**A Level History – Bridging Materials**

France in Revolution, 1774-1815

Welcome to A Level History! This pack contains your bridging materials for the France in Revolution component of A Level History.

This pack is designed to introduce you to the subject matter, ensuring that you begin the course in September with an understanding of the ‘Big Picture’ of this revolutionary period, enabling you to visualise its impact and laying the foundations for our course by exploring what France was like before the Revolution.

The activities will take you a few hours to complete, so don’t attempt to do it all at once! You will find it helpful to break up the work to keep it manageable. Please don’t hesitate to get in touch if you have any questions, as I’ll be happy to help you out.

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**Section 1: The Big Picture of France in Revolution**

When we refer to the ‘French Revolution’ it is tempting to see it as an ‘event’ and, often, one particularly associated with the storming of the Bastille in July 1789. However, this is somewhat misleading as there is no single ‘event’, rather this is a revolutionary period where we see the even the meaning of ‘revolution’ shift over time. By completing the activities below, you will not only gain an overview of how events developed over time, you will also get a sense of the changing nature of the revolutionary period.

**Activity 1**

* Read through the information in the central column which tells the story of the development of the French revolution.
* Give each period a ‘headline’ – this should be a few words which you feel summarises that particular period. Feel free to be imaginative and make it a newspaper-style headline.
* Select the most important details and summarise each period in a maximum of 3 bullet points

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| Give each stage a ‘headline’ |  | Summarise each stage in up to 3 bullet points |
| e.g.  ‘Absolute power and luxury?’ | **1774-1788**  Louis XVI had been King of France since 1774. He was an absolute monarch, which meant that theoretically there were no constitutional limits on his power. The King alone appointed his ministers and he could pass whatever laws and follow whatever policies he wished. However, in practice he needed the co-operation of his ministers and of the ruling class to be able to govern effectively.  One much-hated symbol of his power was the *lettre de cachet.* This was a letter, signed by Louis and countersigned by one of his ministers, which allowed the immediate imprisonment of any Frenchman or women. There was no right of appeal against this and it was often used for the King’s political opponents.  The royal family lived in luxury at the Palace of Versailles, which is 12 miles outside of Paris. Thousands of people lived at the royal court and Versailles was the centre of political power in France.  French society was strictly divided into three estates. The first estate comprised the clergy (members of the Church), the second estate comprised the nobility and the third estate comprised the ‘commoners’ (i.e. everyone who was not clergy or nobility). There were vast inequalities in wealth and influence, for example those in the third estate paid the majority of the taxes but had no voice in politics. | e.g.   * King had ‘absolute’ power in theory |
|  | **1788-1789**  In August 1788, the French government was bankrupt. Louis was forced to call the Estates-General, an elected body that represented all the people of France that had not met for 175 years. When it met in May 1789 the complaints that had been building came to a head. The delegates of the common people (the third estate) declared themselves to be the National Assembly and swore an oath not to disband until France had a constitution which gave the people a say in government. This was known as the Tennis Court Oath. Some argue that this was the moment that the revolution began, as the delegates of the Third Estate were defying the authority of the King.  By July 1789, there was widespread disorder in Paris after Louis dismissed the popular minister Necker. There were also rumours that the King was planning to use force against the new National Assembly. This led to Parisians storming the Bastille on 14th July, the prison where some of those imprisoned under the *lettres de cachet* had been held. It appeared that Louis had lost control of Paris.  Opposition to the government was not restricted to Paris and, in the summer of 1789, the ‘Great Fear’ swept the countryside. This was when peasants (members of the third estate) attacked the property and privileges of the nobility.  Worse was to come in October 1789, when the thousands of the urban poor (mostly women) marched from Paris to Versailles and brought the royal family back to Paris. From this point on, the king and the royal family were under the scrutiny of the Paris mob. |  |
|  | **1789-92**  Despite sporadic violence, particularly in Paris, thus far this was a moderate revolution with Louis XVI still ruling France.  From 1789 until Autumn 1791, delegates of the National Assembly drafted a new constitution and, for just over a year (until September 1792) France experimented with a constitutional monarchy (where there is legal framework which limited the monarch’s power). Throughout this period, the key question that was difficult to answer was how much power the king should have.  The process was almost undermined in June 1791, when the King fled Paris. There was a rise in republican sentiment as many people believed the king had betrayed the revolution. This resulted in the first violent clash between members of the Third Estate, when around 50 people were killed at a republican demonstration at the Champ de Mars in Paris.  During this period, the revolutionaries also attacked the privileges and wealth of the Church by selling Church lands, re-organising the Church and attempting to make all members of the clergy swear an oath of loyalty to the state. As France was such a deeply Catholic country, these changes would have far-reaching consequences.  On the whole however, this period was largely peaceful and witness some of the most iconic legislative developments. For example, the August Decrees in 1789 abolished feudalism, which removed the estates system. The Declaration of the Rights of Man and the Citizen was also issued in 1789, this enshrined the core values of the Revolution – liberty, equality and fraternity. |  |
|  | **August 1792-June 1793**  Towards the end of 1792, the revolution became more extreme in response to twin threats – from threats and divisions within France and from foreign countries at war with France. This had several important results:   1. Sporadic popular violence in Paris. In September 1792, around 1500 prisoners were murdered because they were seen as a threat. 2. France’s politics became polarized (divided). In September 1792, the monarchy was abolished (making France a republic), the king was put in trial and, in January 1793, he was guillotined in the centre of Paris. 3. Divisions within France led to civil war. In March 1793, a Catholic and Royal army emerged in the Vendée (in western France) and it took an army of 100,000 the rest of the year to defeat them. 4. The revolutionary government became increasingly powerful, it ordered conscription into the army to defend France against its external enemies and began to introduce harsher measures to suppress those who opposed the government within France. |  |
|  | **June 1793-July 1794**  Violence increased further in a period which became known as ‘The Terror’; a period in which approx. 250,000 Frenchmen and women died. The Committee of Public Safety, dominated by Robespierre, became the most important government body in France and was effectively the executive power.  One of the many changes the CPS made was a speeding up the trial process in the Revolutionary Tribunals. As a result, anyone charged with opposition to the revolution could be arrested, tried, convicted and executed within 24 hours. The victims of the Terror came from a cross-section of society, from ex-aristocrats to priests and peasants.  There was also a Religious Terror during this period. Notre Dame Cathedral became the ‘Temple of Reason’, churches across Paris were closed and a new calendar was introduced to remove links between daily life and religion.  The revolutionary government of France had ostensibly defeated both internal and external enemies, yet the Terror continued until July 1794. It ended when it began to turn on itself, after key revolutionaries such as Danton were executed, politicians, worried they would be next, plotted to overthrown Robespierre and he was arrested and guillotined in July 1794 in the Coup of Thermidor. |  |
|  | **1794-99**  From this point, there was a return to moderation and an end to government by Terror. It was not entirely peaceful as there was revenge against the people responsible for perpetrating the Terror and against a resurgent tide of royalists; however, this was far away from the scale of the Terror.  From 1795, the more democratic ‘Directory’ was elected and governed France for four, largely peaceful years, restoring a considerable amount of stability.  This period also witnessed success in the war against external enemies, which meant that French territory expanded as well as the strength and prestige of the army. |  |
|  | **1799-1815**  Although the Directory was more moderate and democratic, it was also rife with corruption. In November 1799, the Directory was overthrown in a military coup by Napoleon Bonaparte and the army. Napoleon had become a national hero through his role in dealing with rebellion in France and in the war against France’s enemies.  Napoleon was able to consolidate his position and increase his power so that, in 1804, he became the emperor of France. His rule brought a greater degree of stability to France. Under Napoleon, France and the French Empire underwent significant reforms which saw the modernised the French state and legal system. His civil code, the *Code Napoléon*, formed the foundation for the legal systems of many European countries.  This was also a period characterised by war and, at some points, France was at war with most of Europe. At its peak the French Empire included territory in Spain, Italy, Germany, Austria and Poland and Napoleon’s *Grande Armée* contained over 1 million soldiers.  In 1815, Napoleon abdicated his power for a second time, as a result of military losses, and was replaced by Louis XVIII, the brother of Louis XVI. Napoleon died in exile on the British island of St Helena. |  |

**Activity 2**

Now that you have established an overview of the course, complete the reflection activities below to draw out patterns and explore turning points.

1. In the space below draw a flow diagram showing who governed France at each of the different stages.

1774-1789

Louis XVI (Absolute Monarchy)

1. How did the scale and pattern of violence change over time? (Consider which period(s) saw the most violence and why this might be)
2. How much do you think France changed over the revolutionary period 1774-1815? (You might find it helpful to break this down to consider: social change, political change, religious change, economic change)

**Section 2: France before the Revolution**

In order to understand the course and nature of the revolution in France, it is essential to have a firm grasp of France’s political, economic, religious and social context before 1789. The first part of our course will focus on this in September and you can put yourself in a strong position by laying the foundations through your own research exploring the question: ‘What was the *Ancien Regime*?’

**What is the task?**

You should use the information attached, and your own research if you are investigating the topics listed under ‘more challenging’, to produce a one-two page summary of the *Ancien Regime*. It is up to you how you present your findings; aim to include photographs, images and charts as these will be useful in helping you to understand and remember the key information.

Essential content:

* Government of the *Ancien Regime*
  + Louis XVI and Marie Antoinette
  + Versailles and the royal court (you will find it useful to explore the website for the Palace of Versailles to get a sense of its grandeur and history: <http://en.chateauversailles.fr/discover>)
  + How the government worked and the problems the government faced
* Social system of the *Ancien Regime*
  + Overview of the estates system
  + Summary of the key details, responsibilities and privileges of each of the three estates
  + Impact of this social system on the financial and economic problems of France

More challenging:

* The role of the Church and religion in France before the Revolution
* France’s position in the world and international relations in the 18th Century
* Intellectual context of the French Revolution – the Age of Enlightenment
  + <https://www.sparknotes.com/history/european/enlightenment/section3/>
  + <https://alphahistory.com/frenchrevolution/enlightenment/>

**Section 3: The Cultural Impact of France in Revolution**

In this section, you will be exploring the cultural context of the French Revolution and the way in which symbols and art were significant during this period. Now you have an understanding of the major developments of the revolutionary period, this documentary will help you to visualise its significance in a different context. The questions below will help you to structure your notes as you watch the documentary.

# **“The French Revolution: Tearing Up History” (BBC documentary)**

Link for documentary: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4bTQv9ESk2c&t=2910s>

1. Why does the presenter (Dr Richard Clay, art historian) feel that the French Revolution is such an important historical event?
2. What has vandalism got to do with the French Revolution?
3. What are the key features of David’s painting of the Tennis Court Oath?
4. Why was art so important to the French elite before the revolution?
5. What were the links between religion and art? Why did Diderot think this kind of art was dangerous?
6. Describe what happened on 12th July 1789.
7. Why does the presenter claim that the Storming of the Bastille (14th July 1789) was the “greatest act of iconoclasm” of the revolution?
8. What does he say was the next greatest act of iconoclasm? Why?
9. How did the French people symbolically react to the royal family’s attempt to escape to Varennes (June 1791)?
10. How did the French people symbolically react to the attack on the Tuileries Palace (August 1792)?
11. What happened to the cathedral of Nôtre Dame, and churches in general, in 1793?

**Additional recommendations:**

If you wish to immerse yourself further in the French revolution (and why wouldn’t you?!), here are some recommended podcasts and videos. To ensure that you are actively engaging as you listen/watch, I would recommend taking notes in some form:

* A 15-minute ‘Crash Course’ of the Revolution: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5fJl_ZX91l0>
* A 15-minute ‘Crash Course’ about Napoleon: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Pd6E38FfuMg>
* BBC In Our Time Podcasts:
  + Montesquieu and the Englightenment: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b0b5qnfx>
  + Marie Antoinette: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/m000117y>
  + Legacy of the French Revolution: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/p00547gg>

For further reading, the following books are very accessible and informative introductions to the French Revolution:

* Ian Davidson, *The French Revolution: From Enlightenment to Tyranny* (2017)
* William Doyle, *The French Revolution: A Very Short Introduction* (2001)