

History
UNFOLDING

THE FRENCH REVOLUTION

THE WAY WE SAW IT
IN ILLUSTRATION AND ART

A Teacher's Resource Booklet

With Lesson Plans and Reproducible Student Activity Assignments



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The well-crafted lessons in MindSparks materials use editorial cartoons, photos, and other visuals to generate spirited yet carefully ordered classroom interactions. The materials are primarily booklets with the ImageXaminer included on CD-ROM. These curriculum supplements cover all major areas of the social studies, with some literature-based materials of interest to language arts teachers. MindSparks products are content-rich materials using visual primary source documents to promote classroom discussion, small-group interaction, and individual student research projects.

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Table of Contents

Introduction	2
Lesson 1	The Approaching Revolution	4
Lesson 2	The Overthrow of the Old Order	8
Lesson 3	The Terror and the Reaction	12
Lesson 4	France Under Napoleon	16

Introduction

The French Revolution

In many ways, the modern political era began with the French Revolution. The revolution put an end to an older concept of society as a hierarchy of hereditary orders of people. In its place, it substituted what was then the radical idea that all citizens are equal under the law. It provided a blueprint for secular revolutions that future radicals would study carefully. The very notion of a political spectrum of “left,” “right,” and “center” evolved from seating arrangements in the revolution’s Legislative Assembly.

The French Revolution’s central rallying cry was “Liberty, Equality, Fraternity.” The phrase can actually be seen as a keynote for the central historical debates of the next 200 years—in which liberalism put its stress on “liberty,” socialism advocated “equality,” and nationalism fostered a strong sense of “fraternity.” The revolution’s excesses also pointed ominously to the future—to the ideologically motivated violence of Lenin, Stalin’s purges, Mao’s Cultural Revolution, and genocides by Hitler and Pol Pot. In ways both admirable and terrible, the French Revolution was indeed a key turning point in world history.

The 12 illustrations in this booklet focus on a number of central themes in the history of the French Revolution. These illustrations are presented in four lessons. Each lesson uses three of the illustrations to explore one broad topic in the overall story. Briefly, the four lessons are as follows:

The Approaching Revolution

The illustrations in this lesson focus on the abuses suffered by France’s poor and middle classes at the hands of a large class of privileged yet unproductive aristocrats.

The Overthrow of the Old Order

The scenes here illustrate the parts played by middle-class political leaders and the poor people of Paris in the early and more moderate stages of the revolution.

The Terror and the Reaction

From the start, radical agitation drove the revolution to the left. Then the threat and outbreak of war fueled the fears on which radicals played as they outbid one another for power. The Terror lasted as long as fears of war remained high. Then it faded quickly.

France Under Napoleon

Worn out by constant pressure to change, the French seemed to turn away from Robespierre’s idea of a “Republic of Virtue.” Instead, they turned to a single, powerful leader to impose order. Napoleon did this. He preserved many of the revolution’s biggest changes. But he also tried to restore in an altered form some of the glory of France’s age of the kings.

Using Photos, Cartoons, and Other Visuals to Teach History

Most textbooks today are full of colorful visuals. But all too often these visuals function primarily as window dressing. They make the text more entertaining, or at least more palatable. But only occasionally do the visuals in textbooks do more than offer simple pictorial reinforcement of ideas already presented in the text. In many cases, they pander to the visual orientation of the young while doing little to help young people master the challenges of the visual media that dominate their lives.

By way of contrast, our approach to using visual materials emphasizes their unique strengths as historical documents. The lessons in this booklet focus students on the visual symbols and metaphors in editorial cartoons, the dramatic qualities of certain photographs, the potential of many images to make abstract ideas more specific and concrete, the implicit biases and stereotypes in certain images, their emotional power, and their ability to invoke the spirit of a time and place. In the process, we make every effort to strengthen students' visual literacy skills in general, as well as their ability to think critically and engage in spirited but disciplined discussions.

How to Use This Booklet

The booklet is divided into four lessons, with three illustrations per lesson. Each lesson consists of the following:

A BACKGROUND INFORMATION SHEET This page provides brief summaries explaining the three illustrations on which the lesson is based and their relevance to the lesson's objectives.

CD-ROM WITH IMAGES The ImageXaminer allows you to project the images for use in your class discussions. The CD-ROM also includes a folder containing all of the discussion questions and follow-up questions in pdf format. All of the images are also in pdf format, should you wish to create overhead transparencies.

DISCUSSION-ACTIVITY SHEETS FOR EACH ILLUSTRATION

Each sheet displays one illustration. It includes a sequence of questions to help you plan an all-class discussion while viewing the images in the ImageXaminer. The questions take students step by step through an analysis of the illustration. If you wish, you may reproduce these pages and hand them out. In addition to the discussion questions on the illustration itself, one or two follow-up activities are suggested. Some of these can be made into individual assignments, while others will work best as small-group or all-class activities.

The French Revolution

**OBJECTIVES
FOR THIS LESSON:**

1. Students will better understand some of the underlying causes of the French Revolution.
 2. Students will better understand the differing points of view of the three estates making up the meeting of the Estates General.
-

The Approaching Revolution

Use the background information on this page to help your students better understand the three illustrations making up this lesson. The questions and activities presented in the rest of the lesson can be used to help students clarify meanings and debate important issues.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION ON THE ILLUSTRATIONS

Illustration 1

In the 1700s, France was the most powerful nation on the continent of Europe. But France was also in trouble. And a major cause of that trouble is suggested by what is shown here. This is the beautiful palace of Versailles, near Paris. Many rich nobles spent much of their lives waiting on France's king here. They passed the time flattering officials, seeking favors, gossiping, and living in idle luxury. On their own estates, they had done little to develop their farm lands. Increasingly, the nobles as a class were seen as unproductive, even silly. So, too, were the higher Catholic clergy, often nobles themselves. At the same time, the Enlightenment—a new spirit of reason and open debate—was spreading. Even the upper classes often approved of it. In doing so, they opened themselves up to growing criticism and attack.

Illustration 2

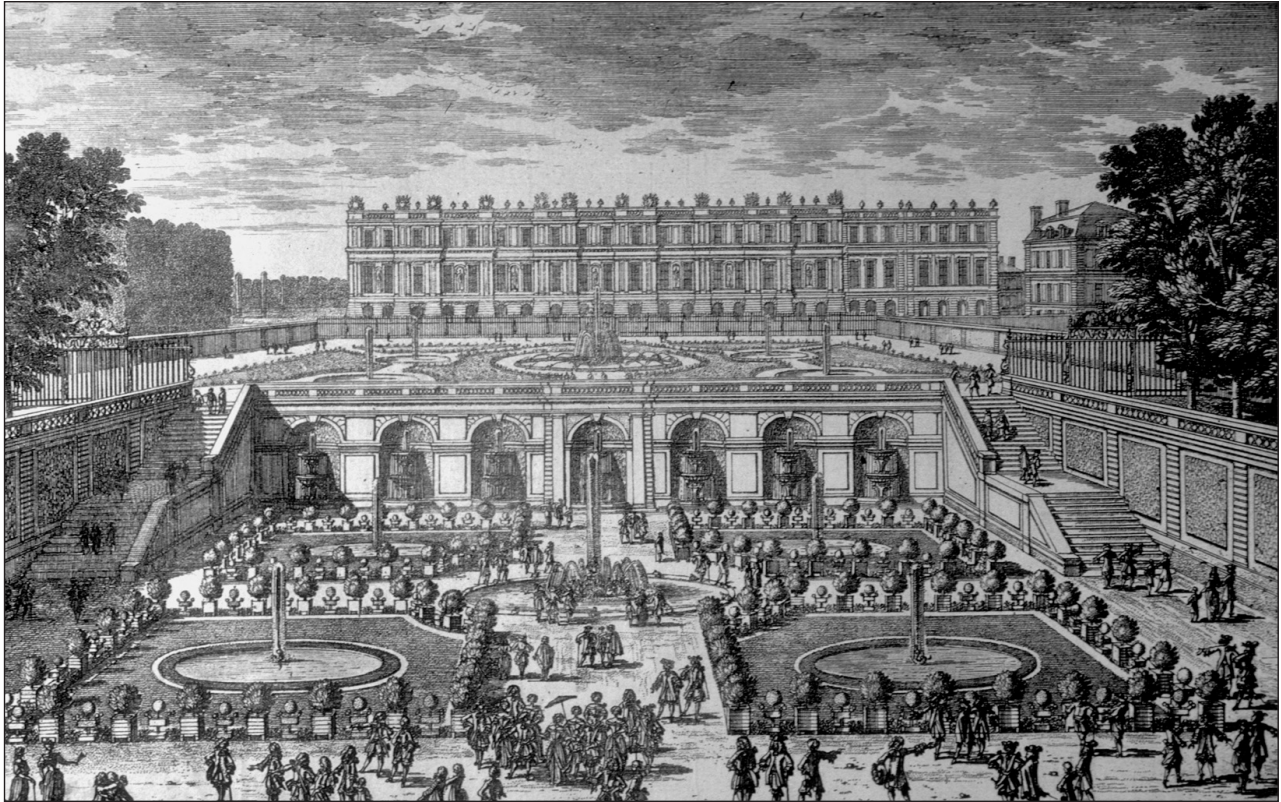
By the 1780s, France was deep in debt from its wars and other wasteful expenses. Poor peasants in the countryside were paying a huge share of the taxes. The nobles and clergy paid little or nothing. Anger was building due to food shortages, rising prices, and constant government demands for more taxes. Yet this drawing offers a very different view of French society at the time. It is titled "France Receives the Three Orders." It shows France presenting the three orders (called "estates") to King Louis XVI. These three estates are the clergy (first estate), the nobility (second estate), and commoners (third estate). The king's portrait is on top, and that of his popular minister of finance Jacques Necker is below it.

Illustration 3

By 1789, France was a bomb set to go off. The fuse was lit at the meeting shown in this illustration. This is the Estates General on May 5, 1789, at Versailles. The Estates General was a meeting of representatives of the three estates. The Estates General had not met since 1614. But in 1789, King Louis XVI was forced to call such a meeting if he hoped to persuade the nobles and clergy to accept new taxes. Necker convinced the king to double the third estate's representation to equal that of the other two combined. Louis wanted the meeting to make a few changes, accept new taxes, and go home. That was not to be.

Lesson 1—The Approaching Revolution

Illustration 1



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Discussing the Illustration

1. This drawing shows the formal gardens at the most important palace in France. Can you name it and the French king who had it built? How would you describe the style of these gardens and the palace itself? What features impress you most?
2. In the 17th century, Louis XIV required thousands of wealthy French nobles to spend much of their time at Versailles. What is meant here by “nobles”?
3. At Versailles, many of the nobles had little to do but gossip, engage in intrigue, and compete for the king’s attention and favors. Elaborate rules even governed how the king would get dressed in the morning and which nobles would assist him. What reason might Louis XIV and other French Kings have had for insisting on these rules and rituals?
4. Do you think France's millions of poor peasants resented this elaborate court life, or might they have admired its splendor and the spectacle of it all?

Follow-up Activities

1. People always seem to be fascinated with the way the rich and famous live. Look through several recent magazines for photos of wealthy people today. Try to find five illustrations of French nobility at Versailles or elsewhere. Also look in magazines for five photos of wealthy people today relaxing in glamorous settings. Share these illustrations with the class and discuss the differences and similarities between the lifestyle of the French nobles and the lifestyles of the rich and famous as suggested by the photos you have found.
2. Read a biography or an article about King Louis XIV of France. Louis XIV lived from 1638 to 1714. Make sure the book or article describes in detail the daily duties of courtiers at Versailles. Based on what you learn, make up an imaginary daily schedule for a courtier at Versailles. Use this schedule to spark a class discussion about why Louis XIV had the courtiers live this way and whether this was good or bad for France as a whole.

Illustration 2



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Discussing the Illustration

1. This drawing is from the 1780s in France. It is titled, “France Receives the Three Orders.” Which figure in the drawing do you think stands for France?
2. France is presenting the three orders to the king of France (whose portrait is on top) and to his minister of finance Jacques Necker, whose portrait is just below the king’s. Who was the king of France in the 1780s?
3. The three orders are shown as three individuals. In a way, they stand here for the entire French nation. The orders were also called “estates.” What were the three estates in France in the 1780s?
4. From the way the estates are drawn, do you think the artist sees France as a nation about to plunge into a bitter and violent revolution? What purpose do you think this illustration was meant to achieve?

Follow-up Activities

1. Based on what you know about France in 1789, try to imagine what each of the three estates shown in this drawing might say to the others about the situation facing the nation then. Base your views as much as possible on what you have learned or can learn about the actual peasants, nobles, and Catholic clergy in France in the 1780s. Make a copy of the drawing and write a few lines of dialogue on it for each of the three estates. Write these lines in bubbles above or next to each figure, as in a comic strip. Share the illustration with others in the class.
2. Learn more about King Louis XVI and Queen Marie Antoinette. In the heat of the French Revolution, they were often depicted as cruel and unfeeling in their attitudes toward the poor of their nation. Read more about both of them. Based on what you read, prepare a brief talk to the class in which you make the case for why they do or do not deserve a better reputation than they had during the revolution.

Lesson 1—The Approaching Revolution

Illustration 3



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Discussing the Illustration

1. In May 1789, King Louis XVI of France called this huge group together. It was a meeting of the Estates General. From this name, can you explain who attended this meeting and who they were supposed to represent?
2. Louis XVI called the Estates General together because the government he led was deep in debt and it needed to raise more money. Can you explain what Louis wanted the Estates General to do about this problem?
3. He especially hoped one of the wealthy estates would agree to pay more taxes? Which estate do you think that was?
4. This illustration shows the opening meeting of the Estates General. In a way, it shows what Louis XVI hoped the entire Estates General session would be like. How does it show this? In answering, notice the way people are dressed, how they are organized into sections, what the hall looks like, etc.

Follow-up Activities

1. Small-group activity: Your group's first task is to read more about the Estates General in 1789 and King Louis XVI's hopes for it. Based on what you learn, write a short newspaper story on the first session of the Estates General, on May 5, 1789. Include this illustration in the news story. Now each group member should pretend to be one of the following people:
 - A poor peasant about 100 miles east of Paris
 - A small shopkeeper in Paris
 - A wealthy merchant in Nantes
 - A bishop from a noble but poor family in LyonAs this person, write a letter to the editor expressing your thoughts about the news story and the picture.
2. Before 1789, the last Estates General met in 1614. What big changes had taken place in France and the world since then. How might those changes have affected the views of each of the three estates in France. Discuss this question in class.

The French Revolution

**OBJECTIVES
FOR THIS LESSON:**

1. Students will better understand some of the early events of the French Revolution.
 2. Students will appreciate the leadership roles played in the revolution by the people of Paris and the National Assembly.
-

The Overthrow of the Old Order

Use the background information on this page to help your students better understand the three illustrations making up this lesson. The questions and activities presented in the rest of the lesson can be used to help students clarify meanings and debate important issues.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION ON THE ILLUSTRATIONS

Illustration 1

In May 1789, a big question was how the Estates General would vote. If it voted by estate, the nobles and clergy would defeat the Third Estate two to one. But if it voted by individual members, the Third Estate would win since its numbers were equal to those of the other two combined. When the king hesitated to allow voting by individual members, the Third Estate simply declared itself a “National Assembly” for all of France and asked the other two estates to join it. Then on June 20, it was locked out of its hall. Its members moved to a nearby indoor tennis court and vowed to stay until they had given the nation a constitution. Their vow is known as the Tennis Court Oath. This 1789 French cartoon is called “The Third Estate Awakens.” In it, a figure meant to be the Third Estate breaks his chains reaches for a weapon and says, “It’s about time I woke up, because the weight of my chains was giving me a bad nightmare.” An aristocrat and a clergyman flee in fear.

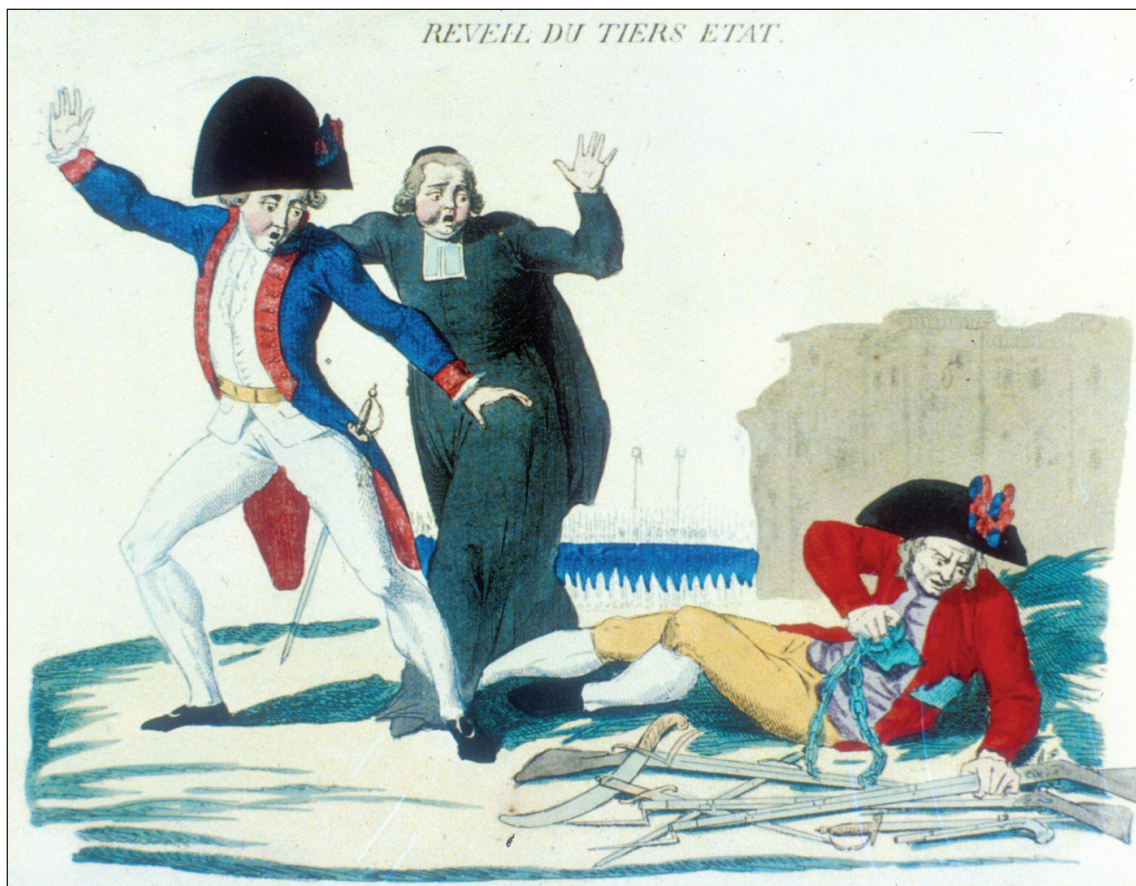
Illustration 2

The king accepted the new Assembly. But when he moved troops to Versailles and dismissed Necker, the people of Paris grew alarmed. They set up a new city government and a National Guard to protect it. On July 14, an angry crowd looking for weapons for this National Guard attacked the Bastille, a royal fortress and prison. In the fall, another Paris mob forced the king and the Assembly to move from Versailles to Paris. Most members of the Assembly were middle-class merchants, lawyers, journalists, doctors, etc. They led the revolution, but the poor, especially the poor of Paris, played a big part in it as well.

Illustration 3

The National Assembly brought vast changes. It approved its famous “Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen.” It ended special privileges for nobles. It took over much Church property and dissolved monastic orders. In 1790, it took a further step against the Catholic Church, enacting the “Civil Constitution of the Clergy.” This gave the state more control over the Church, required election of bishops and required all clerics to take an oath of loyalty to the kingdom. This cartoon makes fun of priests who took the oath, suggesting they were lying by giving them the long noses of those who tell lies. It condemns the Church they led, calling it “Holy Infamy.”

Illustration 1



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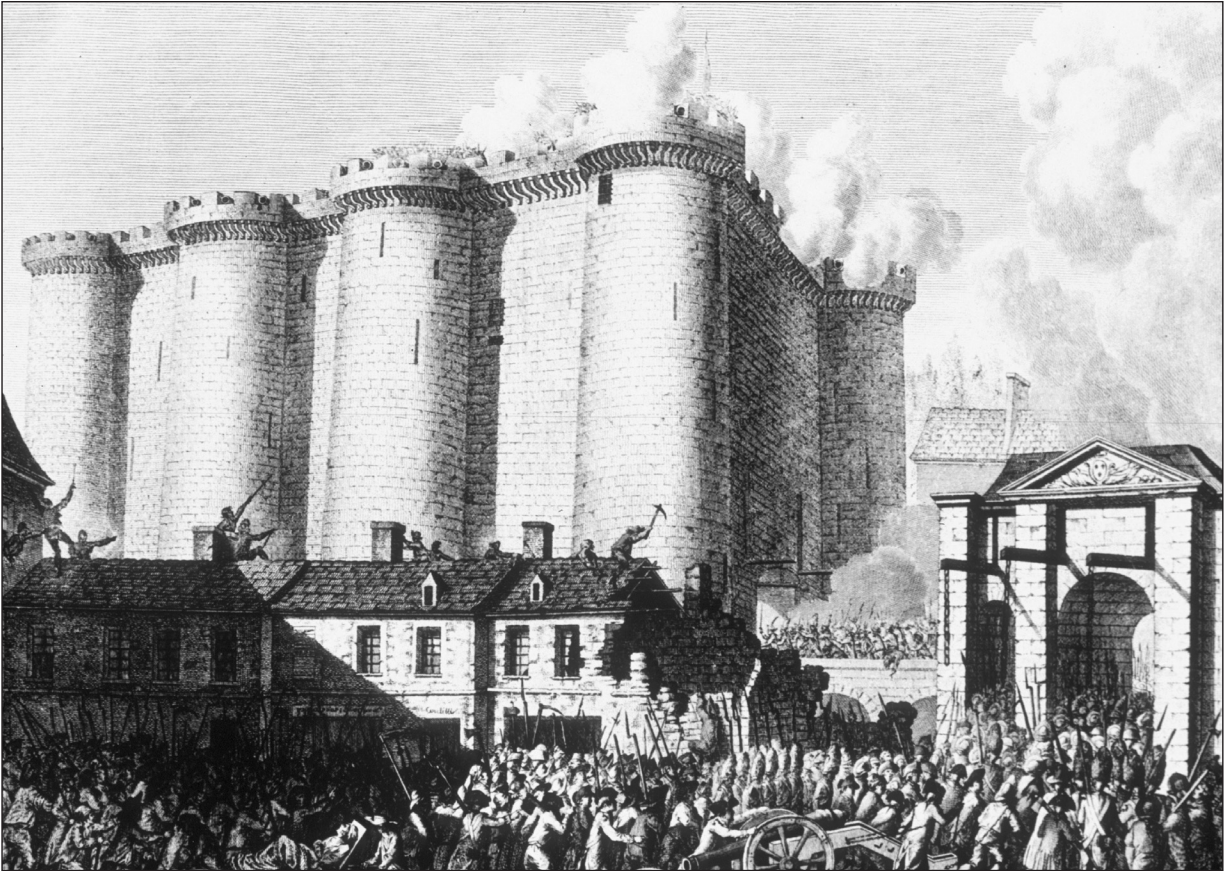
Discussing the Illustration

1. When the Estates General met, the nobles wanted the estates to meet separately, with each estate having one vote. The members of the Third Estate wanted the entire Estates General to meet as one body and vote by head. Can you explain why?
2. In June, the Third Estate declared itself a National Assembly speaking for all of France. It invited nobles and clergy to join it. A few days later, it was locked out of its hall. It moved to a nearby indoor tennis court and took the famous Tennis Court Oath. This 1789 cartoon is titled "The Third Estate Awakens." Which figure in it represents the Third Estate?
3. In the cartoon the Third Estate breaks his chains and says, "It's about time I woke up." Why would the Tennis Court Oath be seen as the time when the Third Estate woke up? What is this figure reaching for? Who are the other two figures and what are they doing? From the way the three figures are drawn, can you tell which side this cartoon's artist seems to favor? Why?

Follow-up Activities

1. A key adviser to Louis XVI when the Estates General met was the popular Jacques Necker. Read more about Necker and try to find out what his hopes were for the 1789 Estates General. Based on what you learn, pretend that you are Necker and have just seen the above illustration. Write a long letter to King Louis XVI giving him your views about the tennis-court meeting and oath taken there by the Third Estate.
2. There were no peasants or urban workers among the Third Estate's representatives. They were mostly members of the middle class, such as merchants, tradesmen, lawyers, etc. However, two of the most important members had a different background. The two members are Abbe Sieyes and Honore Gabriel Riquetti Mirabeau. Write a brief essay explaining what was unusual about their backgrounds as representatives of the Third Estate, and what was important about the part they played in its meetings.

Illustration 2



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Discussing the Illustration

1. On July 11, 1789, Louis XVI dismissed his popular finance minister Jacques Necker. This angered the people of Paris, who were already upset about food shortages, high prices, and rumors of plots by nobles to shut down the National Assembly. On July 14, these fears led to one of the most famous moments in the French Revolution, shown here. Can you explain what this scene shows?
2. The Bastille fell as leaders in Paris were setting up a new city government. This government wanted its own militia. People attacked the Bastille in part to get weapons for this militia. But this was not an attack by a disorganized mob. What in the illustration shows that the attack involved more than just a street mob? What in it helps to show how fearsome and hated the Bastille was?
3. Why was the Bastille so hated by the people of Paris at this point in time? Why has the fall of the Bastille come to be celebrated as a major holiday in France?

Follow-up Activities

1. Read an account of the three or four days leading up to the fall of the Bastille. Also read a detailed account of the attack itself and its aftermath. Your librarian should be able to help you locate books or articles with this information. One book with an account is *The French Revolution* by Francois Furet and Denis Richet, translated by Stephen Hardman (The MacMillan Company, 1970). Based on what you learn, give a brief talk about the fall of the Bastille. Focus your talk on the above illustration. Specifically, answer these two questions: How accurate is the illustration? Does it give the viewer a sense of the meaning and importance of this historic event?
2. Do the same background reading as suggested above for Activity 1. Compare the account you find to the one in your history textbook. How complete is the account in your textbook as compared with the one you found? How accurate is it? Report what you find out to the rest of the class.

Illustration 3



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Discussing the Illustration

1. For two years, the National Assembly made many big changes. Among these, it took many steps to reduce the power of the Catholic Church, which is the subject of this drawing. Why do you think the revolution's leaders chose to act forcefully against the Church?
2. This illustration is about one step against the Church, the "Civil Constitution of the Clergy." It required priests to take oaths of loyalty to the state, and it required that bishops and priests be elected in their districts, not appointed. Who do you think normally appointed the bishops?
3. The priests in this cartoon, including Archbishop Jean-Baptiste-Joseph Gobel, are those who signed the loyalty oath. Do you think this cartoon is critical of the Catholic Church, of the priests who took the oaths and signed them, or of the Civil Constitution of the Clergy itself? What do you think the long noses on these clerics are supposed to mean? What other features add to the cartoon's impact? Why?

Follow-up Activities

1. By July of 1790, the Civil Constitution of the Clergy was only the latest of several actions against the Catholic Church taken by the National Assembly. Read more about the attitude of revolutionary leaders toward the Catholic Church and the steps they took to control it, both before and after the Civil Constitution of the Clergy. Make an outline of these steps and give a brief talk in class to help other students see how the Civil Constitution of the Clergy fits in this ongoing campaign against the Church?
2. The Civil Constitution of the Clergy split the clergy into those who took the oath (called "jurors") and those who refused ("non-jurors"). Many non-jurors were in the countryside, where pro-Church sentiment this was high. This was especially so in the Vendee, in west central France. Later, orders to draft men into the army finally sparked a big uprising there against the revolution. Read more about it. Report on it from the scene and send your recommendations about it to France's revolutionary leaders back in Paris.

The French Revolution

**OBJECTIVES
FOR THIS LESSON:**

1. Students will understand how war added to the revolutionary spirit in France after 1792.
 2. Students will discuss the use of violence by radicals in the French Revolution.
-

The Terror and the Reaction

Use the background information on this page to help your students better understand the three illustrations making up this lesson. The questions and activities presented in the rest of the lesson can be used to help students clarify meanings and debate important issues.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION ON THE ILLUSTRATIONS

Illustration 1

Food shortages and high prices kept the poor angry and led to violence in the countryside, some of it for and some of it against the revolution (opposition to the revolution arose especially in response to the attacks on the Church). In Paris, the poor kept the pressure on the Assembly and the king. In June 1791, Louis XVI tried to flee the country. He was stopped and arrested. This illustration shows him being brought back to Paris, where he was met by a hostile crowd on June 25, 1791. In September 1791, he agreed to a new constitutional monarchy set up by the Assembly. It limited his powers, but it kept him as king.

Illustration 2

The French Revolution terrified Europe's rulers—especially after Louis XVI was taken back to Paris almost a prisoner. Austria and Prussia sent warnings to France. In April 1792, war broke out. The dangers of war alarmed the French and led them to accept drastic steps to defend the revolution. In early 1793, Louis XVI was executed. Queen Marie Antoinette followed him to the guillotine a few months later. Wartime danger led France's leaders to turn power over to a Committee of Public Safety. This committee soon fell under the control of the most radical groups in France and began what came to be called the "Terror." During the Terror, people suspected of being against the revolution were tried by revolutionary tribunals and executed. The tribunals were often little more than mobs. Public executions served as warnings to others not to make trouble. A radical faction known as the "Jacobins" carried the Terror to its height. Its leader, Maximilien Robespierre, wanted to remake society totally into a so-called "Republic of Virtue."

Illustration 3

The British already had a constitutional government that limited the power of its monarchy and gave some representation to its middle class. In the late 1700s, Great Britain was a prosperous commercial society about to launch the Industrial Revolution. The British tended to view the political violence in France with horror. This 1793 British cartoon satirically contrasts "French happiness" (in fact, three starving men) with "English misery" (a table laden with food and four men overeating).

Lesson 3—The Terror and the Reaction

Illustration 1



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Discussing the Illustration

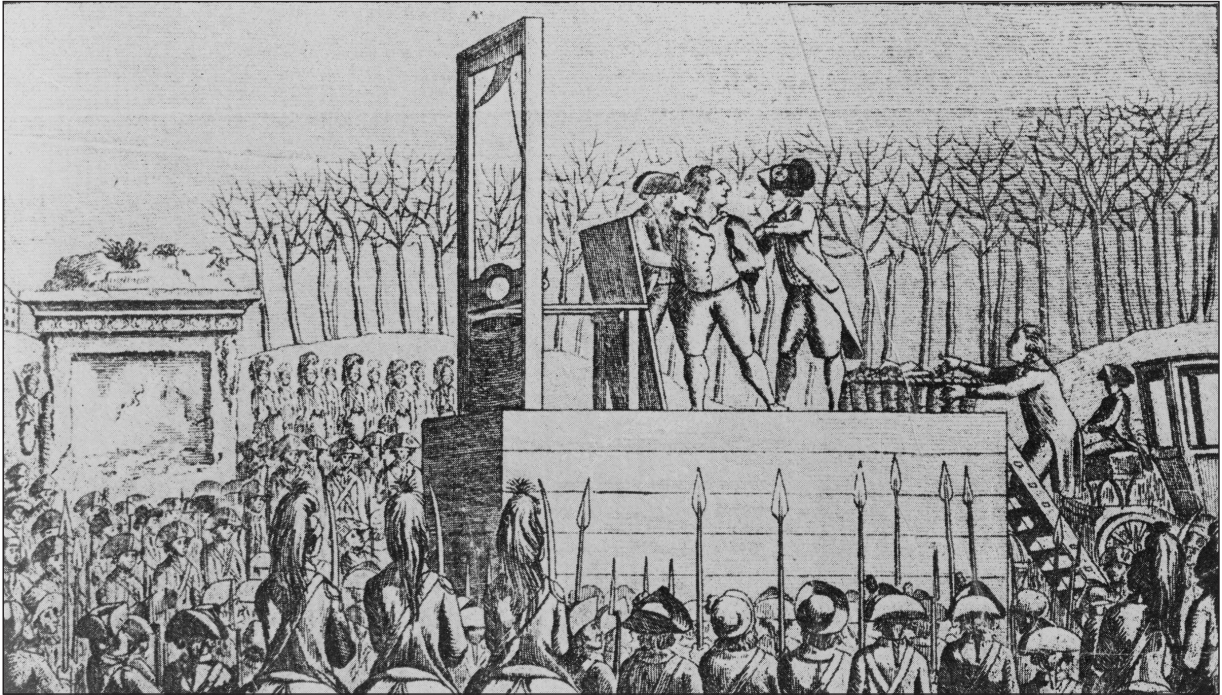
1. In June 1791, Louis XVI and his family secretly left Paris and tried to flee the country. Were they successful?
2. They headed for the border, where troops sent by queen's brother Leopold II were supposed to meet them. From what country were those troops sent?
3. They were spotted in Varennes, arrested, and sent back to Paris. This illustration shows them being brought back into Paris. What do you suppose this crowd thought of Louis XVI at this point? What features suggest its mood? What else adds to your sense of the drama of this moment? How do you think this incident might have altered the crowd's views about what the revolution should do next?
4. The king fled knowing that foreign rulers might help him. The French Revolution terrified rulers all over Europe. Most of them sided with the French king. Why do you suppose they found the revolution so frightening?

Follow-up Activities

1. In June 1791, Louis XVI tried and failed to escape from France. Suppose he had escaped that June. How would that have affected the rest of the French Revolution? Would the revolution have turned out differently? Pretend that Louis did escape. Write a brief, imaginary almanac entry (only three or four paragraphs) on the French Revolution as you think it would have turned out had Louis escaped.
1. Small-group activity: Angry Paris crowds were often used by radical leaders to frighten not only the king but the revolution's legislative bodies as well. First, a National Assembly wrote a constitution. Then in 1791, a new Legislative Assembly took over running the nation. On September 22, 1792, the National Convention took over. Paris mobs and radical leaders played a role in these changes, and in many others. Create a detailed timeline showing key changes in France's revolutionary government from 1789 to 1795 as well as the role Paris and its radical crowds may have played in these changes.

Lesson 3—The Terror and the Reaction

Illustration 2



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Discussing the Illustration

1. When people think of the French Revolution, this is often what they think of. What is taking place here?
2. This particular execution was very special to the revolutionary leaders but also very disturbing to many of them and many others all over Europe. It took place in Paris on January 21, 1793. Can you name the man being executed? Does this illustration express sympathy for Louis XVI, or for his executioners (the revolutionaries)? Or is it completely neutral? What details help you answer this question?
3. Executions of this sort hit their peak in France from June 1793 to July 1794. During those months, fears about war and about the revolution's internal enemies reached a high point. What radical political group or faction controlled the revolution then?
4. Those months in France are known as the "Terror." From this label, can you explain what purpose these executions were supposed to serve. What do you think the purpose of the Terror was?

Follow-up Activities

1. Small-group activity: In 1793 and 1794, the National Convention officially ruled France. But for much of the time, a smaller group, the Committee of Public Safety, actually ran the country. From June 1793 to July 1794, the committee was controlled by Robespierre. Two other radical leaders then were Georges Danton and Jacques Hebert. As a group, read more about all three of these men. Take turns role-playing a discussion among them about the above illustration and the Terror. After practicing, do this role-playing exercise in front of the class.
2. Robespierre dreamed of establishing what he called a "Republic of Virtue." At one point he said:
If the basis of popular government in time of peace is virtue, the basis of government in time of revolution is both virtue and terror.
What did Robespierre mean? Write an essay about his statement. Explain how the statement helps in understanding the Terror. Give your own opinion of both Robespierre and his statement.

Lesson 3—The Terror and the Reaction

Illustration 3



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Discussing the Illustration

1. The Terror was fueled in part by fears because, starting in 1792, it was at war with other European nations who wanted to put an end to its revolution. Can you name some of the nations that France fought between 1792 and 1802?
2. Many of the nations fighting France were ruled by powerful kings. However, the most important of France's enemies was a nation with a king of strictly limited powers and a representative parliament already largely in charge of government. What nation was that?
3. In 1688, England had its own revolution, one that strengthened Parliament greatly. However, most British would have agreed with this cartoon's view of France's revolution. Describe the differences you see between the French figures and the British in the cartoon. What other features add to the contrast it makes? Create a caption for this cartoon that sums up its view of England and revolutionary France.

Follow-up Activities

1. Read the book *A Tale of Two Cities* by the English writer Charles Dickens. Choose several passages that compare England and revolutionary France. Share them in class and discuss how they compare to the cartoon shown here; that is, do they agree with the cartoon completely, partly, or not at all?
2. A key battle early in revolutionary France's wars with other nations was the Battle of Valmy (September 20, 1792). Find descriptions of this battle. To better understand its importance to the French Revolution, you should find out how the war was going from April 1792, up to the Battle of Valmy. You also need to know what was happening in France in those months. Read more about events in France from April to October 1792. Now create a timeline of important battles and key events during the revolution. Use this timeline in a brief talk to the class about the Battle of Valmy and its place in the French Revolution.

The French Revolution

**OBJECTIVES
FOR THIS LESSON:**

1. Students will better understand how the disorder of the French Revolution could lead people to welcome the strength and order provided by Napoleon and the empire he created.
-

France Under Napoleon

Use the background information on this page to help your students better understand the three illustrations making up this lesson. The questions and activities presented in the rest of the lesson can be used to help students clarify meanings and debate important issues.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION ON THE ILLUSTRATIONS

Illustration 1

In July 1794, as the war situation improved, revolutionary excitement faded, and France turned against the Terror. One of the last to be guillotined was Robespierre himself. A government ruled by wealthier members of the middle classes came to power, headed by a five-member Directory. It was distrusted both by radicals and by royalists and others who wanted to restore the old order. In 1795, some royalists and reactionaries attacked the National Convention that had set up the Directory. Army troops led by General Napoleon Bonaparte dispersed them with what was described as a “whiff of grapeshot.” France’s military victories continued. Napoleon came to be seen as a great hero. In 1799, he seized control of the government by force.

Illustration 2

Napoleon ruled France as a king might have. In 1804, he even crowned himself Emperor Napoleon I. This painting shows him doing that, with the approval of the Catholic Pope, who is standing next to him here. Napoleon did not restore France’s old order. Instead, he kept many of the revolution’s biggest changes. Peasants were able to keep the lands they had taken from the estates of the nobles. Also, all citizens remained equal under the law. Napoleon made the central government much more powerful, but that was actually a major aim of most of the revolutionaries as well. One big change he did make was to end the revolution’s attacks on the Catholic Church. In his concordat with the Pope, he gave up some of the government’s control over the Church, though he kept the lands taken from it during the revolution.

Illustration 3

Napoleon led France’s armies to victory after victory in Europe. And his troops carried their revolutionary ideas and pride with them. At first, many Europeans welcomed these new ideas. But soon, they became angry about the way Napoleon’s armies treated them. This treatment led other lands to become just as nationalistic as France was. Then in 1812, Napoleon finally went too far—he tried to conquer Russia. In the end, the bitter Russian winter trapped his forces, dealing him a blow from which he never recovered. This drawing shows his few surviving troops struggling back from this disastrous campaign.

Illustration 1



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Discussing the Illustration

1. In July 1794, the war situation improved for France. Revolutionary fervor faded. In 1795 a much less revolutionary government called the Directory took over. It was disliked both by radicals and many royalists who wanted the old order back. This scene shows troops fighting against one royalist revolt against the Directory. The troops were led by the man who is perhaps France's most famous military leader. Can you name him?
2. What in this scene helps to show why revolutionary crowds in Paris in the late 1700s were often so easily able to intimidate rulers? How can you tell that an army is controlling the rebels fairly well here?
3. In 1799, Napoleon himself used force to take control of France's government. He was similar in power to a new king. Yet he also saw himself as protecting the big changes of the French Revolution. By then, many in France seemed to again long for a single, strong leader to keep order. Why do you think that was so?

Follow-up Activities

1. The French Revolution began with France ruled by a king, Louis XVI. In a sense, it ended with France controlled by an even more powerful single ruler, Napoleon Bonaparte. How different and how similar were these two rulers? Read more on the family background, childhood, and personality of each man. Based on what you learn, write a brief essay comparing the similarities and differences in the backgrounds of the two men. Also explain how these differences could have affected their personalities and their ideas about France and its government.
2. For about 20 years, Napoleon led France's armies in one battle after another. He sent hundreds of thousands of soldiers to die in these battles. Yet most of his soldiers admired him tremendously. Why? Read about one of Napoleon's great military victories. Prepare a brief talk on Napoleon's leadership in that battle. Based on what you learn, try to explain his huge popularity with his troops.

Illustration 2



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Discussing the Illustration

1. This painting shows the ceremony that made Napoleon Emperor of the French in 1804. That ceremony took place at the Cathedral of Notre Dame in Paris. Notice the woman kneeling before Napoleon. Can you guess who she is?
2. In 1804, Napoleon became France's emperor. In the past, the Pope crowned emperors in Europe. From the painting, can you tell how Napoleon altered the ceremony that made him emperor? Why do you think he did this? What view of Napoleon do you think this painting is intended to provide? What features help convey a grand sense of Napoleon and his role in France?
3. The leaders of the French Revolution weakened the Catholic Church in France in many ways. However, Napoleon reached a new agreement with the Pope, called the Concordat of 1801. From what you know of it, explain how this satisfied the Pope yet also kept many of the revolution's changes.

Follow-up Activities

1. Over the decades, many artists have painted pictures of Napoleon. He has also been featured in many editorial cartoons. Ask your librarian to help you find books with paintings and cartoons of Napoleon. Choose ten you would use in a bulletin-board display. Find five you think are favorable to Napoleon and five that are not. Write your own thoughts about each illustration, and explain any cartoons you use. If you can make good copies of these illustrations, set up the bulletin-board display with the title "Napoleon: Pro and Con."
2. Small-group activity: Why were leaders of the French Revolution often so hostile to religion? Read more about the following:

Civil Constitution of the Clergy

Hebert's "cult of Reason"

Robespierre's "cult of the Supreme Being"

Based on what you learn, prepare a brief talk in class called "Religion and the French Revolution."

Illustration 3



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Discussing the Illustration

1. This drawing could be titled, “The End of the Age of the French Revolution and Empire.” To see why, you need to know that Napoleon’s armies conquered most of Europe. Name some of the nations Napoleon either took over completely or defeated and forced to accept his peace terms.
2. In 1812, Napoleon led a huge army to war against the largest nation in Europe. Can you name that nation?
3. At first, Napoleon marched deep into Russia. As he did, Russian troops fell back, destroying farms, crops, and farm animals. When Napoleon reached Moscow in September, he found the Russians had already set it ablaze. This scene of Napoleon’s army shows the result. What does it show? How does its depiction of the soldiers make clear what happened? How does its depiction of Napoleon differ from the previous one (Illustration 2)?
4. Why might this drawing be titled “The End of the Age of the French Revolution and Empire”?

Follow-up Activities

1. Find a month-by-month account of Napoleon’s 1812 invasion of Russia. Pretend you are one of the men on the march back from Russia in December 1812. Write four diary entries or letters home, one for each of the following days:

June 24, 1812

September 15, 1812

October 24, 1812

December 6, 1812

Share your entries in a class discussion about the great Russian campaign of 1812.

2. The great cry of the French Revolution was “Liberty, Equality, Fraternity.” One historian says:

“Under Napoleon, Equality became equality before the law in a centralized state, Fraternity became patriotic nationalism and militarism, and Liberty got lost in censorship and dictatorship.”

In a brief essay, explain this quote and why you agree or disagree with it.

Answers to Factual Questions

(Answers provided only to questions
requiring a single correct answer)

Lesson 1

Illustration 1 Question 1: Palace at Versailles
Question 2: People, often but not always wealthy, who had special aristocratic status by birth

Illustration 2 Question 1: The female figure on the left
Question 2: Louis XVI
Question 3: Nobles, clergy, commoners

Illustration 3 Question 1: All three estates. They represented the entire nation.
Question 2: Agree to new taxes
Question 3: The nobility

Lesson 2

Illustration 1 Question 1: The Third Estate had as many members as the other two combined. With some supportive nobles and clergy, it would win any vote by individual members.
Question 2: The man lying on the ground
Question 3: It said the Third Estate spoke for the whole nation

Illustration 2 Question 1: The attack on a fort and prison known as the Bastille
Question 2: There appear to be cannons and rifles with fixed bayonets, implying that soldiers were involved

Illustration 3 Question 2: The Catholic Pope

Lesson 3

Illustration 1 Question 1: No
Question 2: Austria

Illustration 2 Question 1: An execution by guillotine
Question 2: Louis XVI
Question 3: The Jacobins

Illustration 3 Question 1: Great Britain, Holland, Austria, Prussia, Spain, Russia, Turkey, Portugal, etc.
Question 2: Great Britain

Lesson 4

Illustration 1 Question 1: Napoleon Bonaparte

Illustration 2 Question 1: Josephine de Beauharnais, Napoleon's wife
Question 2: He crowned *himself* emperor, rather than the Pope. It recognized Catholicism as the majority religion in France. The government got to keep church lands it had taken over, but would only appoint bishops.

Illustration 3 Question 1: Spain, Italy, the Netherlands, parts of Germany, etc.
Question 2: Russia
Question 3: It shows Napoleon's starving troops retreating in defeat from Moscow
Question 4: After failing to conquer Russia, Napoleon never again led any effective war of conquest in Europe

History

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