

# The French Revolution



**Day 1:** Read and annotate your assigned role and answer the associated questions.

## **Peasants/Urban Workers**

The lower class, consisting of unskilled workers and peasants, comprised the vast majority of all Frenchmen. The peasants, who worked the hardest, performed the most forced labor, and shouldered the greatest tax burden, made up three-fourths of all French citizens. They paid land taxes, poll taxes, and tithes (10% of their income) to the Church. Although some peasants had the right to farm their own land, most were still sharecroppers, and some of them still paid dues to their manor owners. They also had to spend from six to thirty days each year working to maintain the royal roads. When landlords needed money, they often attempted to raise more taxes from the peasants. Among the poorest were urban workers. They included apprentices, journeymen, and other who worked in industries such as printing or cloth making. Many women and men earned a meager living as servants, construction workers, or street sellers of everything from food to pots and pans. A large number of the urban poor were unemployed. To survive, some turned to begging or crime. Urban workers earned miserable wages. Even the smallest rise in the price of bread, their main food, brought the threat of great hunger or even starvation. After 1763, the enormous national debt, mostly caused by France's wars with Britain, resulted in inflation that caused the peasants to suffer more than any other class.

## **Bourgeoisie (Boo-juaw-zee)**

Within the middle class alone, several tiers were evident. Members of the upper middle class had earned their status from individual effort and talent rather than through birth. Those who collected taxes had paid the King for this privilege, and they were among the richest men in Europe. The industrial revolution had moved factory owners into the upper middle class. Merchants in the slave trade and traders in commodities such as sugar and tobacco were also very rich. So were bankers involved in international trade, and they often lent money to the government. Lawyers and other professionals also formed an important wing of the middle class. Anyone with money could buy land, so many in the wealthy classes were also large landowners. They usually avoided paying taxes, but they were angry and resentful because they had no power in the government in spite of their many achievements. Urban craftsmen and shopkeepers formed the middle of the middle class. The Third Estate resented the privileges enjoyed by their social "betters." Wealthy bourgeois families in the Third Estate could buy political office and even titles, but the best jobs were still reserved for the nobles.

## **Nobles**

400,000 nobles made up the Second Estate. Members of the Second Estate owned thirty percent of all French land. It had a monopoly on all high ranks in the military, and benefited from a number of special privileges from the government. Its members were exempt from paying property taxes and affected a snobbish cultural superiority over everyone below their social status. Some nobles were among the richest men in France and some were so poor that they didn't have the proper clothes, carriage, and jewelry to even appear at the king's court. At Versailles, ambitious nobles competed for royal appointments while idle courtiers enjoyed endless entertainments. Many nobles, however, lived far from the center of power. Though they owned land, they received little financial incomes. As a result, they felt the pinch of trying to maintain their status in a period of rising prices. Many nobles hated absolutism and resented the royal bureaucracy that employed middle class men in positions that once had been reserved for them. They feared losing their traditional privileges, especially their freedom from paying taxes.

## **Clergy**

About 100,000 church officials made up the First Estate. It ran its own legislature and maintained its own court of laws. The clergy got most of its income from the land they owned and from the tithe (10% of income paid to the church) peasants were expected to pay them. The clergy paid no taxes. It controlled the entire educational system and had the power to censor books and artistic expressions. It included important cardinals with an annual income of around \$2 million and simple parish priest whom made the equivalent of about \$150 a year. During the Enlightenment, philosophes targeted the Church for reform. They criticized the idleness of some clergy, the Church's interference in politics, and its intolerance of dissent. In response, many clergies condemned the Enlightenment for undermining religion and moral order.

## **Queen Marie Antoinette**

Marie Antoinette was born on November 2, 1755, in Vienna (now in Austria), the capital of the Holy Roman Empire. She was the eleventh daughter of the Holy Roman emperor Francis I (1708–1765) and the empress Maria Theresa (1717–1780). In 1770 she married Louis XVI (1754–1793). Louis was the French dauphin, or the oldest son of the king of France. He became king four years later in 1774, which made Marie Antoinette the queen.

Marie Antoinette was happy and careless in her actions and choice of friends. At first the new queen was well liked by the French citizens. She organized elegant dances and gave many gifts and favors to her friends. However, people began to resent her increasingly extravagant ways. She soon became unpopular in the court and the country, annoying many of the nobles, including the King's brothers. She also bothered French aristocrats, or nobles, who were upset over a recent alliance with Austria. Austria was long viewed as France's enemy. Among the general French population, she became the symbol for the extravagance of the royal family. Her extravagant court expenditures contributed—though to a minor degree—to the huge debt incurred by the French state in the 1770s and '80s.

## **King Louis XVI**

Louis was the third son of the dauphin Louis (heir to the throne). He became the heir to the throne on his father's death in 1765. His father died of lung tuberculosis at age 36 before having a chance to become the next King of France. In 1770 he married the Austrian archduchess Marie-Antoinette, daughter of Maria Theresa and the Holy Roman emperor Francis I.

On the death of his grandfather Louis XV, Louis succeeded to the French throne on May 10, 1774. At that time he was still immature, lacking in self-confidence, and austere in manner. Well-disposed toward his subjects and interested in the conduct of foreign policy, Louis had not sufficient strength of character or power of decision to combat the influence of court factions or to give the necessary support to reforming ministers, such as Anne-Robert-Jacques Turgot or Jacques Necker, in their efforts to shore up the tottering finances of France.

Succeeding Louis XV, his unpopular grandfather, Louis XVI was well aware of the growing discontent of the French population against the absolute monarchy. The first part of his reign is marked by his attempts to reform the kingdom in accordance with the Enlightenment ideals like the abolition of torture, abolition of the serfdom, tolerance towards Jews and Protestants and the abolition of the Taille (land tax on peasants.). However, Louis XVI failed to impose his will, as his reforms were resisted by the nobles and were not carried out.

Louis XVI actively supported the Americans, who were seeking their independence from Great Britain, which was realized in the 1783 Treaty of Paris. On the economic side, France was in a huge crisis. The price of the flour was rising sharply and the price of the bread followed the trend closely. The king knew that the only way to address the economic issues was the begin taxing the First and Second Estate, but to do so he would have to call the Estates General to meeting. A French king had not called the Estates General for 175 years.

After reading your assigned place in society, respond to the following questions:

- What are your hopes for France?
- What is your opinion of Enlightenment ideas?
- What would you like to change and what would you like to stay the same? Why and why not?

**Social Class/Role:** \_\_\_\_\_

**1. What are your hopes for France?**

**2. What is your opinion of Enlightenment ideas?**

**3. What would you like to change what would you like to stay the same? Why or why not?**

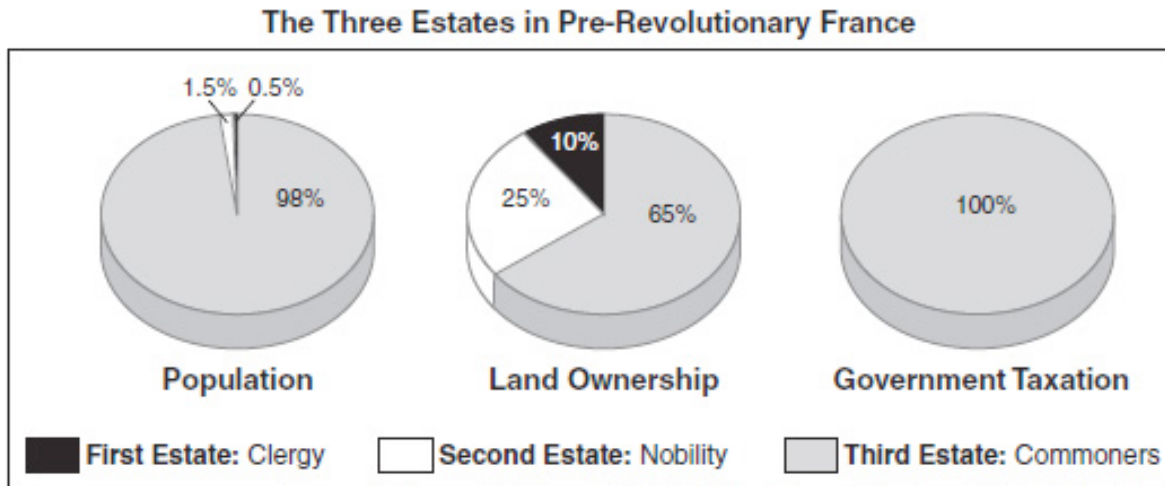
**Day 2:** Listen to the description of each social class from your classmates and take notes in the graphic organizer below.

Social Class/Role	Estate	What is their life like?	Do they want France to change? How? If they want it to stay the same, how and why?
Peasants			
Bourgeoisie			
Nobles			
Clergy			
King and Queen			

4. Which other social classes do you have the most in common with? How and why?

5. Which other social classes do you have the least in common with? How and why?

What caused the French Revolution and to what extent does the French Revolution represent the ideals of the Enlightenment?



6. What does this chart say about the social class structure in Pre-Revolutionary France? Why could this cause a problem?

### Conditions in France Worsen

Struggling under the enormous debts from the Seven Years' War, France was on the brink of a financial crisis. When the king proposed higher taxes for the nobility and other classes, the provincial governments claimed they were exempt from national taxes. To add to the crisis, low harvests from 1785 onward meant that the price of bread, the peasant's major source of food, constantly increased. By 1788, France was suffering an economic depression. Growing inflation, a decline, real wages, and the rising cost of bread all intensified the unrest among a majority of French citizens.

Desperate to solve the crisis and raise taxes in order to avoid bankruptcy, various advisors told the king to impose a Stamp Tax and a tax on farm produce. Hoping to gain support of the nobles, the king called for an Assembly of Notables. These nobles, clearly looking out for their own interests, demanded major reforms instead. Meanwhile, food riots broke out across the country and mobs took over parts of France. Many were demanding price controls, especially on bread.

King Louis XVI decided to call the **Estates General** to meet in May 1789. Each of the three estates elected representatives would attend. In preparation, Louis had all three estates prepare **cahiers**, or notebooks, listing their grievances.

7. What would be listed in your cahier?

### **Day 3: The Estates General meets**

Delegates to the Estates General from the Third Estate were elected, though only propertied men could vote. The delegates were mostly lawyers, middle-class officials and writers.

8. On the issue of extending taxes to the members of all three estates (not just the third estate) how would you vote? Why?

### **Meeting at the Estates General**



In the past, each estate had voted as a bloc, which meant that although the first two estates represented a minority of Frenchmen, they could always defeat the Third Estate. This time the Third Estate which obviously represented many more citizens, demanded that the representatives should vote as individuals. After weeks of stalemate, delegates of the Third Estate took a daring step. In June 1789, claiming to represent the people of France, they declared themselves to be the **National**

**Assembly**. A few days later, the National Assembly founds its meeting hall locked and guarded. Fearing that the king planned to dismiss them, the delegates moved to a nearby indoor tennis court. Here the delegates took their famous **Tennis Court Oath**. They swore "never to separate and to meet wherever the circumstances might require until we have established a sound and just constitution." Reform-minded clergy and nobles joined the Assembly.

9. What are the advantages and disadvantages of joining the National Assembly?

10. Would you have joined the National Assembly? Why or why not?

## The Revolution Begins

When a people's army took control of Paris on July 13, King Louis ordered his troops to suppress the revolt. As news of the King's actions spread, large groups of people in Paris took arms from nearby arsenals and on July 14, 1789, stormed the **Bastille**, an old fortress that had been converted to a jail. The revolutionaries, who included a number of women, believed many innocent people were being held there. The angry mob killed 98 of the prison guards and, displaying the prison commander's head on a pole, marched through the streets of Paris.

The revolutionary virus spread to the countryside. Peasants began to attack manor houses and burned records detailing their responsibilities and obligations to their lords. Many peasants stopped paying taxes and seized common lands.



### The following excerpt is an eyewitness account of the fall of the Bastille:

"Veteran armies... have never performed greater prodigies [feats] of valor than this leaderless multitude of persons belonging to every class, workmen of all trades who, mostly ill-equipped and unused to arms, boldly affronted the fire from the ramparts and seemed to mock the thunderbolts the enemy hurled at them....

The attackers, having demolished the first drawbridge and brought their guns into position against the second, could not fail to capture the fort.....One of the [soldiers] opened the gate behind the drawbridge and asked what we wanted. 'The surrender of the Bastille' was the answer, on which he let us in. At the same time the besiegers lowered the great bridge....

Those who came in first treated the conquered enemy humanely and embraced the staff officers to show there was no ill-feeling. But a few soldiers posted on the platforms and unaware that the fortress had surrendered discharged their muskets, whereupon the people, transformed with rage, threw themselves on the [soldiers]....

... Several... [individuals] contended for the honor of having arrested the Marquis de Launay [the governor of the Bastille]... and a few others undertook to guard him and succeeded in getting him out of the Bastille, though he was roughly handled by the people, who were calling for his death....

But the fury of the crowd continued to increase and their blind wrath did not spare de Launay's escort.... Exhausted by his efforts to defend his prisoner... he had to separate from M.de Launay... Hardly had he sat down when, looking after the procession, he saw the head of M. de Launay stuck on the point of a pike.... The people, fearing that their victim might be snatched away from them, hastened to cut his throat on the steps of the Hotel de Ville [City Hall]....

In the intoxication [excitement] of victory the unfortunate inmates of the dungeons of the Bastille had been forgotten. All the keys had been carried off in triumph and it was necessary to force the doors of the cells. Seven prisoners were found."

**11. What significance did the attack on the Bastille have as a symbol?**

**12. How should the new government, the National Assembly, address these problems?**

### **The National Assembly Acts**

On August 4, in a combative all-night meeting, nobles in the National Assembly voted to end their own privileges. They agreed to give up their old manorial dues, exclusive hunting rights, and special legal status. The National Assembly easily got concessions from the frightened King. They issued the **Declaration of Rights of Man and Citizen** as a first step to writing a constitution.

- All men were born and remain free and equal in rights
- Natural rights of liberty, property, security, and resistance to oppression.
- All male citizens are equal before the law
- Every Frenchmen had an equal right to hold public office
- Freedom of religion
- Taxes should be levied according to ability to pay

**13. How do you feel about the ideas in the Declaration of Rights of Man and Citizen? Does it include too much change, too little, or just the right amount?**

### **The Civil Constitution of the Clergy**

In order to pay off the large debt, the Assembly voted to take over and sell Church lands. They also put the French Catholic Church under state control. Under the Civil Constitution of the Clergy, issued in 1790, bishops and priests become elected, salaried officials.

**14. How do you feel about the Civil Constitution of the Clergy? Do you support it or oppose it? Why?**



## Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen

### **Approved by the National Assembly of France, August 26, 1789**

The representatives of the French people, organized as a National Assembly, believing that the ignorance, neglect, or contempt of the rights of man are the sole cause of public calamities and of the corruption of governments, have determined to set forth in a solemn declaration the natural, unalienable, and sacred rights of man, in order that this declaration, being constantly before all the members of the Social body, shall remind them continually of their rights and duties; in order that the acts of the legislative power, as well as those of the executive power, may be compared at any moment with the objects and purposes of all political institutions and may thus be more respected, and, lastly, in order that the grievances of the citizens, based hereafter upon simple and incontestable principles, shall tend to the maintenance of the constitution and redound to the happiness of all. Therefore the National Assembly recognizes and proclaims, in the presence and under the auspices of the Supreme Being, the following rights of man and of the citizen:

#### **Articles:**

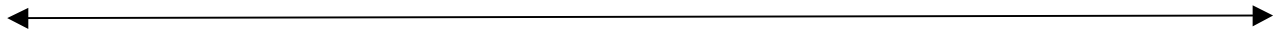
1. Men are born and remain free and equal in rights. Social distinctions may be founded only upon the general good.
2. The aim of all political association is the preservation of the natural and imprescriptible rights of man. These rights are liberty, property, security, and resistance to oppression.
3. The principle of all sovereignty resides essentially in the nation. No body nor individual may exercise any authority which does not proceed directly from the nation.
4. Liberty consists in the freedom to do everything which injures no one else; hence the exercise of the natural rights of each man has no limits except those which assure to the other members of the society the enjoyment of the same rights. These limits can only be determined by law.
5. Law can only prohibit such actions as are hurtful to society. Nothing may be prevented which is not forbidden by law, and no one may be forced to do anything not provided for by law.
6. Law is the expression of the general will. Every citizen has a right to participate personally, or through his representative, in its foundation. It must be the same for all, whether it protects or punishes. All citizens, being equal in the eyes of the law, are equally eligible to all dignities and to all public positions and occupations, according to their abilities, and without distinction except that of their virtues and talents.
7. No person shall be accused, arrested, or imprisoned except in the cases and according to the forms prescribed by law. Any one soliciting, transmitting, executing, or causing to be executed, any arbitrary order, shall be punished. But any citizen summoned or arrested in virtue of the law shall submit without delay, as resistance constitutes an offense.
8. The law shall provide for such punishments only as are strictly and obviously necessary, and no one shall suffer punishment except it be legally inflicted in virtue of a law passed and promulgated before the commission of the offense.
9. As all persons are held innocent until they shall have been declared guilty, if arrest shall be deemed indispensable, all harshness not essential to the securing of the prisoner's person shall be severely repressed by law.
10. No one shall be disquieted on account of his opinions, including his religious views, provided their manifestation does not disturb the public order established by law.
11. The free communication of ideas and opinions is one of the most precious of the rights of man. Every citizen may, accordingly, speak, write, and print with freedom, but shall be responsible for such abuses of this freedom as shall be defined by law.

12. The security of the rights of man and of the citizen requires public military forces. These forces are, therefore, established for the good of all and not for the personal advantage of those to whom they shall be intrusted.
13. A common contribution is essential for the maintenance of the public forces and for the cost of administration. This should be equitably distributed among all the citizens in proportion to their means.
14. All the citizens have a right to decide, either personally or by their representatives, as to the necessity of the public contribution; to grant this freely; to know to what uses it is put; and to fix the proportion, the mode of assessment and of collection and the duration of the taxes.
15. Society has the right to require of every public agent an account of his administration.
16. A society in which the observance of the law is not assured, nor the separation of powers defined, has no constitution at all.
17. Since property is an inviolable and sacred right, no one shall be deprived thereof except where public necessity, legally determined, shall clearly demand it, and then only on condition that the owner shall have been previously and equitably indemnified.

**14. To what extent do you agree or disagree with these articles and why? How do you predict they will affect change in France? Specifically reference AT LEAST 3 articles in your entry.**

## Why does the Revolution become radical?

15. Based on what has happened in the Revolution so far, to what extent does the French Revolution represent the ideals of the Enlightenment?



*No Enlightenment*

*All Enlightenment*

### **Constitution of 1791**

- Limited monarch in place of the absolute monarchy
- A new legislative assembly with the power to make laws, collect taxes, and decided on issues of war and peace
- King still has executive power to enforce laws.
- Every adult male property owner who satisfied minimal tax-paying requirements (roughly 2/3 of all adult males) could vote
- Abolished old provincial courts and reformed laws

16. How do you feel about the ideas in the Constitutional of 1791? Why?

## Day 5:

### A Series of Dramatic Events

- King and Queen attempted to escape but were discovered and returned to Paris
- Émigrés (nobles, clergy, and other who had fled France) reported attack on their privileges, property, religion, and their lives.
- Government banned strikes and workers feel ignored
- Inflation is through the roof
- Prussia and Austria declare war on France in order to intervene and support the French king.
- War goes badly for France and the King seems indifferent
- On August 10, 1792 a crowd of armed Parisians stormed the royal palace at the Tuileries (literally driving the King from the throne)
- Sans-culottes (urban working class men and women) demand a republic (a government ruled by elected representatives)



17. Predict what impact these series of events might have on the course of the Revolution.

## The National Convention

On the night of the attack on the Tuileries, ½ of the National Assembly fled Paris. Those who remained ordered elections for a National Convention to decide the king's fate, to draft a republican constitution, and to govern France in the current emergency

- The newly elected Legislative Assembly survived for less than one year.
- France is declared a republic.
- Fearing a plot to force open Paris' overcrowded jails, mobs of Parisians invaded the prisons and over the course of three days in September 1792 slaughtered more than 2,000 prisoners.
- King Louis XVI was found guilty of treason
- Vote of 387 to 334, he was sentenced to death – by guillotine
- Nine months later the queen was executed.

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<b>Left</b>	<b>Center</b>	<b>Right</b>
Radical Jacobins Danton, <b>Robespierre</b> , Marat San-culottes	Moderate Girondins	Reactionaries Royalists
"We need more change"	"The change doesn't need to be quite so radical."	"Let's go back to the way things used to be."

18. Where would you be on the political spectrum? Why?

## Radical Days of the Revolution – The Reign of Terror

Jacobins	Girondin
<p>"Friends, we are betrayed! To arms! To arms! . . . Your greatest enemies are in your midst, they direct your operation . . . Yes, the counter revolution is in the Government . . . in the National Convention!</p> <p>Let us rise! Yes, let us all rise! Let us arrest all the enemies of our revolution, and all suspected persons. Let us exterminate without pity, all conspirators, unless we wish to exterminate ourselves."</p> <p><i>Circular from the Paris Jacobin Club to local branches</i></p>	<p>I thought that the insurrectionary (rebellious) movements must cease, because, when there was no longer a tyranny to be struck down, there ought to be no longer any force in insurrection . . .</p> <p>I thought that order alone could produce tranquility; that order consisted of a religious respect for the laws . . . and the safety of the individual . . . I also thought, consequently, that order, also, was a truly revolutionary measure . . .</p> <p><i>Brissot, a leader of the Girondin Party</i></p>

### 19. Which party best represents the beliefs of your character/social class? Why?

On June 22, 1793, 80,000 armed sans-culottes surrounded the meeting halls of the National Convention and demanded the immediate arrest of the Girondin faction. The Convention yielded to the mob and 29 Girondin members of the Convention were arrested.

The Jacobins believed passionately that France needed complete restructuring, and they unleashed a campaign of terror to promote their revolutionary goal. They sought to eliminate the influence of Christianity in French society by closing churches and forcing priests to take wives. They promoted a new "cult of reason" as a secular alternative to Christianity. They reorganized the calendar, keeping months of thirty days but replacing seven-day weeks with ten-day units that recognized no day of religious observance. The Jacobins proclaimed the inauguration of a new historical era with the Year 1, which began with the declaration of the First Republic on September 22, 1792. They encouraged citizens to display their revolutionary zeal by wearing working class clothes. They granted increase rights to women by permitting them to inherit property and divorce their husbands, although they did not allow women to vote or participate in political affairs.



By mid-1793, many people were concerned about the course of the Revolution. There was much criticism both inside and outside of France's borders, and as a result, many of the leaders feared losing control. In order to avoid a "counterrevolution" the Jacobin, under the leadership of Maximilian Robespierre, began to make accusations, hold trials and executions in order to stop this activity. This created a wave of fear and panic throughout the country. The Jacobins made frequent use of the guillotine: between the summer of 1793 and the summer of 1794, they executed about 40,000 people and imprisoned 300,000 suspected enemies of the revolution.

### 20. How do you feel about the changes made by the National Convention/Jacobin party? Why?

## The Law of Suspects, September 17, 1793

1. Immediately after the publication of the present decree, all suspected persons within the territory of the Republic and still at liberty shall be placed in custody.
2. The following are deemed suspected persons: 1<sup>st</sup>, those who, by their conduct, associations, talk, or writings have shown themselves partisans of tyranny . . . and enemies of liberty; 2<sup>nd</sup> those who are unable to justify . . . their means of existence . . . 3<sup>rd</sup>, those to whom certificates of patriotism have been refused; 4<sup>th</sup>, public functionaries suspended . . . from their positions by the National Convention . . . 5<sup>th</sup>, those former nobles, husbands, wives, fathers, mothers, sons or daughters, brothers or sisters, and agents of the émigrés who have not steadily manifested their devotion to the Revolution; 6<sup>th</sup> those who returned to France.

### **21. Would you be a “suspect”? Why or why not?**

## **The End of the Terror**

By the summer of 1794, there seem to be less need for the Terror. The Republic seemed a reality, an aristocratic conspiracy had subsided, the will to punish traitors decreased, and most *sans-culottes* went home to tend to business. And, as the need for the Terror decreased, so too did Robespierre's power and leadership. Some members of the Convention, fearing for their own lives, ordered the arrest of Robespierre. On July 27, 1794, Robespierre was arrested and guillotined the next day -- the *sans-culottes* made no attempt to save him.

### **22. Why did the Revolution become radical? Why did it end?**

## **The Directory**

As the Reign of Terror ended, it became necessary to create yet a new form of leadership for France, and by 1795, the government had passed into the hands of the five-man Directory. The Directory tried to preserve the Revolution of 1789 – they opposed the restoration of the *ancien regime* as well as popular democracy. The Directory lasted until 1799. By this time the French Revolution was over and the French tried to get back to business as usual. Radicalism had been effectively put down as well. But France was still at war with the rest of Europe.

### **23. Is the Directory what France needed after the Reign of Terror? Why or why not?**