

Introduction

Revolution !

A revolution is an event or a period of time when great and rapid change takes place.
In 1789, there were dramatic changes in France.
What causes a revolution?

Marie-Antoinette, Queen of France

Marie-Antoinette was born in 1755. She was the fifteenth child of the Empress of Austria. Her childhood was spent in the luxury of the royal palace in Vienna. By the time she was 12, arrangements had begun for her marriage to Louis, the young grandson of King Louis XV of France. The marriage took place at the great Palace of Versailles, just outside Paris, in 1770. Four years later, she became Queen. She was young, beautiful and popular. Whatever she wanted, she could have.



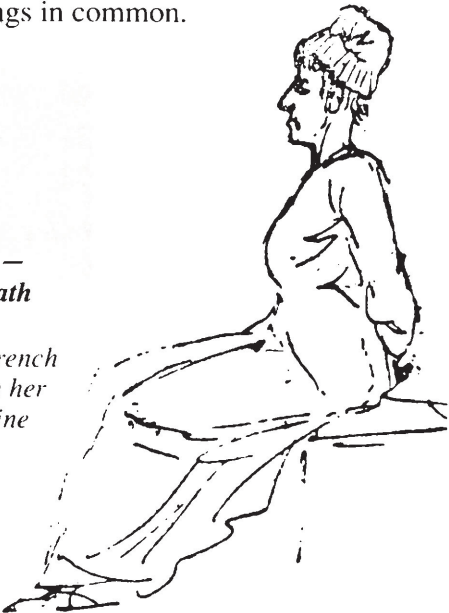
Source A – A life of luxury
Marie-Antoinette and her ladies-in-waiting in the royal bed chamber at Versailles. A painting by the French artist Jacques Gautier-Dagoty, 1775.

A few years later, on a cold and foggy morning in 1793, thousands of spectators watched as a horse-drawn cart took her from prison, across Paris to the Place de la Révolution. The guillotine was waiting for her. As the thin, grey-haired woman climbed the steps to her death, the crowd shouted insults at her. As the blade fell, the crowd roared. Marie-Antoinette was another victim of the events known as the French Revolution. She was not yet 40 years old.

What happened between 1770 and 1793 that sent Marie-Antoinette to her death? What changes took place in France during this time? This book is an investigation of the dramatic changes that took place in France between 1787 and 1815. It was a period that saw the French royal family executed and thousands of people killed. It saw the rise of a dictator, Napoleon, and French armies invading most of the countries of Europe.

Why did all these events happen? There is no simple answer, but all revolutions have certain things in common.

Source B –
A humiliating death
Marie-Antoinette,
sketched by the French
painter, David, on her
way to the guillotine
in 1793.



Other revolutions

There have been many revolutions in countries all over the world, for example in the USA in the 1770s and in Russia in 1917. More recently, there have been several revolutions in the countries of Eastern Europe, in Romania, Poland and East Germany. In each case, many people protested against the government.

- Try to think of some other examples of revolutions that have happened around the world. Are revolutions always successful?



Source C – The Russian Revolution in 1917
Crowds of ordinary people are protesting outside the Winter Palace in St Petersburg (Leningrad). They are demanding better conditions from the Tsar.



Source D – Revolution in East Germany, 1989
The Wall divided East and West Berlin between 1961 and 1989. It was built to prevent people escaping from East Germany, a communist country, to West Germany, a democratic country.

In 1989, the people of East Germany protested in large enough numbers to force the communist government to resign. They wanted more say in how their country was to be run and they hoped for better living standards. Germany is now one country.

From monarchy to anarchy: France 1788–94

*During the 1780s, France – the most powerful country in Europe – was moving towards a crisis.
 Many people were unhappy for one reason or another with the way the country was run.
 Pressure was put on King Louis XVI to make changes.*



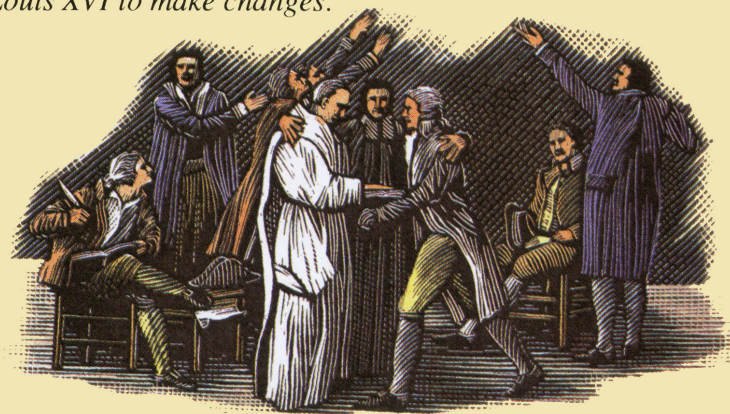
*1 Summer 1788
King Louis is desperate*

He is unpopular and very short of money.
 His advisers cannot help him.



*3 July 1789
The Bastille is stormed*

After weeks of panic, fear and discontent, the people of Paris storm the Bastille, a prison in the heart of Paris. They completely destroy it. After this, Louis gives away more of his power to the parliament.



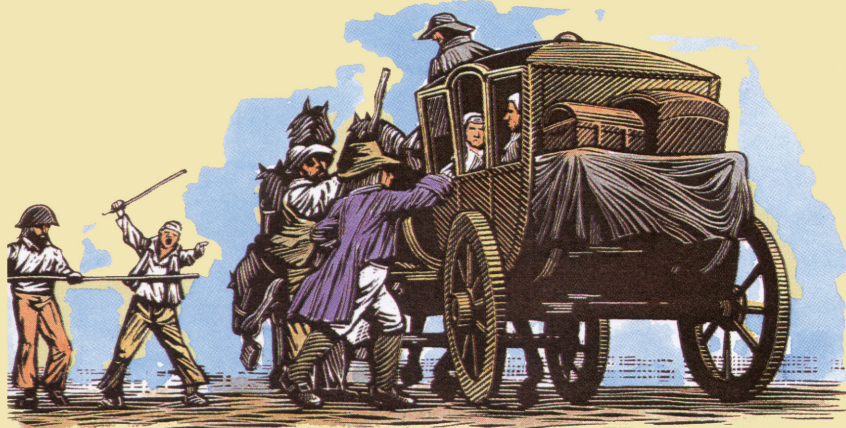
*2 June 1789
Louis is forced to call parliament*

He hopes to raise money through a new tax. Many of the representatives refuse to accept the unfair way that parliament is run. They storm out and hold their own meeting in the indoor tennis court in Versailles. Louis backs down.



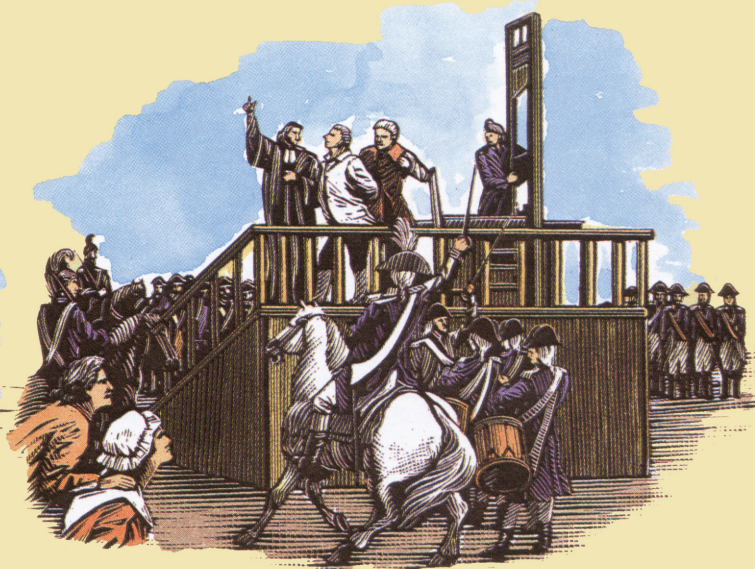
*4 October 1789
The march to Versailles*

There are serious food shortages. The women of Paris march to the Palace of Versailles to protest to Louis. The King and his family are forced to leave Versailles. They go to live in the Tuileries Palace in Paris.



5 June 1791
The royal family escape

Louis, Marie-Antoinette and their children decide the time is right to escape from France. The escape attempt fails. They are captured. After this, they are treated as prisoners.



6 January 1793
The King is executed

Louis is sentenced and put to death. He is regarded as a traitor to France by the people who are now in power. Marie-Antoinette is executed nine months later.



7 Spring 1793 to summer 1794
The Reign of Terror

Against a background of foreign war, civil war, food shortages and great fear, the Committee of Public Safety – 12 men – organises a ‘Reign of Terror’. The guillotine is used against anyone who is considered to be an ‘enemy’ of the Revolution.



8 July 1794
The end of the Terror

Finally, Robespierre, the leader of the Committee, is himself guillotined. This brings an end to the Terror. But the cost has been high. Many lives have been lost or ruined. France is still at war and the country is in chaos.



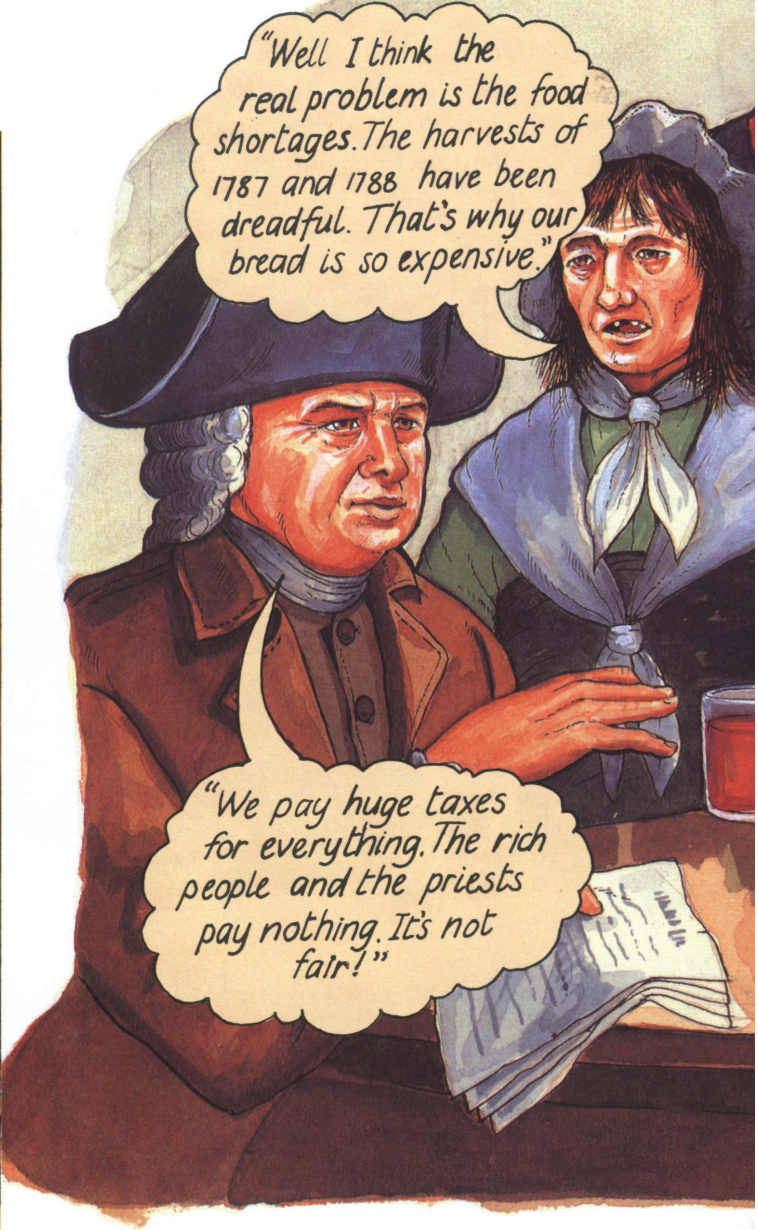
Did the Revolution take place simply because Louis was a weak king? Or did it take place for a mixture of reasons, both short-term and long-term?

What were the causes of the French Revolution?

Louis XVI – What was he like as King?



Source A – King Louis XVI
Louis in full state robes. This picture was painted by Antoine François Callet in 1783.





- What other reasons might there be to explain why the Revolution took place?

1 Find information from the diagram that supports each of these explanations of the Revolution:

Information	
◆ Louis was a weak king	
◆ Many people were badly off	
◆ France was an unfair country	
◆ People got ideas from other countries	

2 For each explanation decide whether you think it was a short-term or a long-term cause.



France was a wealthy country in the years before the Revolution, but it was a divided and unhappy land.
Why were many French people angry about the way they were treated?

A rich and powerful country

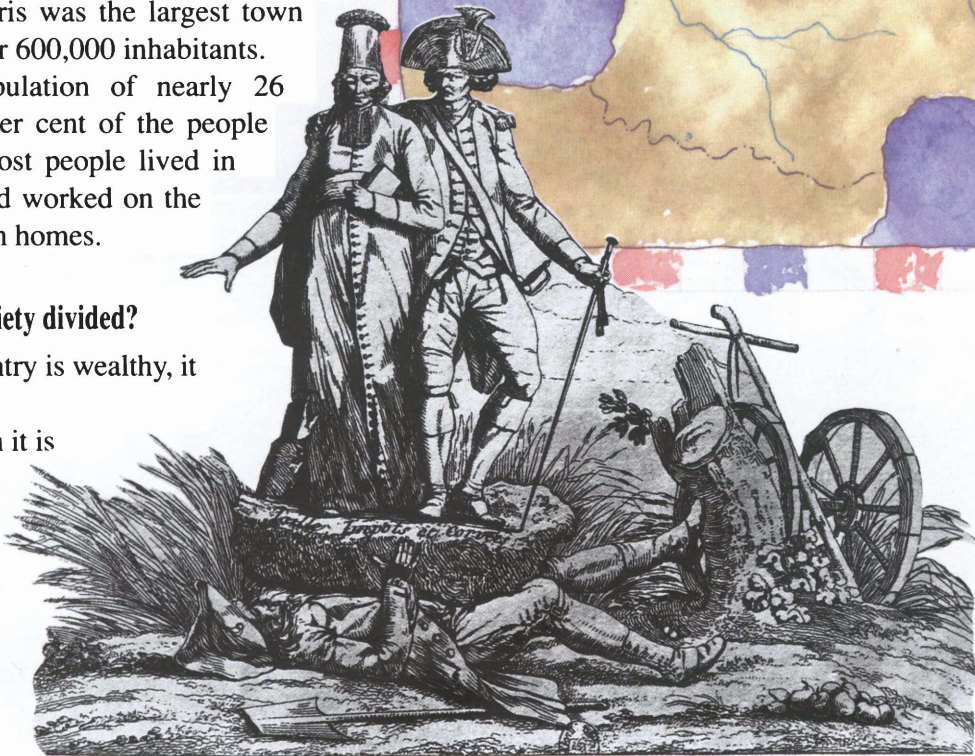
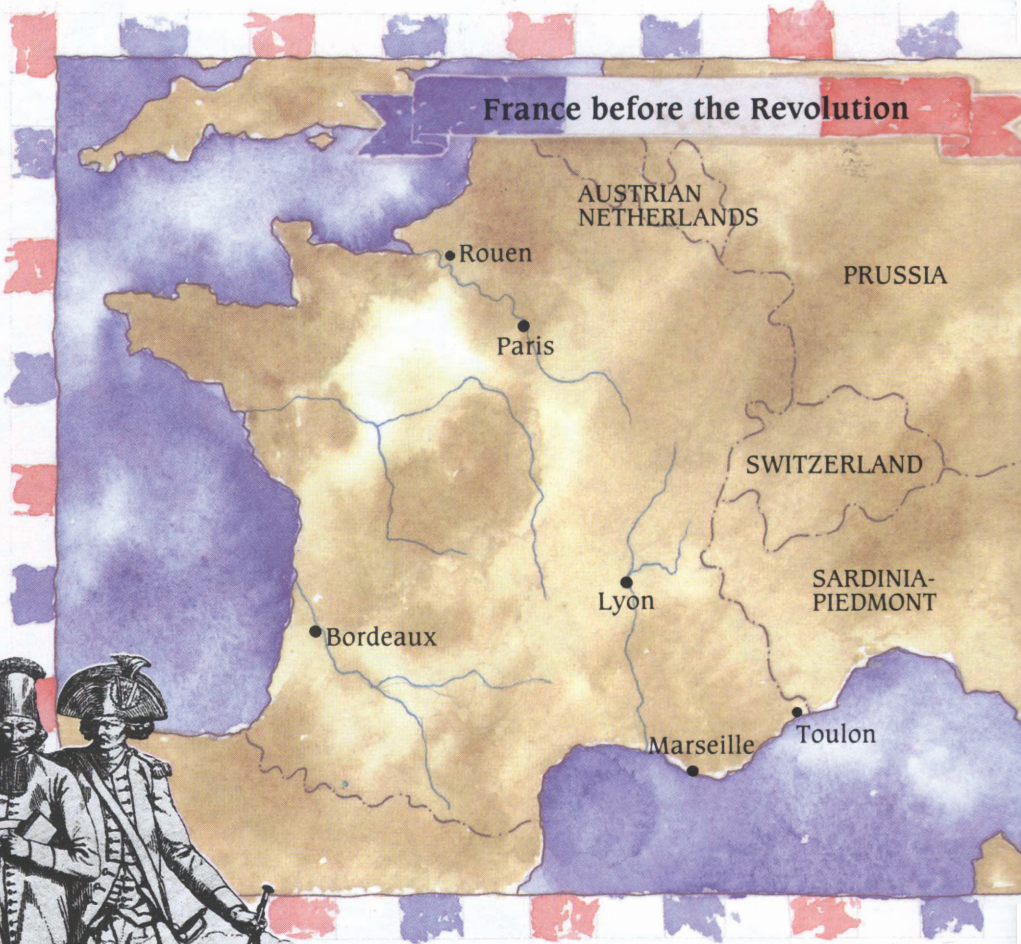
In the eighteenth century, France was one of the richest countries in Europe. Much of its wealth came from the goods produced in the slave islands of the Caribbean, such as Haiti. Coffee, sugar and cotton were produced cheaply on large plantations worked by slaves. These products were then sold to other European countries, making a large profit.

Within France itself, the towns of Marseille, Bordeaux and Toulon were important ports, with industries such as soap-making, leather-tanning and sugar-refining. The town of Rouen was the centre of the woollen cloth trade, and Lyon was the centre for silk. Paris was the largest town in France with over 600,000 inhabitants.

Out of a population of nearly 26 million, only 11 per cent of the people lived in towns. Most people lived in the countryside and worked on the land or in their own homes.

How was French society divided?

Just because a country is wealthy, it does not mean that everybody living in it is too. For a long time French society had been divided into three large groups called 'estates'. Power and wealth were in the hands of a few.



Source A
This cartoon was drawn before the Revolution. The figures represent the three estates – the Church, the nobles and the people.
• Can you explain what the artist is trying to express?

What was an estate?

An estate was a very large group or class of people. In France there were three estates. It was difficult for a person to move from one estate to another.

The Three Estates



The First Estate

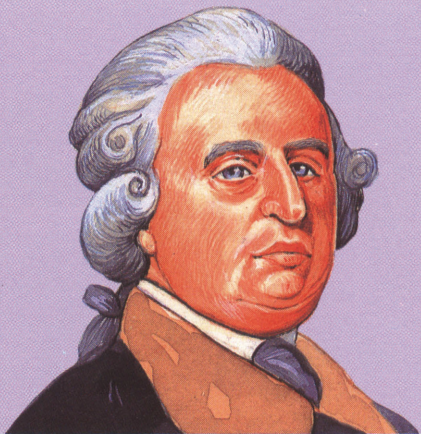
The **clergy** made up the First Estate. They included archbishops, bishops, abbots, parish priests, monks and nuns.

The leaders of the clergy, such as bishops, were all wealthy, and lived like nobles. They tended to support Louis because of the privileges they had. They paid no taxes.

The rest of the clergy – the parish priests, for example – were no better off than the ordinary people who lived with them in the villages, except that they paid no taxes either.

TOTAL = 400,000 (2%)

The King
The King of France ruled over everybody. Louis XVI was called an *absolute monarch*. This meant that his word was law. The King needed taxes from the people for his army, for the public officials and for the luxurious life that the royal family led at the Palace of Versailles.



The Second Estate

The **nobles** made up the Second Estate. They were nobles by birth, and were landowners. Most of them had wealth and some power. In some parts of the country, though, the nobles were not particularly rich.

Although most nobles were wealthy, they did not pay taxes either. Some nobles thought that the King and his ministers were running the country badly.

TOTAL = 150,000 (1%)



The Third Estate

This group consisted of **everybody else** in France. Some **middle-class** people, such as merchants, bankers and doctors, were quite wealthy but they had no chance of power. They had to pay taxes.

The **peasants** and the town workers paid heavy taxes. Many were poor but some peasants were reasonably comfortable. No one in this estate had any say in the running of the country.

Middle classes 1 million (4%)
Peasants 22 million (85%)
Other workers 2 million (8%)

TOTAL = 25 million (97%)



Source B This print, by an unknown artist, shows a peasant carrying the weight of the other two estates.

- How can you tell that the woman carrying the weight is the poorest?
- What do you think this picture is trying to show?

1 The following people were all alive at the time of the Revolution:

- ◆ Archbishop Brienne of Toulouse
- ◆ Claire Lacombe, an actress from Marseille
- ◆ Marie-Rose Barre, a lace-worker from Paris
- ◆ Comte (Count) de Réveillon, a factory owner in Paris
- ◆ Louis Legendre, a butcher from Paris
- ◆ Georges Couthon, a lawyer from near Lyon
- ◆ Jacques Roux, a parish priest from Brittany
- ◆ Duchesse de Polignac, governess to the King's children

a Copy this list and next to each name write the number of the estate to which he or she belonged.

b For each person, try to work out whether he or she would have supported the King, or opposed him.

c What patterns can you see from the list that you have completed?

2 Look at the information on page 11. Design either a bar chart or a pie chart showing the number of people in each estate. Colour it in, using the colours of the French flag – red, white and blue.

3 Each estate included some people who were unhappy with the way France was run. Explain what you think each estate had to complain about.



Calls for reform

*It is one thing to complain about the way a country is run; it is another thing to decide how to improve things.
What did people think about the government in France? What changes were called for?*

Freedom

Calls for change in France were not new. There were so many things wrong with the country. In the second half of the eighteenth century, a number of writers set out their ideas for a new and improved society. One of these was the famous writer Voltaire. He believed that French people would have no freedom as long as the King of France was an absolute monarch with complete power.

England was not a democracy like it is today. Very few people had the right to vote. But the King did have to listen to Parliament. Voltaire believed that there was greater freedom there.

At this time, as well as the ordinary people of France without freedom, there were also 600,000 black people living in the French colonies in Africa and the West Indies. A society was formed in 1788 with the aim of banning slavery and the slave trade.

Source B — The awakening of the Third Estate

A man from the Third Estate is breaking free from his chains. He is saying, 'My goodness, it's time I woke up! The weight of my chains is giving me terrible nightmares.'

- What do you think the chains represent?

Source A — Voltaire is very impressed with the example of England

'The way the English run their country is excellent. This is not normally the case with a monarchy, but because there is a parliament, English people have rights. They are free to go where they wish; they can read what they like. They have the right to be tried properly by law and all individuals are free to follow the religion of their choice.'

Voltaire, *Lettres Anglaises*, written in about 1750

