

Name _____ **The French Revolution**

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The French Revolution refers to the period of time during which the people of France revolted against the king and established a new form of government. The revolution lasted for 10 years. Prior to the revolution, there were three general social classes in France. The highest class was called the First Estate, and was made up of church leaders. The Second Estate was made up of the aristocracy. But most of the people belonged to the Third Estate. While the First and Second Estates lived privileged lives, the Third Estate did most of the work and paid most of the taxes.

The French Revolution began in 1789 when a group of about 1,000 merchants and craftsmen, members of the Third Estate, stormed a prison called the Bastille in order to get the gunpowder stored there. The king had not responded to their demands for more say in the government, and they believed he was preparing to use military force against them.



After their success at the Bastille, the Third Estate created the National Assembly, made up of their own representatives. This body demanded certain rights from King Louis XVI and soon took over the country. It changed its name several times, and during the Reign of Terror (1793/1794) it was known as the National Convention. Its leader was a man named Robespierre. He led the passing of laws requiring that those suspected of treason be arrested and put to death by guillotine. Many were executed during this time, including Queen Marie Antoinette and Robespierre's political rivals.

The French Revolution ended both monarchy and feudalism in France, and reduced the political power of the Catholic church. It introduced the idea of liberty for the common man, to include the abolishment of slavery and women's rights — ideas which would go on influence many contemporary governments, including that of the United States.