

Unit 10 France 1789–94: why was there a revolution?

About the unit

In this unit pupils will learn about the main events of the French Revolution during its years of most dramatic change and how some of these events have been interpreted and represented in different ways. They will consider the nature and causes of the revolution.

This unit is expected to take 8–11 hours. There is scope to adjust some of the teaching activities to take account of time constraints in different schools.

Where the unit fits in

The unit builds on pupils' understanding of political challenges and changes in England and Scotland covered in the units for Britain 1500–1750.

Expectations

At the end of this unit

most pupils will: demonstrate knowledge of the causes and changing course of the French Revolution up to 1794; demonstrate knowledge of how key events have been interpreted in different ways; select and organise information to produce structured work explaining, for example, why some people supported the execution of Louis XVI; describe how far the revolution had an impact on the underprivileged; review the unit in order to produce an extended, well-structured description of the French Revolution 1789–94

some pupils will not have made so much progress and will: demonstrate some knowledge of key events in the French Revolution 1789–94; using specific vocabulary, such as *peasants* and *nobility*, identify some reasons why many French people in 1789 wanted change; show some understanding of the way key events have been interpreted; use factual knowledge to produce descriptions of motives, such as an account of why some people wanted the execution of Louis XVI; produce an account showing the impact of the revolution on an underprivileged group; gather information from prior work in order to produce an extended description of the French Revolution 1789–94

some pupils will have progressed further and will: demonstrate a detailed knowledge and understanding of the complex causes of the French Revolution and its changing nature in the years 1789–94; evaluate contemporary and more recent interpretations of key events; show an understanding of a detailed chronology of the revolution and how turning points, such as the Flight to Varennes, altered its nature; investigate how far the principles of 'liberty, equality and fraternity' were applied to all underprivileged groups; form an overview of the topic and use information to produce a well-structured account of the 1789–94 revolution

Prior learning

It is helpful if pupils:

- draw upon their study of the position of peasantry, clergy, nobility and monarchy in medieval times
- draw upon their study of the overthrow of the English monarchy during the English civil wars
- have considered questions of causation and interpretation

Language for learning

Through the activities in this unit pupils will be able to understand, use and spell correctly words relating to:

- the causes and course of the French Revolution, *eg privilege, class, clergy, nobility, peasants, sans-culottes, republic*

Reading – through the activities pupils could:

- distinguish facts from hypotheses/theories/opinions and how far information is complete and helpful
- undertake independent research using knowledge of how texts, databases, etc are organised and of appropriate reading strategies

Writing – through the activities pupils could:

- organise facts/ideas/information in an appropriate sequence
- group sentences into paragraphs that are clearly focused and well developed

Resources:

Resources include:

- textbooks, information books, ICT-based resources websites, *eg* www.woodberry.org/acad/hist/FRWEB/index.htm on Toussaint L'Ouverture and the rebellion in Haiti, www.pbs.org/wgbh/aia/part3/3p2990.html

Out-of-school learning

There are opportunities for pupils to carry out further research using local libraries, television programmes, fictional accounts, annual Bastille Day celebrations in France.

Future learning

There are many possible links between events and themes of the French Revolution and subsequent work looking at Britain 1750–1900 and a world study after 1900. Pupils will build on their knowledge and understanding of government, political change and human rights in several units, such as unit 15 ‘Black peoples of America’, unit 19 ‘The Holocaust’ and unit 16 ‘The franchise’.

Why are the events in France 1789–94 known as a revolution?

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • about the idea of revolutionary change • that the revolution in France involved an attack on the privileges of church, nobility and royalty • to summarise the key points of their research | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Discuss the idea of a 'revolution' in history: as a time of sudden dramatic change. • Discuss the idea of privilege in society. Study three dramatic events that show the French Revolution attacking three privileged groups: the abolition of all titles of nobility in June 1790; the September 1792 massacres of priests, monks and nuns; the execution of the king in January 1793. • Tell pupils that the French call the system before the revolution 'ancien régime'. • Pupils research key aspects of the 'ancien régime' to understand the privileges of the nobles, the church and the royal family before the revolution. • Ask pupils to produce a 'before and after' poster showing both the way the revolution attacked three privileged groups and the position of these three groups before the revolution. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • investigate and report on the way clergy, nobility and royalty were privileged under the 'ancien régime' in France • describe some of the ways in which these privileges were attacked during the revolution | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • When considering the actions of the revolutionaries, ask pupils to explain in their own words what makes these actions 'revolutionary'. It should soon become clear to pupils that they cannot understand the nature of a sudden and dramatic change without knowing something about what went before. • Language for learning: undertake independent research using knowledge of how texts are organised and of appropriate reading strategies. Pupils could construct a grid in order to manage their research, ie key questions/ information/reliability of evidence. • ICT: pupils could use a drawing or DTP package to combine images from a variety of sources, eg CD-ROM, website, digital images, to produce a before/after poster or to present different attitudes to the French Revolution, eg <i>which might have appeared in a French revolutionary newsheet or an English newspaper.</i> |
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What causes led to the revolution?

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • that the privileges of the ruling classes in France are not enough to explain the revolution • that the revolution had many causes, including new ideas and economic developments | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ask pupils if the pre-1789 position of nobles, church and crown alone can explain the revolution. Provide two pieces of information to stimulate their discussion: the French clergy and aristocracy had had their privileges for centuries without a revolution; in Eastern Europe, the position of the wealthy was even more privileged but there was no revolution. • Provide information about other factors that contributed to the revolution, eg <i>ideas of the Enlightenment</i>. • For each factor, ask pupils to explain why it would encourage people to want dramatic change. Ask pupils if it is possible to categorise the causes into groups related to either 'new ideas' or 'arguments over money'. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • argue that the position of the elite is not enough to explain the revolution • explain how a variety of different factors contributed to the revolution in France | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pupils will have learnt from the previous activity that the position of the privileged elite was one cause of the revolution. This activity asks them to consider whether the privileges of the elite constitute a sufficient cause. Pupils can use the information provided to show that, logically, there must have been other causes. |
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Why did the revolutionaries think that the Tennis Court Oath was so important?

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • to analyse a key source such as Jacques-Louis David's painting of the Tennis Court Oath • to research the early stages of the French Revolution and understand why the revolutionaries thought that the Tennis Court Oath was a turning point | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Look at the famous painting of the Tennis Court Oath by Jacques-Louis David. Tell pupils that it is a significant source because it literally gives us a picture of what revolutionaries thought was important. • Ask pupils to explain why this scene was so important to the revolutionaries. In their answers, pupils will need to research the events leading up to the meeting of the Estates General and the importance of the actions of the Third Estate. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • select information from sources • evaluate a key source in its historical context • describe some of the beliefs and attitudes of participants in the early stages of the revolution | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This painting is well known and reproductions can be found in many books about the French Revolution. It shows the scene on 20 June 1789 when the Third Estate, as National Assembly, was locked out of its hall and met at a nearby indoor tennis court. The deputies took a solemn oath to remain in session until France had a new constitution. To make sense of this scene, pupils will need to understand the story of the early months of the revolution. |
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Why was the Bastille attacked and destroyed?

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • that the storming of the Bastille has been interpreted in different ways • about the significance to the revolutionaries of the taking of the Bastille | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Discuss the way the storming of the Bastille is still remembered today and is commemorated in France by a great national holiday. • Pupils compare heroic revolutionary paintings showing the taking of the Bastille with modern accounts that tell us a less dramatic story. They suggest reasons for the difference. • Provide information on the Bastille and ask pupils to explain why it was important to the revolutionaries even though it was virtually empty on 14 July 1789. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • explain how and why the storming of the Bastille has been interpreted differently • explain the practical and symbolic importance of the Bastille to the revolutionaries on 14 July 1789 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pupils can be presented with a paradox: the attack on the Bastille is very famous, but the prison contained only seven prisoners at the time. In order to explain this, pupils need to understand its practical importance as a storage place for gunpowder and weapons and its symbolic importance as somewhere where people were imprisoned without trial. |
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Why was the king executed?

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • how and why revolutionary attitudes towards the monarchy changed from 1789 to 1793 • about the importance of the Flight to Varennes and the war with Austria • to use knowledge to support and communicate a particular view | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Remind pupils that the king was executed in January 1793. Tell them that at the start of the revolution very few French people wanted his death. • Give pupils a brief narrative of the events of 1791–2. Ask them to see if they can identify any factors that explain why the mood swung so violently against Louis XVI. Discuss the significance of the Flight to Varennes and the war with Austria. • Tell pupils about the declaration of the republic and the trial of Louis. Tell them about the violently anti-royalist newspapers that existed at the time, such as <i>Père Duchesne</i>. Show them examples of scurrilous cartoons, etc. • Ask pupils to produce a front page of an edition of <i>Père Duchesne</i> for December 1792 demanding the death penalty for Louis. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • describe, analyse and explain the way revolutionary support for a constitutional monarchy changed into support for a republic • describe the motives of those who called for the execution of Louis • communicate their understanding in a specific form of writing | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This activity, too, is intended to provide pupils with information to answer the overarching question of the unit. Pupils need to understand that the aims of the revolution changed as it took place. The story of how hostility towards the king grew is an example of this. • Language for learning: organise facts/ ideas/information in an appropriate sequence. Writing the front-page edition should lead pupils into incorporating key vocabulary/emotive language. • ICT: use a teleprinter simulation application or saved e-mail messages to relay timed messages about the events of the Flight to Varennes into the classroom. Pupils in groups could work out the narrative from the messages and other supplementary information, <i>eg maps and primary sources</i>. They could use a desktop-publishing template to produce a news-sheet telling the story of the flight. They could include editorial comment on the perceived 'loyalty' of the king and queen to the people. Alternatively they could use a template in a desktop-publishing package to produce a front-page edition of a news-sheet to demand the death penalty for Louis. They could combine text with scanned images of the cartoons or images from a website or CD-ROM. |
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Did all the revolutionaries want the same things?

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • that the backgrounds and motives of the revolutionaries were complex • that different sources highlight different aspects of revolutionary motivation | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Describe the different groups of revolutionaries. • Ask pupils to show that they can distinguish between different supporters of the revolution: rural peasants and urban sans-culottes. • Look at the backgrounds of some of the leaders of the revolution. Do the pupils find anything surprising about the fact that people such as Talleyrand came from a privileged background? • Provide different groups of pupils with different sources relating to the revolutionaries. Do not tell them that they are looking at different sources. Ask what the sources can tell us about the motives of the revolutionaries. • In whole-class discussion, consider what the pupils have learnt from this exercise: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – that the backgrounds and motives of the revolutionaries were complex – that access to different sources can lead to different conclusions and interpretations | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • accurately distinguish between different groups of revolutionaries • explain how different sources can lead us to different conclusions about the motives of the revolutionaries | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The group exercise depends on the provision of contrasting information to the different groups. One group, for example, looks at the use of the guillotine and the way prisoners were kept while awaiting execution. Another group looks at the reforms of the revolution, such as the <i>Declaration of the Rights of Man</i> or extracts from the Constitution of 1793, that gave the vote for the first time to all men. While some groups will describe the idealism of the revolution, others will stress the wish to destroy the former ruling classes. • Language for learning: pupils should be able to distinguish between facts and opinions and evaluate the usefulness of some of the sources. • Key skills: some of these activities will provide opportunities for pupils to demonstrate evidence of working with others and improving their own learning and performance (reviewing what they have learnt from the exercise). |
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Pupils should learn:

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Did the revolutionaries want to help all underprivileged people?

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • about the limited nature of the revolution's attack on privilege • that some groups, including women, black people and trade union members, were discriminated against during the revolution | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • make inferences from sources about the attitudes of revolutionaries • Provide a range of sources showing how the revolution dealt with the rights of women; slavery in the French colonies and the rights of black people; trade unions and the possibility of workers going on strike. • Ask pupils, working as a class or in groups, to consider if there were limits to the principles of liberty, equality and fraternity, and to reach a conclusion. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • make inferences from sources about the attitudes of revolutionaries • identify limits to the way the revolutionaries helped underprivileged groups • explain some aspects of the contribution women and black people made to the story of the French Revolution | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teachers may wish to focus on the career of a key individual, such as the black leader in San Domingo/Haiti, Toussaint L'Ouverture, using the structure provided in unit 22 'The role of the individual'. • Citizenship: links can be made to the legal and human rights and responsibilities underpinning society. • ICT: sources about L'Ouverture are available on CD-ROM and websites. Pupils can discuss how they will structure their investigation using these resources. They could copy and paste carefully selected text into a writing frame they have created. |
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Why did Robespierre lead a Reign of Terror?

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • about the role of Robespierre during the Terror • that there are similarities and differences between Robespierre and other revolutionary leaders | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consider the Terror, focusing on the career of Robespierre. • Study a narrative of his period of power. Ask pupils what motivated him. • Remind pupils of their prior work on the English civil wars. Tell them that it is sometimes called the English Revolution. Discuss, and draw up a chart that compares and contrasts what the French revolutionaries wanted with what Cromwell wanted. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • describe some of the motives of Robespierre during the Terror • use examples to compare Robespierre with Cromwell | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This activity involves revisiting work done in the study of Britain 1500–1750. If the French Revolution is studied before Britain 1500–1750, the activity would require modification. • Unit 22 'The role of the individual' could be used to study Robespierre in greater depth. |
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Why was there a revolution?

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • to organise and communicate their knowledge of the nature and causes of the revolution | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ask pupils to produce a piece of structured writing that answers this question. Emphasise that they must show that there were many causes of the revolution; the revolutionaries had a mix of motives; the aims of the revolution changed over time. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • select, organise and use relevant information to produce a structured account of the nature and causes of the revolution • group sentences that have a clear focus and topic sentence | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This piece of written work should focus on analysis, not narrative. Pupils may need help in organising the different elements of their answer, including how to show the relationship between ideas by using appropriate links. Pupils can be encouraged to be succinct. • Language for learning: this activity provides pupils with the opportunity to write explanatory text coherently. They can link ideas using more complex connections. They should be able to group sentences into paragraphs that have a clear focus. Pupils could be provided with different levels of writing frames according to need. More able pupils could be provided with a 'menu' of connectives/key events. Pupils should be asked to check their accounts for errors in sentence grammar and spelling. • ICT: a word processor could be used to help pupils to organise and edit their writing. • Citizenship: links can be made when pupils justify their opinions of the causes of a historical event and find out about the key characteristics of different forms of government. |
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