

# The French Revolution

## Student Text



THE  
**CHOICES**  
**PROGRAM**  
BROWN UNIVERSITY

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# Contents

<b>Introduction: The Summer of 1789</b> .....	1
<b>Part I: France under the Old Regime</b> .....	2
A New King .....	2
French Society .....	2
The Political Structure .....	6
France and the Age of Enlightenment .....	8
<b>Part II: Crises and Change—1774-1789</b> .....	12
Financial Crises .....	12
Political Evolution.....	14
The Estates General.....	16
The Fall of the Bastille.....	20
<b>The National Constituent Assembly and the Future of France</b> .....	23
<b>Options in Brief</b> .....	26
Option 1: Conserve the Power of the King .....	27
Option 2: Create a Constitutional Monarchy .....	30
Option 3: Liberate France from the Old Regime .....	33
<b>Part III: A Revolution, a Republic, and the Terror</b> .....	36
Revolutionary France .....	36
The Flight to Varennes .....	39
The Republican Revolution .....	40
The Terror.....	44
Thermidorian Reaction .....	47
Document: Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen .....	51
<b>Videos</b> .....	<i>Online</i>

## Introduction: The Summer of 1789

On July 14 1789, several thousand French workers attacked and captured the Bastille—a military fortress and prison in the city of Paris. Many were hungry and looking for food. They were also looking for gunpowder to defend themselves against soldiers called to Paris by France’s King Louis XVI. The king had said that the soldiers were there to preserve public order. But the workers suspected the soldiers were there to disband the National Assembly, a new representative body that had just formed against the wishes of the king.

The National Assembly hoped to solve the serious problems facing France. Economic conditions were desperate and France’s government was nearly bankrupt from fighting a succession of wars. Most recently France had spent a fortune helping Britain’s American colonies achieve independence. Many of France’s people faced hunger and starvation. Riots over the price of bread were common.

Worries about the arrival of the king’s troops disrupted the work of the month-old National Assembly. When they found themselves locked out of the assembly’s regular meeting place, the delegates swore an oath on a nearby tennis court to remain in session until they created a new constitution for France. This, they believed, was an important step to solving France’s troubles.

**“We swear never to separate ourselves from the National Assembly, and to reassemble wherever circumstances require, until the constitution of the realm is drawn up and fixed upon solid foundations.”**

—The Tennis Court Oath, June 20, 1789

Today the fall of the Bastille is the event that France and the world use to mark the French Revolution. But the revolution did not occur in a single moment. In fact, the fall of the Bastille was closer to the beginning of the revolution than the end. The French Revolution would last for

another ten years. During this time France would have three constitutions and repeated changes of government. It would fight a series of international wars and a civil war. It would go through a period of brutal dictatorship known as the Terror. It would also produce “The Declaration of Rights of Man and Citizen,” a document that has had a profound impact on contemporary thinking about human rights and the role of government.

### ***Why is the French Revolution important to understand today?***

The ten years of the French Revolution were a time of intense debate and upheaval. The upheaval would have profound effects in France and beyond. Borders in Europe would change, many would suffer and die, and new ideas about politics and individual rights would emerge that would reshape the world. It is these far-reaching effects that contribute to our interest in the French Revolution today.

As you read in the coming days, try to consider the following questions: Why was there upheaval and change in France? What were the events that led to the storming of the Bastille and eventually to revolution? How did the French people determine what sort of government they would have? Why did efforts to create a democratic republic fail? Why did those committed to political rights resort to terror and dictatorship? How did the French Revolution contribute to new thinking about the relationship between people and their government?

In these readings and the activities that accompany them, you will explore the social, political, and economic conditions of France in the eighteenth century. You will then be asked to recreate the debate in the National Assembly as it pondered what should be in the constitution of France. Finally, you will consider the outcome of these debates and the course of the French Revolution.

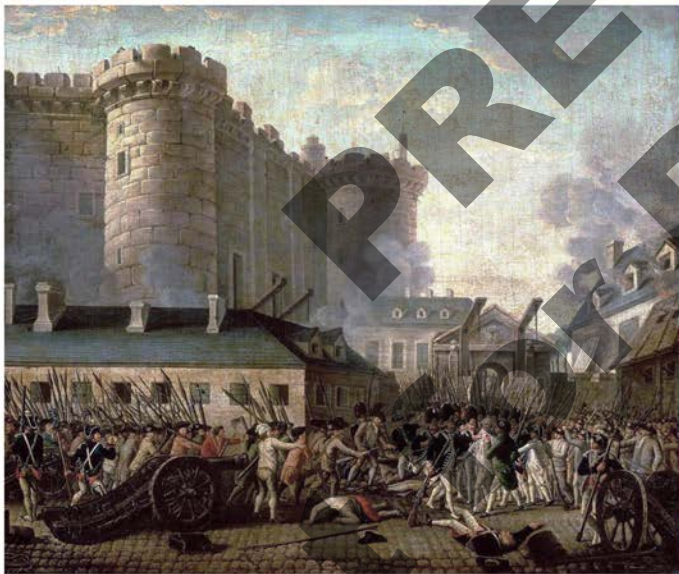


# The French Revolution

## Teacher Resource Book

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# Contents

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Note to Teachers .....	2
<b>Part I: France under the Old Regime</b>	
Study Guides and Graphic Organizer .....	3
French Society under the Old Regime .....	7
<b>Part II: Crises and Change—1774-1789</b>	
Study Guides and Graphic Organizer .....	11
The Fall of the Bastille .....	15
<b>The Options Role Play</b>	
Organization and Preparation .....	17
Options: Graphic Organizer .....	21
Debate and Discussion .....	22
<b>Part III: A Revolution, a Republic, and the Terror</b>	
Study Guides and Graphic Organizer .....	24
<b>Synthesis</b>	
Illustrating the French Revolution .....	28
The Trial of Louis XVI .....	32
Assessment Using Documents: The Causes of the French Revolution .....	41
Key Terms .....	46
<b>Supplemental Materials and Videos .....</b>	<b>online</b>

## Illustrating the French Revolution

### Objective:

**Students will:** Review and consider significant events of the French Revolution.

Identify and then graphically represent significant episodes of the French Revolution.

Assess the historical significance and legacy of events.

### Required Reading:

Students should have read Part III of the student text and completed the “Study Guide—Part III” (TRB 25-26) or the “Advanced Study Guide—Part III” (TRB-2).

### Handouts:

“Planning Your Graphic Short Story” (TRB 30-31)

### Videos:

The short videos used with this lesson are available at <[choices.edu/the-french-revolution](http://choices.edu/the-french-revolution)>

### In the Classroom:

**1. Considering the Course of the Revolution**—Have students consider the previous day’s role play. Call on students to recap the main arguments of each of the options. What were the major points of disagreement? What were the concerns of citizens who marched to Versailles? What did the delegates eventually decide upon? How did the people of France view the future in late 1789? What sort of government and society did they think they would have?

Now ask students to recount the events of the later years of the Revolution. What significant changes occurred after 1789? What were the challenges facing the revolutionary government? How did things turn out differently than the assembly delegates in 1789 expected?

Show the following videos of Professor Joel Revill answering the following questions:

- How did the Convention try to change France?
- What are the legacies of the French Revolution?

**2. Illustrating the Revolution**—Tell students that they will be creating graphic short stories (like a graphic novel, but much shorter) about a specific aspect or theme of the Revolution. Have students brainstorm key events and themes. Some possible suggestions include:

- The trial of the king
- The role of women
- The Terror
- The role of the *sans culottes*
- The de-Christianization movement
- The role of the Church in French society
- The life of peasants before and after the Revolution
- The affect of the ideas of the Enlightenment on the Revolution
- The affects of the Revolution on France’s colonial possessions
- The results of the Revolution (domestic or international)
- The legacy of the Revolution (domestic or international)

Tell students that they can choose to create these stories individually or with a partner. Try to have each student or pair explore a different theme. Distribute “Planning Your Graphic Short Story.” Tell students to read the instructions carefully and plan their graphic stories before they begin to draw. Remind students to incorporate what they know about the French Revolution and the information from the readings in their stories. They should



be sure to limit their stories to no more than six frames. Students might find it useful to have a pencil and a good eraser for this activity, as well as a black ballpoint pen or marker to trace their pencil lines when they are finished.

**3. Sharing Student Work**—Call on students to share their stories. What key events did students decide to illustrate? Are there any similarities among the stories? Are there significant differences or divergent opinions? What sorts of methods did students use to get their messages across? Do students think that there are benefits to representing this kind of information in this format, as opposed to other mediums such as print text or video? Are there any drawbacks?

As a culmination to this activity, you may want to have students put the stories together in a class publication. Students can organize their graphic short stories into an illustrated history of the French Revolution, and perhaps write an introduction that highlights the key lessons and legacies of the Revolution.

**4. Evaluating the Revolution**—Have students consider the legacy of the French Revolution. What was the result of the Revolution in France? How did the Revolution affect the rest of the world? What key issues did the events and people of the French Revolution raise? How do the issues that were raised more than two hundred years ago still affect us today?

### Suggestion:

With more advanced classes, you may want students to incorporate the Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen into their graphic short stories. Before beginning the lesson show the short video of Professor Joel Revill answering the question:

- What is the significance of the Declaration of the Rights of Man?

Have students consider the rights enshrined in that document. Were these rights respected in the later years of the Revolution? What about in the centuries that followed, both in France and abroad? Have students relate the Declaration to the themes of their stories. Challenge them to incorporate quotes from the document into their stories, to illustrate how certain rights were protected or violated in the events of the Revolution and beyond.

## Planning Your Graphic Short Story

*Instructions:* In this activity, you will take on the role of a graphic novelist and write a short story about the French Revolution. You should choose a theme and create three to six frames to tell your story. Before you begin, you should think about what information you will convey. Graphic novelists use different methods to get information across, including images, captions, and word balloons. (See the example to the right.)

What information will you convey through images? Through captions? Through word balloons? Will each of your frames be the same size? If you are not good at drawing, what are other creative ways you could get your message across?

Before you begin drawing, think about the Questions to Consider listed below, and jot down some notes about what you will include in each frame. Be sure to make your story historically accurate and informative.

### Questions to Consider

What message will you try to convey through your story?

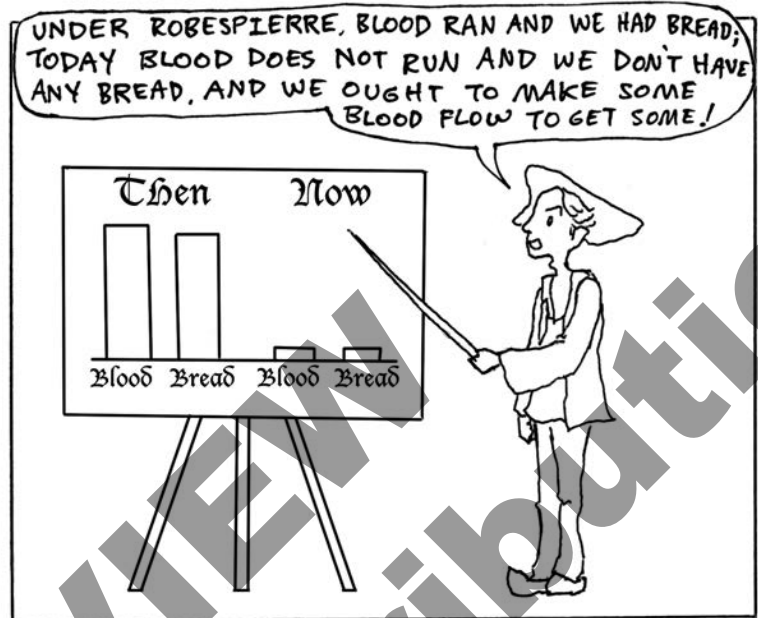
Will you take a specific perspective or point of view?

What key events will you include?

Will you need to provide historical or background information to get your message across?

Who are the key actors?

Will you set your story in a specific location or locations?



sans culottes meeting, 1795

Drawing by Julia Liu.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

### Planning Each Frame

Frame 1:

Frame 2:

Frame 3:

(Frame 4):

(Frame 5):

(Frame 6):

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