

# The 1789 Revolution

History

Year 8 - Lesson 8

Mr Arscott



In 1789, Louis XVI had made a big decision to try to tackle the debt crisis. He called an important meeting called the **Estates General** where representatives of all Three Estates: the clergy, the aristocracy and everyone else; would be invited. This kind of event had not happened in France for over a hundred years so it looked like something was going to change. Louis XVI hoped to get an agreement on how to change France's taxes. But the **bourgeois** representatives of the Third Estate were not prepared to agree to any changes unless changes were made to how France was governed. They wanted to introduce Enlightened reforms which would make France fairer and more equal.

The meeting did not start well. Even though the Third Estate represented over 95% of the population, each estate was given one vote. So, if Louis XVI wanted to force a vote he hoped the clergy and the aristocracy would vote against the Third Estate. This way Louis XVI believed he could keep control as an absolute monarch.



Rumours and suspicions started to grow. The Third Estate started to distrust Louis XVI and wondered whether he might end the Estates General meeting before agreeing to any Enlightenment reforms. On one day, the Third Estate found their meeting room had been locked and they decided to take action themselves. They looked for a large space where all the representatives of the Third Estate could meet. They found a tennis court. Here they swore an **oath** declaring themselves a **National Assembly** and ~~they~~ would not stop meeting until a constitution was put in place. This was a revolution in itself. The Third Estate seemed to be inspired by Enlightenment ideas about sovereignty. They were claiming that they, the representatives of the people, had the authority to make demands. This implied the people and not the monarch were sovereign.



The actions by the bourgeois representatives of the Third Estate were popular with the sans culottes of Paris. But rumours started to spread that the king was going to shut down the National Assembly using force. The people of Paris acted quickly to try to protect the National Assembly. So, on the 14 of July 1789, around one thousand sans culottes stole guns and then **stormed** the Bastille. Louis XVI had now lost control of the Estates General and Paris.

The National Assembly was saved by the sans culottes. Now it got to work on introducing Enlightenment Reforms to France. In just over a month they produced a remarkable document inspired by Enlightenment ideas. It was called 'The Declaration of Rights of Man and of the **Citizen**'. This document protected freedom of speech and made all French people legally equal. Louis' absolute control of France and the Three Estates were gone.



# Glossary

**Citizen:** an equal member of a country (as opposed to a subject who must obey a ruler).

**Bourgeois:** being part of the middle class (bourgeoisie).

**Estates General:** a meeting where French kings would make big decisions.

**National Assembly:** a parliament which formed from the Estates General.

**Stormed:** moved angrily or violently.



# Comprehension Questions

1. Which group of people attacked the Bastille?

Sentence starter: The Bastille was attacked by...

2. What was the Estates General?
3. What happened at the Tennis Court Oath?
4. How did the Declaration of the Rights of Man and the Citizen change France?
5. Challenge question: Why was the Tennis Court Oath sworn?



# Extension Question

6. Did the 1789 Revolution succeed because of Enlightenment ideas?

Choose option 1 or 2 and choose which examples to use to support your argument.

Sentence starters options:	Examples
<p>1. <i>In 1789, the bourgeoisie successfully led France through an Enlightened Revolution that created a more equal society. For example...</i></p> <p>2. <i>In 1789, the sans culottes saved the Revolution through mob violence. For example....</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- The Tennis Court Oath</li><li>- The Storming of the Bastille</li><li>- The Declaration of the Rights of Man and the Citizen</li><li>- The Women's march on Versailles</li></ul>

