

THE FRENCH REVOLUTION

Teachers' Notes

Liberty, Equality, Fraternity!
Study the Cause of the French Revolution
Workshops for key stages 3–5 at the
Wallace Collection

Louis XVI, King of France possibly by Antoine-François Lebrun, c. 1774, detail



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What did the Peasants in the Ancient Regime have to pay?

To the Church

'*The dîme*', which as you can see from the word was 10% of what they produced. They had to pay this every year at harvest time

To the King

The taille: a tax on every non-privileged person in France

The gabelle: a salt tax (Salt was essential to preserve things like meat in those days before tins and freezers)

The corvée royale: labour tax, they had to mend the roads; and had to fight in the wars.

To their Lord

Hunting rights: they could not cut their crops till the pheasants etc had finished nesting; they could not kill pigeons or rabbits that damaged their crops

Banalités: they had to pay to use the lord's mill for their flour and oven for their bread.

Droits de seigneur (lord's rights): they had to pay in order to marry, become a monk or priest and move to the town.

Labour: they had to work on the Lord's own land a number of days a year.

Share of crops: they had to give him some of their crops and a share of their livestock.

What did the Peasants get in return?

The Church provided

Hospitals and some medical care as well as spiritual guidance. This was also a kind of National Insurance.

The King provided

He was supposed to protect them from enemies, provide a legal system and look after the infrastructure i.e. roads.

The Lord

They were allowed to use the land and live on his estate.

**Why didn't they complain or rebel?
Give some reasons.**

**Was it worth it? You decide and give
your reasons**

**Of course they did sometimes rebel,
but they always lost! Think about why!**

Stages to a Revolution

1. France's Tax system did not work well. France had been at war for many years. The King was running out of money and could not borrow any more. New ideas about politics and government were developing as part of the Enlightenment. In 1787, Louis summoned an Assembly of Notables (Nobles and Clergy) to ask for money.
2. They said they'd only give him money if he summoned an Estates General. There hadn't been one since 1614!
3. The King had to agree: Elections were called: every noble could vote for his representatives; the Churchmen voted by diocese; the Third Estate chose representatives to go to meetings to elect their representatives. Of course, they would need educated people, even some nobles.
4. In Paris, the groups that had elected the Representatives went on meeting, and formed Clubs, like the Jacobins
5. The two privileged classes wanted to vote 'by order', 1 vote for the Clergy, 1 for the Nobles, and 1 for the 3rd Estate. The 3rd Estate wanted to vote 'by head' so that the 600 of them could beat the other two and get fair taxation.
6. The Assembly of the Estates General finally met in May 1789, two years after it had first been discussed. But they all just argued about details and procedure until 14 July, when the ordinary people in Paris, inspired by the Clubs, attacked the Bastille. After that, things really got moving!
7. Each Representative had to bring with him a 'cahier de doléances' or list of complaints. Usually, those of the country poor were written by town lawyers.

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How was society divided in 'Ancien Regime' France?

The King					
The First Estate: The Church (almost everyone was Catholic)		The Second Estate: The Nobles		The Third Estate: everyone else	
<p>The Upper Clergy</p> <p>Bishops, Cardinals Abbots etc</p> <p>The King chose these by arrangement with the pope</p> <p>They had to come from the nobility</p>	<p>The Lower Clergy</p> <p>The priests in the villages and towns, and lay brothers (servants) in monasteries</p> <p>They could come from the lower classes, if they had some education</p>	<p>The 'Sword' Nobles</p> <p>Members of families that had been noble for centuries. All children of nobles were noble. They lived off money from their estates, or from their investments in Royal funds. They could hold jobs in the armed forces, the Church or in the government, and tried to force the King to rely only on them.</p>	<p>The 'Robe' Nobles</p> <p>Families that had 'bought' or been given titles. After 3 generations, they counted as 'sword' nobles. Successful lawyers, bankers, doctors etc would get to be noble and stop working. The Sword nobles in the 18th Century were trying to stop the creation of Robe nobles</p>	<p>The Country people (paysans)</p> <p>These were the people who worked the land. They either paid rent, or were metayers, share croppers, handing over 40-60% of their crop in return for the land & house. A few children might get taught by the village priest, if they were not needed to work.</p>	<p>The Town People (bourgeoisie)</p> <p>Some rich men were owners of shops or workshops. Guilds controlled all trades, so only the sons of rich people could get to the top. Many paysans ran away to the towns for a 'better' life.</p> <p>Lawyers met in the Parlements, which checked that the King's laws were legal</p>
<p>The clergy paid a 'free gift' (Don Gratuit) to the King each year so they did not have to pay any of the real taxes.</p> <p>BUT the Church Council itself decided how much they were going to pay, and they were often YEARS behind with the payments. Besides, the money came from the dime paid by the 3rd Estate</p>	<p>If a noble did any type of work, except in the army or the Church, he was disgraced (derogé)</p> <p>The Nobles paid almost no taxes, so it was worth becoming a noble! What they did pay, obviously, was collected from the workers and peasants of the 3rd Estate</p>	<p>Many towns had paid the kings in earlier centuries money to be exempt from taxes. So most of the taxes fell on the country people.</p>			

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The Guillotine

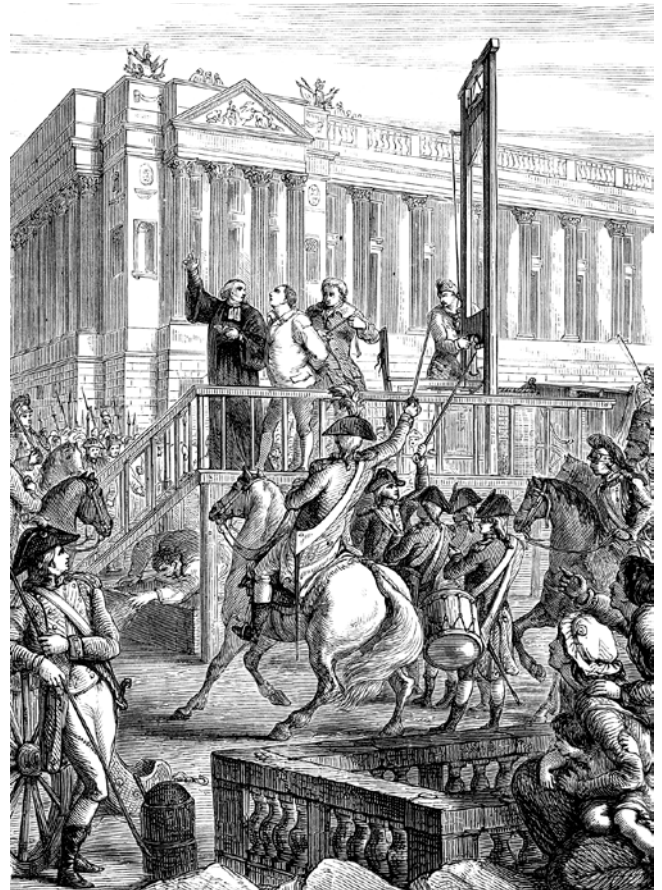
Before the Revolution, capital punishment was a matter of class. Nobles could expect to be beheaded with a sword, by a skilled practitioner. Clergy were not executed. For the Third Estate, there was a range of unpleasant ways of death: the most common was hanging, but people were also torn apart by 4 horses, strangled, burned etc etc.

Once the National Assembly met in 1789, they discussed the whole question on several occasions. They realised that they could not abolish the death penalty but agreed that there should be equality in execution as with everything else. In May 1791, they questioned the executioner, Mr Sanson, and he said this:

The sword is not fit to perform a second execution after the first. The blade is liable to chip and absolutely must be reground and sharpened again. If there were several executions to perform at one time, it would be necessary to have a sufficient number of swords, all of them ready prepared. It should also be noted that swords have often been broken during executions of this kind. The Paris executioner has only two.

A further consideration is that, when there are several condemned men to execute at once, the terror of the execution, caused by the vast quantities of blood, will bring terror and faintness to the hearts of even the most intrepid of those waiting to be executed. This faintness will prove an invincible obstacle in the way of execution as the persons will be unable to hold themselves still ...

(He was too modest to mention that beheading with a sword was an extremely skilled job, as anyone who has ever tried to chop wood knows well.)



So Dr Guillotin, of the Academy of Surgery, developed a machine that needed no skill, that enabled even frightened people to be kept still, and that used the law of gravity as well as a sharp blade, to behead people so, as he said in a debate in the Assembly 'one feels no more than a slight sensation of coolness at the back of the neck'.

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Royal Income and Expenditure in France in two typical years before the Revolution.

Income	1775	1788
Royal lands (rent and produce)	9.4	51.2
Clergy 'don gratuit'	3.0	Nil paid
Other payments made instead of tax	23.9	26.0
Direct Taxes	150.7	163.0
Indirect taxes	183.9	219.3
Borrowing	6.3	17.5
Totals	377.2	471.6

Expenditure	1775	1788
Royal Household	43.0	42.0
Foreign Affairs (not war)	11.8	14.4
War and the navy	123.8	158.9
Public works, roads etc	5.4	14.9
Pensions, charities etc	33.0	47.8
Interest on borrowing	154.4	261.1
other	40.0	75.0
Totals	411.4	633.1

What can we learn from these figures? Some ideas:

- It's clear why the peasants who lived on the Royal Estates were increasingly angry and desperate.
- Comparing the income from borrowing in any year with the interest payments on all previous borrowing shows that this is not really a sensible way to operate a financial system.
- The Royal household had made a real effort to cut down in the years before the Revolution
- Household costs were never more than a small part of the whole money problem

Further Reading

The French Revolution (Questions & Analysis in History)

by Jocelyn Hunt

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The Summoning of the Estates General Role Play

You are going to think about the different hopes and fears that French people had when the King summoned the representatives of the people to meet him in his Estates General.

You are the representatives of the people of France. In groups, you will discuss what should go into the Cahier de Doleances that you will take with you to the meeting in Versailles in May 1789.

Depending on the number of people involved, you will meet with your own order first, and then meet with representatives of the other two orders, and see if you can agree on anything.

When sharing out the roles, you need to make sure that each class is represented. You may decide that each person needs a group of advisers to help with the research.

When you have been given your role, you need to think about it, and do a little research, so that you know what you want to say at the meeting of your order.

When you have all thought about your roles, you could have a 10 minute meeting of your 'order' to see if you agree about anything. Then choose ONE of your group to have a discussion with the other two orders about how things should be done when the estates general finally meets: Should all three Estates sit together? Should it be 'one man one vote' ? Will you want the King or his Ministers to attend the discussions? Should you discuss the Cahiers first, or do what the King wants and talk about money?

Will you be able to agree about anything at all?

1789, two years after it had first been discussed. But they all just argued about details and procedure until 14 July, when the ordinary people in Paris, inspired by the Clubs, attacked the Bastille. After that, things really got moving!

7. Each Representative had to bring with him a 'cahier de doléances' or list of complaints. Usually, those of the country poor were written by town lawyers.

The Roles: the First Estate

Bishop

You want to be sure that things don't change too much. You certainly don't want the clergy to pay more in their 'Free Gift' to the King than they have in the past. You think only people from the nobility, like yourself, should be able to hold the top jobs in the organisation of the church. After all, you are from the class that knows how to lead, that has the best education, and that understands the great achievements of the past

Village Priest

You have two main worries: your own life is pretty poor, because the Bishop takes the dime which you have to get from your parish, so you have to spend time growing your own vegetables and looking after your cow. Also you will never rise to the senior ranks of the Church, as you come from an ordinary family of shopkeepers in the town

nearby. But your other worry is the people in your parish. You see every day how poor they are. You run a little school to teach the boys and girls how to read and write, but they don't come, because they have to work with their parents. You also see how many of them die young. You do hope that something can be done to improve things, and you have some ideas: but who would bother to listen to someone as unimportant as you?

Ordinary monk

You lead a very quiet life and don't know much about the world outside. But you do know that you will never rise very high in the monastery, as you are not noble. You have also noticed that the number of people who come begging for food at the monastery gate has gone up, and that they seem to be given rather nasty scraps, whereas the food in the monastery is certain better than you remember when you were a village boy.

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The Roles: the Second Estate

Sword Noble 1

You live on his country estates and never go to Versailles. You can trace your family back for hundreds of years

Sword Noble 2

Your great grandfather was made a noble in the time of Louis XIV, but you can count yourself a Sword Noble, and so look down on the new Robe Nobles. You want to change the rules so that fewer nobles can be created. You spend a lot of time at court, hoping to pick up gifts and rewards from the King. But being at Versailles is terribly expensive: you need so many clothes! You have to gamble – everyone does – and you keep losing. You also have a Mistress, and she keeps demanding jewels and other

presents. So you need to squeeze as much money as you can from the peasants back on your estates, who are clearly very lazy, according to your farm manager

Robe Noble

You used to be a banker, and you are certainly pleased to be a noble, though it cost a lot to get the title. But now you don't have to pay most of the taxes, and you will not want that to change. Having worked in a Bank before buying your title, you are certainly aware of the problems of the state finances. The King cannot go on and on borrowing, unless he can show how he will pay the interest, let alone paying the money back in the end. You certainly won't be lending any more to the government!

The Roles: the Third Estate (town)

Wealthy town Craftsman

Your life is all right. You are rich, and respected. You may not be a noble, but you could afford to buy a title if you wanted. But there's no point: the towns don't pay nearly as much tax as the country people. You have a fine house, and your apprentices and journeymen do most of the work. You value the King's court, as they buy your beautiful silverware; but you do feel it's all a bit excessive. You worry a bit about competition from Britain, but their machine made items can't compete at the luxury end of the market. You have been reading some of these new ideas about Liberty and so on, and your oldest son wanted to go and fight for the Americans: but you didn't let him!

Town apprentice

Well, life is certainly better than it was in the countryside, so you are glad that your father saved up to pay for your apprenticeship. But you will never get to be a 'Master' and run your own shop: the Guilds make sure that one

the sons of Masters get to the top. Perhaps the Assembly will change that. Living in Paris, you sometimes see the nobles when they drive in from Versailles: but not often: they know it's pretty dangerous to walk through Paris with all those jewels on. You have attended some meetings with speakers who say there will have to be violence to change things. That might be fun?

Doctor

You made a decision years ago when you came back from training in Prussia: you work among the poor, rather than having a posh practice at Versailles. So you know how the poor suffer. On the other hand, you can do experiments in the poor hospitals, and have been working at Bicêtre Hospital so see whether this new 'electricity' makes the insane people there better or worse. You have read all the Philosophers who write about Liberty and so on, but you are quite content as you are. You are going to represent your poor area of Paris, since none of the market porters and workshop men can read or write!

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The Roles: the Third Estate (country)

Farmer with his own land

Well, things certainly need to improve, as far as you're concerned. Farmers are the most important people in the country: you feed the nation; and yet you are taxed heavily, so you have no spare capital to experiment with, as they have in Britain and the Netherlands. You've read some of the new ideas about taxation being a percentage of your income, rather than based on your land. That's a good idea!

But you know you are better off than your neighbours who live on the land of the great Lords. You will try to speak for them when you go to the Assembly. You doubt if the Lords will ever give up wealth and influence, but it's worth a try.

Peasant working on his Lord's land

You don't really understand what is going on, and you don't see how things will ever change. You work all day every day and still can't afford to feed your family. The

Lord's steward knows everything about you. When your pig had piglets, there he was, taking two of the five. You had to pay the Lord some money when your daughter got married. It would be wonderful if your son could move to the town, where everyone is rich, or so you have heard, but the Lord will not let that happen.

You have heard that there is to be an Assembly to discuss change, and there will be a meeting in the village to decide what to ask for. You all think the salt tax and the tax per person are the worst.

You also hate having to watch the Lord's pigeons eating your crops without being allowed to kill them. And having to use the Lord's windmill to grind your own grain to make flour. But none of you can write, and so you don't know if the priest and the rich farmer will write down what you want. They're not worried about the things that worry you.



The Trial of Marie-Antoinette by Auguste Raffet (1804 - 1860), 1845

PRIMARY SOURCES 1

A complaint from the Comte de Germiny to the National Assembly, 20 August 1789

On 20 July 1789, a gang of foreign brigands, joined with my vassals and those of the neighbouring parish of Vrigny came to my Chateau of Sassy in a crowd of about two hundred and, having broken the locks of the chests which contain my title deeds, they took a large number of them, with registers which are necessary to me and carried them off and burned them in the woods near my chateau; my guard could make no resistance because he was the only one in the area, since I do not reside there. These evil men rang the church bells in the neighbouring parishes to gather even bigger numbers together.

I am the more unhappy in this loss, since I have never made my people feel the odious weight of the old feudal

system, which I am delighted is being lifted in these modern times: but who will ever be able to assess and prove the damage which they have done to my properties?. I call upon your good judgement that these difficulties can be adjusted by the National Assembly, to restore to me what I have lost and above all to provide me with some legal basis I shall take no legal action against those whom I knew amongst the brigands who, as well as burning my papers, have killed all my pigeons. But I await complete justice from the spirit of equity which rules you.

flour. But none of you can write, and so you don't know if the priest and the rich farmer will write down what you want. They're not worried about the things that worry you.

PRIMARY SOURCES 2

Part of a Letter from the British Embassy in Paris to London, 11 December 1788

I must, however, observe that the present temper of the Nation is such that the Provinces probably will not consider themselves as bound to follow any particular mode that may be dictated to them for the election of deputies to represent them at the Assembly of the States-General, unless it shall appear by the records to be confirmable to the customs of former times on similar occasions; neither, it is thought, will the Tiers-Etat [3rd Estate] at any rate submit to a representation of their Order that shall be judged by them inadequate

to the magnitude of the proportion they hold in the state. For, by the calculation that has lately been made of the three Orders, it appears that the Clergy, not including the religieux [monks], amounted to 90,000 only, and that of the Nobility, even with all those who have purchased their titles, amounted to no more than 500,000; the disproportion therefore between the Tiers-Etat and the other two orders taken together, is very considerable, the whole population of France being estimated at 24 millions.

PRIMARY SOURCES 3

Letter from Gouverneur Morris, the American representative in Paris, 25 February 1789

... Lafayette is out of town. He is gone to Auvergne to get himself elected, either for the Noblesse or the Tiers-Etat (3rd Estate). I hope the former, for he would otherwise, in my opinion, be too desperately estranged from those of his own Class I have here the strangest employment imaginable. A republican I preach incessantly respect

for the Prince, attention to the Rights of the Nobility, and moderation not only in the object but in the pursuit of it. All this, you will say, is none of my business, but I love France and as I believe the King to be an honest and good man, I sincerely wish him well, and the more so as I am persuaded that he earnestly desires the felicity of his people.

PRIMARY SOURCES 4

Two extracts from Arthur Young's 'Travels in France' published in 1787

If the French have not husbandry [farming] to show us, they have roads ... and indeed for the whole way from Samer it is wonderfully formed: a vast causeway with hills cut to level vales; which would fill me with admiration if I had known nothing of the abominable corvées that make me commiserate the oppressed farmers from whose extorted labour this magnificence has been wrung.

The poor people who cultivate the soil here are metayers that is, men who hire the land without ability to stock it; the proprietor is forced to provide cattle and seed and he and his tenant divide the produce: a miserable system that perpetuates poverty.