

The Revolution Begins

By Miss Lavelle

www.SchoolHistory.co.uk

Source A. The Storming of the Bastille, July 14th 1789.



The Storming of the Bastille.

The Paris mob, hungry because of the lack of food from poor harvests, took the law into their own hands. On July 14th, 1789, the mob rioted and attacked the royal fortress prison called the Bastille. They saw the Bastille as a symbol of everything that was wrong with France. It was a symbol of the King and his government and the Paris mob wanted it destroyed. The Paris mob killed the governor of the prison, Marquis de Launay. The Soldiers in and around Paris refused to stop the attack, showing that King Louis XVI had also lost control of the army.

Key events and themes:

- The Paris 'mob' and the fall of the Bastille.
- The peasants revolting across France.
- The Declaration of the Rights of Man.
- The New Constitution.

Words to Learn:

Mob - a large crowd of rioting people

Bastille - the royal fortress prison in Paris

Constitution - the laws for the running of a country

Feudal documents - a lord's papers showing who owes him what

Feudal documents destroyed, 1789

Throughout France, peasants were also losing patience. They took part in widespread attacks on the chateaux and palaces of their lords.

Source B. Arthur Young an eyewitness 1789.

The whole country is in the greatest agitation. Many chateaux have been burned and others plundered. The lords hunted down like beasts. Their feudal documents burned. Their property destroyed.

(Travels in France – Arthur Young, 1792.)

Tasks

- 1) Write out the key words and their meanings.
- 2) Why did the Paris mob storm the Bastille?
- 3) What did the author of source B mean when he said, 'The whole country is in the greatest agitation...'?
- 4) Why did the peasants burn the feudal documents?



Source C. As the feudal lord leaves, his peasants burn down his chateau. & its contents.



The Declaration of the Rights of Man.

The National Assembly passed a law on 4th August 1789 which abolished all feudal privileges and unjust taxation. There were to be no more church tithes, no feudal dues and no more private companies keeping part of the taxation. Between the 12 – 26 August, the Assembly issued the 'Declaration of the Rights of Man' (see source D) However, there was nothing in the declaration about the rights of women, the position of slaves in France and the French Empire (some people, such as left winger, Robespierre campaigned for the abolition of slavery but were rejected by the Assembly.) There was also nothing in the declaration about who would impose these new laws. (Today, we have the United Nations or the European Court) By September 1789, the Assembly, with the King's approval appointed new middle class officials, elected by the people, to take charge of local government. They were called intendants, and they replaced the former agents of the King.

The New Constitution 1789 – 1791.

Over the next two years, the members of the Three Estates, as the Assembly worked together to hammer out a new constitution for France. (see source E.) The main features of this New Constitution were:

- The Assembly was to be elected every two years, by men who paid a certain level of taxation. About two thirds of the male population gained the vote, they were called 'active citizens'.
- The King was to be called 'King of French', not 'King of France'.
- The King could delay the passing of a law for three years.
- 83 new departments were created to become centres for local government.
- Judges, deputies (MPs), tax-collectors and priests were to be elected by 'active citizens'.
- A new taxation system, based on income, and a new currency, the assignat, was created.
- Church lands were nationalized. Income from their sale would pay off government debt.
- The Church tax (tithe) was abolished.
- Marriages (previously, they only took place in a church) had to be celebrated as civil ceremonies in front of state officials. Divorce was introduced.
- Priests had to take an oath of loyalty to the state; some saw this as an attack on the power of the bishops and on the Pope.



Source E. A Cartoon published in 1789. The members of the three estates working together to hammer out a new constitution for France.

BONUS QUESTION!
(an extended piece of writing – at least two pages!) What changes occurred in France in the early part of the revolution?

Source D. THE DECLARATION OF THE RIGHTS OF MAN (extract)

Men are born equal and remain free and equal in rights which are liberty, property, security and resistance to oppression. Liberty is being able to do whatever does not harm others.

The law should express the will of the people. All citizens have a right to take part personally, or through their representatives, in the making of the law. Every citizen can talk, write and publish freely, unless the liberty is abused in a way which breaks the law.

August 1789

Tasks

- 1) Read source D. Which parts of the Declaration are fair? Which people of France previously did not have equal rights?
- 2) Which people in France still were not equal despite the declaration? Explain your answer.
- 3) Outline the changes brought about by the Assembly in August – September 1789.
- 4) Explain how changes in the constitution affected; a) the King; b) local government; c) the economy; d) the Church.
- 5) Which of these changes do you think was most important? Why?
- 6) Which people might not have agreed with the new constitution? (consider members of all three estates)