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The Three Estates Teacher Page

Overview:

This lesson will get students to think about the role that the Three Estates played in laying the groundwork for the French Revolution, focusing in particular on the growing discontent of the Third Estate. The primary sources used in this lesson should highlight how fractured French society was and underline the growing tensions at the time. The political cartoon students will look at has virtually unreadable captions, but for the purposes of this lesson they only need to look at the images in the cartoon.

Objectives:

Students will:

- analyze a political cartoon
- identify the roles and importance of each of the Three Estates
- assess whether instability was inherent in French society because of the Three Estates

Web Sites Used in this Lesson:

A political cartoon about the Three Estates can be found at
<http://www.historywiz.com/images/frenchrevolution/threestates.jpg>

Abbe Sieyes's famous essay "What is the Third Estate?" can be found at
<http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/mod/sieyes.html>

Strategies:

Ask students if classes exist in today's society and what those classes might be. Have them decide which class could be considered most important to the nation as a whole.

Have students complete the worksheet.

Wrap-Up:

Ask students if they think the Three Estates was an inherently unstable basis for French society, and if they think the existence of the Three Estates made conflict inevitable.

Extension Activity:

Pose the following scenario for the class:

Assume you are in the class of nobles during the French Revolution. You recognize how the mood in the country toward your estate is growing more ominous. Develop a plan you could implement to convince the First Estate of the need to change its policies and outlook toward the Third Estate.

The Three Estates Student Worksheet

Introduction:

In French society, the people were divided into three categories called estates. Each estate had specific roles and privileges. The First Estate consisted of the nobility/aristocracy, the Second Estate was the Church, and the Third Estate included most of the rest of French society—the peasants and the “common people.” The Third Estate, the poorest group, provided most of the nation’s taxes. Tax dollars were used to pay for wars, to pay for the kings’ palaces, to support the wealthy lifestyle of the aristocracy, and to pay for other public projects.

Directions:

Political Cartoon on the Three Estates

Go to <http://www.historywiz.com/images/frenchrevolution/threestates.jpg> and answer the following questions:

1. Describe the scene depicted in the cartoon. Who do you think the various people represent?
2. In a few sentences, summarize the message you think the artist is trying to convey.
3. How is the height of each group used to convey the cartoon’s message?
4. Which estate do you think the artist feels is the most important? Explain your reasoning.

5. How effectively do you think the cartoon conveys the artist's message? Explain your reasoning.

“What Is the Third Estate?”: Abbe Sieyes

Go to <http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/mod/sieyes.html> and answer the following questions:

6. Why does Sieyes believe that the Third Estate is the one that “sustain[s] society”? Briefly paraphrase his argument.
7. At one point Sieyes states, “Meanwhile they have dared to impose a prohibition upon the order of the Third Estate. They have said to it: ‘Whatever may be your services, whatever may be your abilities, you shall go thus far; you may not pass beyond!’” What do you think he is referring to here? Explain.
8. In the public function section, why does Sieyes claim the noble class does not really belong to the nation?
9. Why does he conclude the third estate is “the whole”?
10. Do you agree with his point of view? Explain.
11. Do you think Sieyes would have agreed or disagreed with the message conveyed in the political cartoon you viewed earlier in this lesson? Explain your reasoning.

The Storming of the Bastille Teacher Page

Overview:

The fall of the Bastille symbolizes both the triumph of the common people over the aristocracy and liberty being victorious over tyranny. However, the fall of the Bastille actually accomplished very little in military terms. This lesson allows students to study a firsthand account of events at the Bastille, and gets them to consider why this incident—widely considered the opening salvo of the French Revolution—held such significance for the French people.

Objectives:

Students will:

- explain why the victory at the Bastille was important to the common people of France
- decide if the people who fought at the Bastille should be considered heroes
- determine if there is any bias by the author in the article

Web Sites Used in this Lesson:

A newspaper account of the fall of the Bastille can be found at <http://thecaveonline.com/APEH/frrevdocuments.html#anchorbatille>.

The newspaper account is also available as a reproducible handout in the Appendix.

Strategies:

Review with students the events that led to the storming of the Bastille, including poor harvests and food shortages, the meeting of the Estates General, the Tennis Court Oath, and debates over creating a French constitution. Have the class discuss which of the events of 1789 might have produced the most discontent among the lower classes of Paris.

Have students complete the worksheet.

Wrap-Up:

Have the class debate whether there is any single event in American history comparable to the storming of the Bastille in terms of its symbolic importance in demonstrating the triumph of the ideal of “liberty.”

Extension Activity:

Bastille Day is a national holiday in France; have students research what types of celebrations occur in France on Bastille Day and how much the actual facts of the storming of the Bastille are incorporated in these celebrations. You may also want to have them compare Bastille Day celebrations to those on Independence Day in America or Cinco de Mayo in Mexico.