e.g., the Seven Years War, Enlightenment-era thought, the American Revolution, escalating internal economic crisis) that affected social and political conditions in Old Regime France

Understands events and ideas that influenced the course of the French Revolution (e.g., how the revolution developed from constitutional monarchy to democratic despotism to the Napoleonic Empire; the organization of the Estates-General and its merits and limitations; central ideas and origins of the *Declaration of Rights of Man and Citizen*)

Understands how the French Revolution changed social conditions in France (e.g., how the revolution changed political and religious institutions, social relations, education, family life, and the legal and political position of women; how territorial changes were made in Europe between 1789 and 1815 and their consequences for diverse social groups such as clergy, nobility, peasantry, bourgeoisie, and sans-culottes)

Knows the consequences of Napoleon's invasions.

Grades 9-12

Understands the political beliefs and writings that emerged during the French Revolution (e.g., characteristics and actions of radical, liberal, moderate, conservative, and reactionary thinking; the ideas in the *Declaration of the Rights of Man and the Citizen*)

INSTRUCTIONAL NOTES

Before presenting this lesson to your students, we suggest that you preview the program, review the guide, and the accompanying Blackline Master activities in order to familiarize yourself with their content.

As you review the materials presented in this guide, you may find it necessary to make some changes, additions, or deletions to meet the specific needs of your class. We encourage you to do so; for only by tailoring this program to your class will they obtain the maximum instructional benefits afforded by the materials.

PRE-TEST

Pre-Test is an assessment tool intended to gauge student comprehension of the objectives prior to viewing the program. Explain that they are not expected to get all the answers correct. You can remind your students that these are key concepts that they should focus on while watching the program.

STUDENT PREPARATION

Set up a Learning Center with pictures, maps, diagrams, and charts etc. relevant to the topics presented in this program such as:

- Pictures of the royal palace of Versailles, home of King Louis XVI, and site of the meeting of the Three Estates in May of 1789

- Pictures of King Louis XVI and Queen Marie Antoinette
- Chart showing the Three Estates
- Picture of the storming of the Bastille
- Map of France in 1789 and New France in 1762
- Pictures of French chateaux
- Pictures of leaders of the French Enlightenment such as Rousseau and Voltaire
- A French Revolution timeline
- The unique calendar invented and used by the French Revolutionaries

STUDENT OBJECTIVES

After viewing the program and completing the follow-up activities, students should be able to explain and/or describe:

- The Three Estates
- Specific causes of the French Revolution (government financial crisis, unfair taxation, Enlightenment ideas, economic depression)
- Founding of the National Assembly (the first government of the French Revolution)
- Storming of the Bastille
- Laws enacted by the National Assembly
- *Declaration of the Rights of Man and the Citizen*

INTRODUCING THE PROGRAM

Duplicate and administer **Blackline Master #1, Pre-Test**. Remind your students that they are not expected to know all the answers. Suggest that they use these questions as a guide for taking notes on the key concepts while viewing the program.

VIEW THE PROGRAM

Running Time: 14 minutes plus a one-minute, five-question Video Quiz.

Hand out **Blackline Master #3, Video Quiz**.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

After viewing the program, you may find it helpful to discuss key concepts as a class. The following questions/statements may prove to be useful. You may also choose to use these topics to begin a discussion prior to viewing the program.

- ✓ Discuss the political beliefs and writings that emerged during the French Revolution; for example, characteristics and actions of radical, royalist, liberal, moderate, conservative, and reactionaries.
- ✓ Discuss the ideas contained in the *Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen*.
- ✓ Discuss the "Enlightenment Ideas" that inspired the framers of the U.S. Constitution.

DESCRIPTION OF BLACKLINE MASTERS

Blackline Master #1, Pre-Test, is an assessment tool intended to gauge student comprehension of the objectives prior to viewing the program.

Blackline Master #2, Post-Test, is an assessment tool to be administered after viewing the program and completing additional activities. The results of this assessment can be compared to the results of the Pre-Test to determine the change in student comprehension before and after participation in this lesson.

Blackline Master #3, Video Quiz, is intended to reinforce the key concepts of the program following the presentation of the program. Student awareness that a Video Quiz will be given also helps promote attention to the video presentation.

Blackline Master #4, Crossword Puzzle, is a puzzle game based on information presented in the program.

Blackline Master #5, Timeline and Activity, presents important chronological events from 1756-1791.

Blackline Master #6, Vocabulary and Activity, includes important names, people, places, and words relating to events that occurred during this era in history.

EXTENDED LEARNING ACTIVITIES

Research papers, oral reports, news reports, or PowerPoint® presentations could be done on the following subjects:

- ✓ The organization of the Estates-General and its merits and limitations.
- ✓ Central ideas and origins of the *Declaration of Rights of Man and of the Citizen*.
- ✓ Connections between political events in the Americas and France between 1770 and 1791.
- ✓ Restrictions placed on the Catholic Church by the *Civil Constitution for the Clergy*.
- ✓ The way of life the French royalty and other nobility in the latter half of the 18th century.

ANSWER KEY

Blackline Master #1, Pre-Test

1. False. New France was lost.
2. True
3. False. They paid no taxes.
4. True
5. False. The Catholic clergy were put under government control and thus lost power.

Blackline Master #2, Post-Test

Fill in the blanks:

1. Catholic clergy, nobles, ordinary people
2. Divine Right of Kings
3. Enlightenment, Age of Reason
4. Third
5. land
6. The cost of the Seven Years' War (and loss of New France), the cost of assisting the Americans during their struggle for independence, lavish spending habits of the royal family and nobles.
7. National Assembly, Third
8. Bastille
9. George Washington
10. Abolish feudal dues, write new constitution, make clergy and nobles pay taxes, divide country into legislative districts with elected officials, put Catholic Church under government control, require that judges and church officials be elected instead of appointed, extend religious freedom to Jews and Protestants.

Blackline Master #3, Video Quiz

1. True
2. False. They were the three main social classes in France.
3. True
4. True
5. True

SCRIPT OF NARRATION

April of 1789 was an extremely important month in history, both in Europe and in America, because that was the month that riots broke out here in Paris; riots that signaled the start of a long and bloody conflict known as the French Revolution.

April of 1789 was the also the month that George Washington was inaugurated as the first President of the United States. And while the Revolution that created the American nation had focused on winning independence from a distant mother country, the situation here in France was quite different because the French Revolution was not about colonies gaining independence. Instead it focused on destroying an unfair class system and the rule of kings that had existed in France for over eight hundred years.

Because of the class-based hatred that had developed in France over the centuries, the French Revolution was far more brutal and resulted in ten times as many deaths as the American Revolution. And even though the French Revolution lasted for ten years, it took many more decades before a successful democracy came into existence in France. Nevertheless, the Revolution's effects were widespread and immediate. Because monarchies all across Europe lost power and as that happened, the lives of ordinary people began to greatly improve.

Causes of the French Revolution

Cause #1: The worsening financial condition of the government

There were three basic causes of the French Revolution and the first was the worsening financial condition of the government that resulted in a desperate need for more money.

The reason France was nearly broke was because it had spent huge sums on soldiers and weapons to fight a conflict called the Seven Years' War. The North American branch of this European war is called the French and Indian War. And it was because of this struggle that France was forced to give up its vast and valuable territory called New France to Spain and Great Britain. This enormous loss included not only a huge part of Canada, but also such far-flung places as the city of New Orleans in today's state of Louisiana, and big military and fur-trading outposts, such as Fort de Chartres in Illinois, Fort Conde in Alabama, and Fort Michilimackinac in Michigan.

A huge financial drain was placed on the French government a second time a few years later when her troops returned to North America in 1778 to provide essential military support to the American colonists to help fight their common enemy, Great Britain, during the Revolutionary War.

But France's financial crisis did not stem from military expenses alone, because the King, his family, and many other members of the nobility, were consuming unbelievable amounts of the country's wealth just to maintain their luxurious lifestyles and enormous palaces. As a result, by the late 1780s, the government of France, Europe's most populous nation, had borrowed so heavily it was almost bankrupt.

But the king had decided spending could not be cut and he wanted to increase taxes. This was a big problem due to the fact that for purposes of taxation, the 26 million citizens of France had been legally divided into groups called the Three Estates. The First Estate was made up of the non-taxpaying Clergy of the Catholic Church, France's largest landowner. The Second Estate was made up of the nobility, the richest and most powerful cit-

izens, whose birth rights exempted them from paying taxes, and gave them many other special rights and privileges as well. The only taxpayers in France belonged to the Third Estate, made up of everyone who was not a member of the first two estates, including all of France's poorest citizens. And perhaps more than anything else, it was the tremendous unfairness of these tax laws that led to the outbreak of the French Revolution.

Cause #2: Economic Depression

However, besides the crisis over taxation, a second cause of the French Revolution was that the 1770s and 1780s were times of severe economic depression in France; when downturns in manufacturing and trade were coupled with many years of poor agricultural harvests. As a result at that time, most French incomes were shrinking as serious shortages were driving up the price of basic foods. That was why by the year 1789, both lack of work and hunger were real problems across much of the French nation.

Cause #3: New Ideas of the "Enlightenment"

In addition to the economic depression and the lack of government money that plagued France in the 1780s, a third important cause of the French Revolution were certain revolutionary new ideas that were coming out of a movement called the Enlightenment. These were many of the same ideas that had inspired the framers of the Constitution of the United States.

The Enlightenment movement, also known as the Age of Reason, developed in Great Britain and France during the 17th and 18th centuries. This movement promoted the use of scientific reasoning as the best way to solve problems, as opposed to depending on faith alone. But the Enlightenment idea that inspired the leaders of the French Revolution the most was that ordinary people should be free to elect the leaders of their governments.

This was a totally different idea from the commonly held belief in the Divine Right of Kings—the notion that only members of certain families were fit to rule nations because God had specially chosen them to do so.

The Start of the French Revolution, Spring, 1789

Late in the spring of 1789, with tremendous pressure on it from all sides, the government of France seemed to be on the verge of a total collapse. Government leaders decided to call a meeting of representatives of the Three Estates: namely the clergy, the nobles, and the ordinary people. It was to be presided over by the king, an event so rare that it had not occurred in France for 175 years.

On May 5th, 1789, here at the enormous royal palace of Versailles that was home to King Louis the Sixteenth, hundreds of people arrived to attend the meeting. The common people brought with them lists of grievances, or complaints, that were presented to the king. But the king showed no sign that he was ready to make any changes and the nobles decided they would block all attempts at reform. That was why the leaders of the Third Estate decided to form a new government, which they called the National Assembly. They invited nobles and clergy to join them as equals in governing the country. Few agreed, but one nobleman, the Marquis de Lafayette, a man who had served as a general in the American Revolutionary War, played an important role in setting up the National Assembly.

In the end, the king and nobles lacked the power to stop the new government; nevertheless, many of them secretly plotted to destroy it. As the National Assembly took over, a "Great Fear" seized the common people all over France. They believed the nobles were hiding large quantities of grain in order to starve them into obedience. And even though this was actually not true, a few of the mag-

nificent palace-homes, or chateaux, of the nobility were broken into and ransacked by angry crowds searching for food.

And, at that time, while the king still held some power, most people had come to believe that he had lost his ability to rule. On July 12, 1789, impassioned speeches were delivered in the streets of Paris warning that the king was planning to wipe out the National Assembly. And they demanded that strong action be taken to protect France's new government.

The Storming of the Bastille, July 14, 1789

In Paris, on July 14, 1789, this congested, traffic-filled square, called the Place de la Bastille, teemed with angry crowds of Parisians in search of ammunition and weapons.

They had come here to take them from the great prison-fortress called the Bastille that once overlooked the square. Its high stone walls dominated this part of the city, and its dark dungeons held many unfortunate citizens. When one of the guards at the Bastille fired into the crowd, the outraged citizens smashed down the doors to the fortress, killed the governor of the prison, and began to tear the building apart, stone by stone. Within two years, revolutionaries had used the stones to build this bridge, so, as they said, "so people could trample forever on the despised old fortress."

Right after the Bastille fell, rioters marched here to the Hotel de Ville, the City Hall of Paris, to search for more arms. Three days later, the king himself made an appearance here to kiss the new tri-colored flag just adopted by the revolutionaries. Its red and blue colors were taken from the flag of Paris, and the Marquis de Lafayette had introduced the royal white between them. In the mean-

time, revolutionaries took over the city hall and formed a new city government, the Commune of Paris, to replace the royalist followers of the king, who had governed the city for so long,

By the end of July, the events in Paris, coupled with uprisings in other communities across France, frightened the royalists enough that the revolutionary National Assembly was able to continue on as the official government of France.

The National Assembly Makes some Important Changes, August 1789-September 1791

Starting in August of 1789 up through September of 1791, the National Assembly made many important changes by passing new laws intended to solve some of the problems that had plagued the country for centuries. For example, the Assembly divided France into legislative districts.

And, although they limited the right to vote to wealthier citizens, elections were held for local government offices. The National Assembly abolished some of the unfair dues, dating back to medieval times, that poor peasants were required to pay the nobility.

And it granted complete religious freedom to Jews and Protestants, two groups that had often been subjected to ruthless repression under the monarchy.

In order to pay off the government's enormous debts, the National Assembly even seized property of the Roman Catholic Church, which owned about one-tenth of all the land in France. It closed certain monasteries, such as this one, and excess church property was sold for cash. The Assembly started to make the Catholic Church and the nobility pay taxes. And they required that voters elect Church officials as well court judges.

In September of 1791, the king accepted a new Constitution for France worked out by the Assembly. Because it established certain basic freedoms, the revolutionaries subtitled it *A Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen*. By then, most members of the National Assembly believed that the French Revolution was over.

And so they disbanded to make way for a newly-elected government called the Legislative Assembly. But as it turned out, the French Revolution was very far from over. And few of them could have imagined the desperate times that lay just ahead.

Video Quiz

1. True or False? In 1789, most European kings would have claimed that their right to rule came from God.
2. True or False? The "Three Estates" were the three largest palaces of the French King.
3. True or False? Many of the leaders of the Enlightenment tried to promote scientific thinking.
4. True or False? The National Assembly was the government of France at the time of the storming of the Bastille.
5. True or False? Before the French Revolution, nobles in France paid no taxes.

