

History Revolutions: French
Teach Yourself Series
Topic 1: Chronology of key events

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SAMPLE

Chronology of key events

The Revolutions course requires students to study the French Revolution from 1774 to 1795. Area of Study 1: Causes of revolution, covers the period from the accession of Louis XVI in 1774 to the October Days of 1789.

The French Revolution is often considered one of the key moments in history, marking the end of the 'old world' and the beginning of the 'new world.' In the years leading to the French Revolution, various groups challenged the power of the king, Louis XVI. During 1789, these challenges were embedded in a new political system called a constitutional monarchy. However, dissatisfaction continued and in 1792, the monarchy was abolished and France became a republic. France was forced to go to war against foreign powers and also internal enemies, resulting in civil war. The revolutionary government believed victory could only be achieved with extreme measures, known as The Terror. By 1794, however, many Frenchmen were sickened by years of bloodshed and fear of continual suspicion. The revolutionary government was overthrown in mid-1794 and France returned to a more moderate government.

Overview of revolutions

As it appears in Units 3 and 4

This is the overview of revolutions that appears in the Study Design.

Revolutions represent great ruptures in time and are a major turning point which brings about the collapse and destruction of an existing political order resulting in a pervasive change to society. Revolutions are caused by the interplay of ideas, events, individuals and popular movements. Their consequences have a profound effect on the political and social structures of the post-revolutionary society. Revolution is a dramatically accelerated process whereby the new order attempts to create political and social change and transformation based on a new ideology. Progress in a post-revolutionary society is not guaranteed or inevitable. Post-revolutionary regimes are often threatened internally by civil war and externally by foreign threats. These challenges can result in a compromise of revolutionary ideals and extreme measures of violence, oppression and terror.

Review Questions

1. Using your dictionary to help you, write working definitions of these words and phrases as they appear in the Study Design:

Word/phrase	Working definition as it applies to Revolutions
ruptures in time	
turning point	
existing political order	
post-revolutionary society	

profound effect	
dramatically accelerated process	
ideology	
regimes	
civil war	
compromise	
oppression	
terror	

2. Rewrite the overview of revolutions using your own words.

Overview of revolutions As it appears in Units 3 and 4

Skills developed in your study of Revolutions

The Study Design states that students:

- develop an understanding of the complexity and multiplicity of causes and consequences of revolution
- construct an argument about the past using primary sources as evidence
- evaluate the extent to which the revolution brought change to the lives of people
- consider perspectives of the revolution
- consider change and continuity
- evaluate historical interpretations about the causes and consequences of revolution
- evaluate the effects of change instigated by the new order.

Review Questions

3. Write working definitions of these words as they are used in the Study Design:

Word/phrase	Working definition as it applies to Revolutions
complexity and multiplicity of causes	
primary sources	
perspectives of the revolution	
change and continuity	
historical interpretations	

Key events in the French Revolution As it appears in Units 3 and 4

Overview of France in the 18th century

In the 18th century, France was a feudal society based around agriculture. During the 18th century it became more mercantile: there was an increase in overseas trade, port cities grew rapidly, and people began to find employment in towns rather than only on the land. It was also traditionally Roman Catholic.

French society was (on paper anyway) divided into three orders or estates: First Estate (priests, nuns, representatives of the Church); Second Estate (nobility); Third Estate (everyone who wasn't in 1st or 2nd estates.) The Third Estate paid most taxes; the First and Second estate were 'privileged' so paid fewer taxes and received special treatment/rights. Above all three estates stood the king who ruled, in theory, as an autocratic appointment from God. Since 1774, Louis XVI was king. He was young, awkward and indecisive, and as his reign developed, he was often seen as unsuited to absolute rule.

During the 18th century, some in the Third Estate became disenchanted: if they made lots of money and were increasing in number, why were they treated less well. In particular, the bourgeoisie (businessmen, merchants, traders, doctors and lawyers) didn't want to be treated like other Third Estate members. They resented the privileges given to the Second Estate.

The Scientific Revolution of the 17th century encouraged questioning. The Enlightenment of the 18th century encouraged a new way of viewing the world; based on reason rather than faith. Perhaps it wasn't true that 'God appointed the king'? Perhaps reason could provide a better way of governing? Perhaps men could decide for themselves how to be governed?

Solutions to Review Questions

1.

Word/phrase	Working definition as it applies to Revolutions
<i>ruptures in time</i>	<i>Great breaking points. The time when events make great changes to society.</i>
<i>turning point</i>	<i>The time at which the society changes from one system to a very different system.</i>
<i>existing political order</i>	<i>The old regime. The system of governing and social structure that exists before the revolution.</i>
<i>post-revolutionary society</i>	<i>The society created after the revolution.</i>
<i>profound effect</i>	<i>Great change or causing great difference.</i>
<i>dramatically accelerated process</i>	<i>Changes to the political and/or social structure are very rapid and increase in speed.</i>
<i>ideology</i>	<i>A set of beliefs. The beliefs that underpinned the new government..</i>
<i>regimes</i>	<i>The system of government. The prevailing system.</i>
<i>civil war</i>	<i>War between two or more groups within the country.</i>
<i>compromise</i>	<i>The new government (regime) has to change some or its ideals or aims.</i>
<i>oppression</i>	<i>Government by coercion.</i>
<i>terror</i>	<i>Extreme measures against anyone who opposes the government.</i>

2. *Revolutions mark the point where the society changes and takes a different direction. They are caused by different forces - ideas, events, individuals and popular movements - working together. As a result of the revolution, the political and social structure changes profoundly, as the new order tries to impose its beliefs. But the new government often faces internal and external threats. These force the government to change some of its aims and it may be forced to use coercion and force against its opponents.*

3.

Word/phrase	Working definition as it applies to Revolutions
<i>complexity and multiplicity of causes</i>	<i>Revolutions are not caused by one factor, but many different factors.</i>
<i>primary sources</i>	<i>First hand evidence from the period or by those who witnessed the events.</i>
<i>perspectives of the revolution</i>	<i>How the revolution has been viewed. Differing views of the revolution.</i>
<i>change and continuity</i>	<i>As a result of revolution, some aspects of society change, but other factors continue unchanged, or return to the former structure.</i>
<i>historical interpretations</i>	<i>Historians and commentators see the revolution in different ways and give varying weight to its causes and consequences.</i>

4.

Date	Event	What changed or why is it significant?
<i>During 18th century</i>	<i>Feudalism Three estates Enlightenment</i>	<i>Agriculture became less dominant, commerce grew in importance Division between bourgeoisie (in third estate) and second estate became blurred Encouraged new way of viewing the world.</i>
<i>1756-1763</i>	<i>Seven Years War</i>	<i>France overspent</i>
<i>1774</i>	<i>Louis XVI becomes king</i>	<i>Louis XVI was king during the revolution</i>
<i>1776-1783</i>	<i>American War of Independence</i>	<i>France overspent. New ideas were also brought back from America to France.</i>
<i>1787</i>	<i>Assembly of Notables</i>	<i>Attempts to reform France's taxation system always failed.</i>
<i>August 1788</i>	<i>King called Estates General to meet May 1789</i>	<i>King was powerless to solve financial problems without representatives from 'the nation.' Estates General hadn't met for 175 years: France was now a very different country. How should it meet and vote?</i>
<i>Latter part of 1788</i>	<i>Bourgeoisie demand more representation at Estates General</i>	<i>Bourgeoisie voice is more dominant. They use propaganda to promote their importance to France.</i>