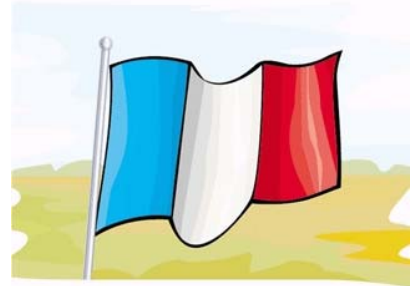


Democratic Revolution in France

Prior to the French Revolution, France was ruled by a monarchy. A monarchy is a centralized form of government that places all the power in the hands of a single king or queen. Society was divided into three social classes. The First Estate, the highest class, was composed of church leaders. The Second Estate was the aristocracy.



Everyone else belonged to the Third Estate. This was by far the majority of citizens, who did the work and paid almost all of the taxes. There was no such thing as upward mobility. People lived and died in the classes into which they were born.

In the years leading up to the French Revolution, France was experiencing a financial crisis due to its inability to pay its debts incurred during the Seven Years' War and the American Revolution. The King Louis XVI had also accumulated debts in order to pay for his extravagant lifestyle. He raised taxes as a way to collect enough money to satisfy these debts. This placed an even greater burden on the already struggling Third Estate.

There was also a food shortage in the country. Prices went up and up, even though people were starving. King Louis did not realize the gravity of the situation that gripped his country. Neither did he realize the power of the new ideas about liberty and equality that were beginning to spread in the 1700s. Motivated also by the success of the American Revolution, members of the Third Estate formed the National Assembly and demanded that the king help them. He didn't answer them. Meanwhile, he disagreed with the Second Estate about what kinds of changes should be made.

On July 14th, 1789, approximately a thousand members of the Third Estate advanced upon a prison called the Bastille. There, they planned to seize the gunpowder stored there, believing they needed to prepare to defend themselves against the king's military force. At the gates of the Bastille, the mob demanded that its military commander, De Launay,

Name _____

hand over the prison and the gunpowder to the crowd. When they were unable to negotiate with him, the crowd grew increasingly restless and finally broke through the gates, spilling into the courtyard. When they tried to enter the main fortress, some soldiers stationed there fired into the crowd. Others joined the revolutionaries and began to fight with them. Finally, De Launay surrendered the Bastille. Around 100 people were killed, and the French Revolution, which would last for ten years, had begun.

QUESTIONS: Democratic Revolution in France

1. Before the French Revolution, the French government was a:
A. anarchy B. democracy C. monarchy

2. Before the French Revolution, there were ___ main social classes.
A. one B. two C. three

3. The largest social class in France was called the:
A. First Estate
B. Aristocracy
C. Third Estate
D. church leaders

4. True or False: In the years leading up to the French Revolution, France was financially stable.

5. What foreign event influenced the onset of the French Revolution?

Name _____

Grade 10 Reading Comprehension

6. What kinds of problems were the French lower classes experiencing leading up to the French Revolution?

7. What did they do about it?

8. Did it work? _____

9. With which social class did the King disagree about what should be done to solve France's problems?

10. What happened on July 14th in 1789? Why?

11. What is the significance of this event?

12. How long did the French Revolution last? _____