



Year 5

The French Revolution

Lesson Series

1. Life in France before the Revolution
2. Louis XVI and Marie Antoinette
3. Napoleon
4. The Battle of Trafalgar
5. Exile of Napoleon and The Battle of Waterloo

Name: _____

Class: _____

Lesson 1 - Life in France before the Revolution

In 1789, France was one of the wealthiest and most powerful nations in the world. The structure of French society had remained the same since the medieval period. The King, Louis XVI, was an absolute monarch. This means he was all-powerful and there was no permanent parliament to act as a check on his power. The clergy and the nobles were extremely rich but paid no taxes. The ordinary people of France worked in tough jobs involving manual labour and paid huge taxes on their small income.

France had recently fought in the American War of Independence, which was extremely costly, and this left France with a huge debt. Following a bad harvest, and facing another raise in taxes, the people of France began to demand change.



Lesson 2 - Louis XIV and Marie Antoinette

The French Revolution was one of the most important events in world history. In 1789, the people of France rose up against Louis XVI, the King of France. Louis XVI and his wife, Marie Antoinette, lived in the palace of Versailles. They lived a luxurious lifestyle in contrast to many people in France.

Marie Antoinette, an Austrian princess, married Louis when she was fourteen years old and he was fifteen. Her marriage was an arrangement between her family in Austria and Louis' family in France. The two countries had been enemies in the past and a marriage would help to build good relations between them. King Louis and Marie Antoinette had four children but only one survived to adulthood. Whilst King and Queen, Louis XVI and Marie Antoinette lived a life of luxury. Marie Antoinette loved fashion and spent large amounts of money having clothes made for her in the latest styles. She loved to wear her hair in very tall styles, once supposedly reaching

four feet high. Her hair styles were adorned with jewels and feathers. Meanwhile, King Louis' father, King Louis XV had spent large amounts of money supporting the Americans in the American Revolution, so France was heavily in debt. King Louis XVI and Marie Antoinette did not help the financial situation and the people of France became angry that they were starving whilst Louis and Marie Antoinette lived a life of luxury.

In 1792, Louis and Marie Antoinette were arrested and imprisoned, along with two of their children. The following year, in January 1793, King Louis XVI was beheaded by the guillotine and some months later, Marie Antoinette met the same fate.



Lesson 3 - Napoleon

After the execution of Louis XVI in 1793, France entered a period of instability. There was disagreement over how the Republic should be governed, and France was having to fight wars against much of the rest of Europe to export their revolutionary ideas, and to prevent other monarchies from re-establishing a French monarchy. Within this confusion, a talented young general took power in Paris in 1799.

Napoleon Bonaparte was from a small French island near Italy called Corsica. When he was ten years old he was sent to a military school where he worked very hard. At the age of twenty-six he was commanding the French army in Italy and three years later he seized power in Paris and made himself the leader of the country. In 1804 he declared himself emperor of France and crowned himself. He conquered much of Europe, dividing it up between members of his family, for example, when he invaded Spain he made his brother Joseph, the King.

In France, Napoleon built roads, ensured people in government were there because they were qualified, not because of the position of their families, and he also opened

non-religious schools, so all children could receive an education. Over time, Napoleon became just as absolutist as King Louis had been before him and ultimately his power came to an end.



Lesson 4 - The Battle of Trafalgar

Prior to becoming Emperor, Napoleon had focused on French domestic reforms, such as roadbuilding to encourage business. However, as Emperor his mind turned to conquering Europe and his first target was Great Britain. By 1805, he had assembled a 200,000 strong 'Army of Britain' ready to invade. First, he had to beat the Royal Navy so that the French troops could safely cross the channel.

Under the command of Horatio Nelson, the British navy took a pre-emptive strike and found the French navy near a Spanish cape called Trafalgar. The French navy were beaten, Admiral Nelson was killed, and Britain was saved from the threat of a French invasion. The Battle of Trafalgar is commemorated in Trafalgar Square in London where Nelson's statue stands on a tall column overlooking the square below.



Lesson 5 - Exile of Napoleon and The Battle of Waterloo

After the Battle of Trafalgar, the British were spared French rule. However, most of Western Europe was not. In a series of military victories, Napoleon spread his power across Italy, Spain, Holland, Poland and Germany. After a disastrous attempt to invade Russia in 1812, Napoleon's power began to fade, and he was defeated and exiled to a small island in the Mediterranean Sea, called Elba, in 1814.

Only a year later, he escaped from exile and returned as French Emperor. An army of 68,000 men led by the British Duke of Wellington and allied with Holland and Prussia (a region of Germany, not to be confused with Russia) met Napoleon's French army on a battlefield, in what is now Belgium, called Waterloo, where he was defeated in June 1815. Napoleon was exiled to St Helena, one of the most remote islands in the world, in the middle of the Atlantic Ocean where he later died.

