



## French Revolution

The 1700s brought about a lot of change across the world. The United States won independence from Britain in 1783. This had knock-on effects elsewhere. France had helped the Americans during the war at great cost to itself. On top that, previous kings had spent huge sums of money on their own lifestyles and fashion. As a result, France had no money left.

A poor royalty wasn't the only problem. There had been twenty years of poor harvests, drought and disease. This meant that the prices for basic items such as bread and meat were incredibly high. Most people couldn't afford them. King Louis XVI, who had succeeded his grandfather, Louis XV, continued to demand high taxes from people. They resented the fact that he didn't use them to look after them or provide food. This led to riots and people striking.

In 1786, King Louis thought he had a solution. He came up with an idea to tax people's land, including the rich. This was the first time that rich people had been taxed like this in France and they weren't happy.

At that time, France was split into three different estates. These were different groups of people based on their status. One estate was reserved for people who worked in the church. The second was for the nobility (the king and queen and other wealthy people). Everybody else fell into the third estate. Part of the problem was that 98% of the French people fell into the third estate and were being taxed heavily and starving. However, they could still be outvoted by the wealthy and the church. They were fed up with the elite having everything their way.

Even though King Louis eventually agreed to meet people from all three estates, violence soon broke out in Paris. All those who weren't wealthy or members of the church had had enough. There were rumours that the army might be brought in to take over the city. Parisians panicked and tried to take a prison called the Bastille for themselves. Rioters stormed the Bastille and captured gunpowder and weapons. This is often seen as the start of the French Revolution. It is a national holiday in France.



When news of the revolt in Paris spread, poor people living in the countryside rose up as well. They burned the homes of the tax-collecting landowners. During the next few years, people on both sides began to panic and suspect each other. People who were accused of treason were often arrested and executed by guillotine. Thousands of people were executed this way. Even royalty wasn't safe. At the end of the revolution, King Louis and his wife Marie Antoinette were both executed.

The end of the revolution came in 1799 when Napoleon overthrew the government. It meant the end for the French monarchy and removed the Catholic church from power. It became one of the first countries to give liberty to common people. It also started the process of introducing rights for women and abolishing slavery.

## VOCABULARY FOCUS

1. Which word in the text means “were no longer ruled by”?
2. What is a “lifestyles” in this context?
3. Which word means “kings and queens and other royalty”?
4. Find and copy a phrase that tells you Napoleon took control of the country.
5. Find a synonym for “freedom”.

## VIPERS QUESTIONS

**S**

Explain how the three different estates were organised in France.

**R**

What percentage of France was in the third estate?

**R**

When did the revolution end?

**S**

What happened to King Louis XVI after the revolution?

**I**

Why were people annoyed at the high taxes?