**#1: Estates General Meets - May, 1789**

**SUMMARY:** Under the Old Regime, the people of France were divided into three social classes or “Estates”. These were the 1st Estate (clergy), the 2nd Estate (nobility) and everyone else (the 3rd Estate) who paid all the taxes but had no official say in making laws. By 1789, France faced bankruptcy because of overspending by King Louis XVI and his family. The King was forced to call a meeting of representatives of each estate called the Estates General. This had not happened for a 175 years. Each estate was to get one vote at the meeting.

**EXPLANATION:** The 1st & 2nd Estates together had always outvoted the 3rd Estate and this is what King Louis XVI expected at the meeting of the Estates General in 1789. However, the Enlightenment influenced the educated middle class delegates of the 3rd Estate. These educated middle class men were called the Bourgeoisie. Some of them wanted to use the Estates General meeting as an opportunity to change the absolute monarchy system.

**IMAGE:** This cartoon illustrates how the 3rd Estate (common people) felt they were chained and unfairly carrying the burden of the King and other Estates (clergy & nobility) on their back.
Summary: The 3rd estate sent delegates to represent members of the Bourgeoisie at the Estates General meeting. The views of these delegates about government were shaped by the enlightenment and they wanted to make changes in the absolute monarchy that ruled France. After the 3rd Estates delegates were locked out of their meeting chamber on June 17, 1789, they fled to a nearby indoor tennis court. In there, they signed the “Tennis Court Oath” vowing never to separate, and to establish a constitution for France. 576 men signed the oath and created the National Assembly.

Explanation: These events mattered because the leaders of over 95% of the people were standing up against the feudal privileges of the 1st and 2nd estates for the first time. The ideas of the Enlightenment were being put into action. The National Assembly established a “Constitutional Monarchy” government. The King still had power, but was required to listen to the will of the people before making decisions for France. These events also set a precedent for revolutions around the world in uprooting an unjust government.
#3: Storming of the Bastille - July 14, 1789

**SUMMARY:** On July 14, 1789 French citizens raided a prison in Paris called the Bastille. Rumors were circulating that King Louis XVI was going to use foreign forces to kill members of the new National Assembly. A mob of angry citizens stormed the Bastille and killed guards and took control over the building. After seizing control, the mob of citizens beheaded the warden marched through the streets boasting of their victory with the men’s heads on sticks. Now the date is celebrated as a national holiday, Bastille Day, in France. The celebration is similar to that in the Unites States of 4th of July.

**EXPLANATION:** This event was significant because it was the first violent physical action taken to change the royal government. After the Enlightenment, people began to believe that the system of absolute monarchy was unfair to the people of France. The citizens and the Third Estate wanted it to be more of a democracy. They wanted better representation for the people. Up until the Storming of the Bastille many educated people were thinking of these ideas and preaching them but no physical actions had taken place. This event started a revolution among the average people that ended up changing France’s government.

**IMAGE:** The painting below shows how the mob of people overthrew the guards of the Bastille and took over the streets. It also shows the amount of weapons the citizens of Paris had to defend themselves from an attack.
Summary: For centuries France was an absolute monarchy, which means everyone was under the rule of the King who had the power to decide the fate of all people. In August of 1789, a few weeks after leaders in the new National Assembly gave speeches about equality and then voted to create a document establishing guaranteed rights for the citizens of France. This document was called the Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen. This was created out of Enlightenment based ideas. The new declaration stated, “men are born and remain free and equal in rights.” Equal justice, freedom of speech and religion were promised in the new document however, these rights only applied to men, not women.

Explanation: The Declaration of Rights of Man is significant because it gave male citizens more rights and made more people question the legitimacy of the King. Also, it encouraged people from other countries to stand up for their rights later. Previously, the people in France didn’t have a guaranteed rights because of the absolute monarchy, but when they started the French Revolution it caused them to stand up for their rights and question the government. They were motivated to publically state complaints with the government and strongly express that they would no longer put up with unequal rights. The newly independent United States even incorporated some of France’s ideas in the preamble of its new Constitution.

Image: This image is showing the seventeen articles of the Declaration of Rights of Man. The angel in this image represents the freedom people were able to get in government.
#5: Great Fear & Women’s March of Versailles October, 1789

**Summary:** Rumors spread around France that nobles were hiring mercenaries to punish peasants who supported the revolution, sparking the **Great Fear**. Many peasants began to riot in the streets. Also, food shortages were leading to growing hunger across France. In October 1789, thousands of Parisian women **stormed the Palace of Versailles** and demanded cheaper food and the return of **King Louis XVI** and **Marie Antoinette** to Paris to listen to their grievances.

**Explanation:** During this time period, women were typically responsible for feeding their families. The scarcities of bread sparked them into fear, and the women **rioted** against the king **demanding cheaper bread**. This riot shows that people are starving, angry and willing to directly and violently attack the Royal Family.

**Image:** The top image is depicting woman angry at the king and queen for raising the price of bread. The bottom image is of a prison the Royal family is being brought to in Paris.
Summary: King Louis XVI felt threatened by the revolution and wanted a way to stop the process. The king and queen tried to escape to Marie Antoinette’s home country, Austria. Austria and other countries near France were still absolute monarchies and did not want revolutions similar to France to start in their countries. The royal couple wanted to find a way to create a counter-revolution with the help of Austria and other nations to stop the French revolution but were then captured, and sent back to Paris.

Explanation: King Louis XVI and Marie Antoinette decided to try and escape but they were recognized during their rushed journey based on the king’s face on a coin. The royal family was stopped before when they got to the Austrian border. They were arrested and sent back to Paris on June 22, 1791. Most French people became completely distrustful of the royal family after this and began to side with the revolution even more. The king was charged for treason which led to his being stripped of his power in October, 1791 and eventual execution in 1793.
#7: Violence & Political Divisions Grow – 1791 & 1792

**SUMMARY:**
Violence within France as well as the threat of foreign invasion cause great uncertainty about what to do within the National Assembly. Therefore, in September of 1791, a new constitution for France was created establishing a new leadership organization called the Legislative Assembly. This new constitution established a limited constitutional monarchy. Under this new system, the king lost most of his authority on law making and foreign policy to the Legislative Assembly. However, members of Legislative Assembly disagreed strongly on what to do to deal with France’s problems.

**EXPLANATION:**
Issues like how to combat the enemies of the revolution inside France, fight the invasion by Austria and other foreign nations, deal with growing starvation and pay massive debts created great debate among the delegates at the Legislative Assembly. The Legislative Assembly split into three groups: radicals, moderates, and conservatives. Radicals wanted to end monarchy altogether, moderates wanted some adjustments to the current limited constitutional monarchy, and conservatives praised the idea more power to the monarchy. These factions were divided by where they sat in the Legislative Assembly. The left side was represented by the radicals and the right side was represented by the conservatives. The moderates sat in the middle. Other groups outside the Legislative Assembly also tried to influence the government. Emigres who fled France wanted to return to the Old Regime supported the right, while Parisian workers and shopkeepers, called sans-culottes supported the left and wanted the revolution to spark more change even if violence was used.

The top picture illustrates the 3 different factions seated in the Legislative Assembly. The bottom picture is a visual of how the 3 groups were divided.
#8: King Louis XVI Guillotined - January, 1793

**Summary:** King Louis XVI was guillotined (beheaded) at La Place de la Revolution in Paris in January, 1793 a month after being tried and found guilty for committing high treason against the state. He had been arrested in August, 1792 and sent to prison with his family. He was the first victim of the violent Reign of Terror phase of the revolution.

**Explanation:** When King Louis XVI was arrested it signaled the end of monarchy. Louis was arrested for violating 33 different charges having to do with everything from attempting to leave France to advancing an army on the people of Paris and he was found guilty for high treason and crimes against the state in an almost unanimous vote. The reign of terror that started with Louis XVI’s beheading was marked by the mass execution of any suspected enemies of the Revolution. In total 41,594 people were executed during next two years.

Image: This picture shows someone showing King Louis XVI’s head to the crowd after he was beheaded.
SUMMARY: Robespierre and his supporters formed a group called the Committee of Public Safety who took control of France starting in July, 1793. They promised to “maintain safety” and build a “republic of virtue” that totally erased all connections to the royal past. They changed the calendar changing the names of the months and removing Sundays due to the belief that religion and royalty were old-fashioned and dangerous. For the next year, Robespierre governed France as a dictator in a period known as the Reign of Terror in which any suspected enemies of the revolution were executed swiftly. He justified the use of terror, saying it helped the French keep their new virtues.

EXPLANATION: Due to the widespread violence and political instability, Robespierre was able to take over the government as a dictator. This shows how the Committee of Public safety got out of hand and had the accused “Enemies of the Revolution” who often had done nothing killed in front of the masses.

This is an image of the guillotining of Robespierre’s “enemies” in a public square.
#10: Reign of Terror Ends, July, 1794

Summary: The **Reign of Terror** was a period of time between September 5, 1793 - July 28, 1794. **Robespierre** became a dictator and almost anyone in France was unsafe. As a result the new **National Convention** went against him and sentence him to death (beheaded). Then in 1795 yet another new government was formed, it was a two house legislative bodies and five man executives called **The Directory**. Later on **Napoleon Bonaparte** used his leadership of the French Army to take control from the Directory.

Explanation: **The National Convention** and the citizens of France were tired of **Robespierre**’s violence and in fear of being executed themselves, they arrested, tried, and executed him by **guillotine**. After such insanity was caused by their fight for democracy, the French people wanted traditional order and turned to the military, and eventually **Napoleon**. Though they still had corruption, France had finally achieved a temporary time of peace and equality that they had been fighting for since the reign of **Louis XVI**.

Image: This drawing depicts Robespierre’s execution by guillotine, which marked the end of the reign of terror.