

Name _____

Date _____

The French Revolution - Answer Key

Use the text to answer each question below.

1. What caused the French Revolution? In two words, extreme inequality. Dressed in lavish clothing, the royal family relaxed while munching on banquets at their palace in Versailles. Meanwhile, France was almost completely out of money. In the streets, the French people were beginning to starve.

In addition to the king's absurd amount of luxury, other social and class issues inspired his overthrow. Before the revolution, France's society was officially broken up into three social classes, which together comprised the Estates-General. The First Estate was made up of members of the clergy, or church leaders. Nobility and royalty comprised the Second Estate. These were the people who were lucky enough to be born into very wealthy French families. The Third Estate included the bourgeoisie, or middle class, and peasants. But here was the problem: The top two estates were just 2% of the population, and the bourgeoisie and peasants made up 98 percent. This meant that for every 100 people in France, two were wealthy and 98 were middle class or poor.

Which of the following was true of French society in the years before the French Revolution?

- A. The king deeply understood the hardships of the French people.
- B. Most people were part of the First and Second Estate.
- C. There were more wealthy people than poor people. ☒

- D.** The Third Estate made up the majority of the population.

According to the passage, "The Third Estate included the bourgeoisie, or middle class, and peasants," and "the top two estates were just 2% of the population, and the bourgeoisie and peasants made up 98 percent."

2. King Louis XVI called a meeting of the Estates-General for the first time in over a hundred years. At the Estates-General, each estate got one vote, which meant that 98% of the population got only one vote. The "majority" of the three estates decided that the Third Estate should pay 100% of the taxes to help the country raise money. But the people of the Third Estate thought this was ridiculous. Why should they have to pay when the nobles had so much more money? The price of bread already took up half of a poor person's daily pay. The Third Estate would starve if they were taxed more.

After that meeting, the Third Estate created its own government, the National Assembly. On June 20, 1789, the members tried to meet and found that King Louis XVI had locked the doors to their building. Desperate to have their meeting, members of the National Assembly went to a local tennis court. There, they swore the Tennis Court Oath, vowing that the future government would be a democracy. The power to govern would come from the people and not from a king.

Why did the National Assembly swear an oath on a tennis court?

- A. because they believed tennis should be the national sport
- B. because they wanted to meet outside where King Louis XVI could see them
- C. because King Louis XVI had prevented them from meeting inside a building
- D. because they wanted to prevent the First Estate from playing tennis



C.

because King Louis XVI had prevented them from meeting inside a building

According to the passage, "the members tried to meet and found that King Louis XVI had locked the doors to their building," and they "went to a local tennis court" because they were "desperate to have a meeting."

3. Members of the National Assembly needed weapons to fight against the king. They stole thousands of guns and cannons, but they still needed the gunpowder to use them. They knew they could find gunpowder at the Bastille. The Bastille was a prison in Paris, but at this time it had only a few prisoners. More importantly, the National Assembly considered the prison to be a symbol of royal power. On July 14, 1789, the National Assembly attacked the prison. This historic event was called the Storming of the Bastille.

At first, the National Assembly crowd tried to negotiate with Bernard-René de Launay, the military governor of the prison. But when the negotiations weren't going fast enough, the crowd turned into a violent mob. The guards of the Bastille opened fire on the mob, and over 100 people died. Outnumbered, Launay and his men raised a white flag and surrendered the Bastille to the revolutionaries.

The people of the National Assembly walked away victorious. With the bloody terrors of the fight still ahead, their spirits were high. The French had no idea how challenging freedom would prove to be. The French celebrate their independence on the Fourteenth of July, Bastille Day.

Why did the National Assembly go to the Bastille?

A. to search for guns and cannons



B.

to find gunpowder

According to the passage, members of the National Assembly “stole thousands of guns and cannons, but they still needed the gunpowder to use them. They knew they could find gunpowder at the Bastille.”

C. to kill the guards

D. to free the prisoners

4. Leaders of the National Assembly wrote a document called The Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen. This document, like the US Constitution and Declaration of Independence, used many ideas from the Enlightenment. The Assembly aimed to guarantee "liberty, property security and resistance to oppression." The document set up a representative government. The bourgeoisie and peasants of the Third Estate would have more power in this new government. The nobles of the Second Estate didn't like the idea of a representative government. It meant that they would lose power. Many noble people fled France because they feared that those who had threatened the king would threaten them next. It turns out they were right. After the storming of the Bastille, the French countryside became a dangerous place. Some revolutionaries attacked the estates and manors of the rich. July through August of 1789 was known as the "Great Fear."

Starving and upset over the skyrocketing price of bread, thousands of women stole weapons and forcefully marched all the way to the king's palace at Versailles. The mob of women demanded that the king submit to the National Assembly. He did.

The writers of The Declaration of the Rights of Men and of the Citizen would most likely agree with which of these statements?

A. Revolution is never justified.



B.

All men have a right to personal freedom.

According to the passage, the Assembly aimed to "guarantee 'liberty, property security and resistance to oppression,' in the Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen.

C. The noble class is best suited to lead the government.

D. No form of government can represent the will of the people.

5. The National Assembly continued to meet. In the meetings, a group called the Jacobins began to have more influence. The Jacobins were the most radical of the revolutionaries. They believed that the new government should completely eliminate the king. And they did. When King Louis XVI tried to flee the country with his family, the Jacobins caught him and chopped off his head!

The Jacobins used violence against anyone who didn't agree with their views. Their leader was Maximilien de Robespierre. Influenced by Enlightenment thinker, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, he believed that people should be governed by the general will. He thought the government should act only in ways that are supported by all citizens. As people came to agree with Robespierre, he got addicted to the power. Soon, if you didn't agree with Robespierre, he'd have his men chop off your head. Even though the National Assembly had fought for rights for all, Robespierre now had almost complete control. His rule was known as the Reign of Terror.

Some people fought back against the Jacobins. Eventually, people grew tired of Robespierre and his reign of terror, and he was executed in July 1794. Who would lead after that?

Which of these best describes how Robespierre ruled?

- A. peacefully
- C. weakly

B. generously



D.

violently

According to the passage, Robespierre “got addicted to the power,” and “if you didn’t agree with Robespierre, he’d have his men chop off your head.” His rule, known as the “Reign of Terror” is best described as violent.

6. The guillotine was a device used to decapitate people, or cut off their heads. The Jacobins used it to execute people who spoke against them. The unlucky person stuck his or her head underneath the blade, and then the executioner let the blade drop down quickly on the neck. Even though the death machine was terrifying and deadly, the guillotine was actually inspired by the Enlightenment. Compared to older execution techniques, such as hanging, burning or the using the breaking wheel, people in revolutionary France considered the guillotine to be a gentler, more humane way to execute people. Either way, people were still killing other people.

King Louis XVI, his wife, Marie Antoinette, and thousands of others who crossed Robespierre met their fate under the blade of guillotine. And the guillotine wasn't just some old historical horror. The French continued to use the guillotine until 1981, when France outlawed capital punishment.

At the time of the French Revolution, the guillotine was considered



- A. the least cruel form of capital punishment.

According to the passage, the guillotine was considered to be “a gentler, more humane way to execute people” and was in use “until 1981, when France outlawed capital punishment.”

- B. the most painful way to punish criminals.

- C. the quickest way to hang a prisoner.

- D. outdated and inhumane.

7. After the death of Robespierre, the Jacobins lost power. The new, less extreme government was called the Directory. During this time, a young man named Napoleon Bonaparte had been rising through the ranks of the military. In 1799, he launched a coup d'état, or government takeover, of the Directory. He called the new government a consulate, which was supposed to reflect the will of the people. But in reality, Napoleon had absolute power. He had total control. By 1804, he had crowned himself Emperor Napoleon I, ruler for life.

Napoleon conquered Europe and created the French empire. By 1812, he ruled an expanded France and parts of Italy. He set up his relatives to rule Spain, Holland, the kingdom of Italy, the Swiss Republic, the Grand Duchy of Warsaw and most of Germany. He worked to spread the freedoms of the French Revolution, which sent nobility running, as they were losing their rights.

In France, he is known for the Napoleonic Code. This set of laws included many of the gains from the revolution in terms of property rights, ability to choose a profession and religious tolerance.

How did Napoleon Bonaparte come to power?

- A. He killed Robespierre and became the new leader of the Jacobins.
- B. He was elected by the Third Estate to lead the Directory.
- D. The Directory decided to become a consulate with Napoleon as leader.



C.

He overthrew the Directory and created a new government.

According to the passage, Napoleon “launched a coup d'état, or government takeover, of the Directory. He called the new government a consulate.”

8. Napoleon's empire couldn't last forever. In fact, it really lasted only a few years. As he grew more and more power hungry, Napoleon decided that conquering Russia would be the jewel in his crown. Even though Russia was as large as his entire existing empire, Napoleon thought he could conquer it. That is, as long as the defeat happened before the terrible Russian winter.

Napoleon marched into Russia in June with 600,000 men. The Russians slowly retreated, drawing Napoleon and his army farther and farther into Russia and closer and closer to winter. When Napoleon's army reached Moscow, the Russians lit the city on fire and destroyed all supplies. In October, the French were forced to begin a retreat back to France, and they suffered through a terrible winter. Some men were so cold and desperate that they killed their horses to sleep inside the warm bodies. By the time Napoleon's army escaped, only around 100,000 of the original 600,000 men were still with him. This catastrophic military loss would be echoed more than a century later when the Nazis invaded Russia and got stuck in a brutal Russian winter.

Which of these best describes Napoleon's invasion of Russia?

A. peaceful and successful



B.

a disaster for Napoleon

The passage describes Napoleon's invasion of Russia as a "catastrophic military loss," in which men "suffered through a terrible winter" and only "100,000 of the original 600,000 men" were with him by the time the army escaped.

C. Napoleon's last military victory

D. Napoleon's biggest achievement