What Caused the French Revolution?

An Inquiry Lesson

Developed by

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World History II

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Inquiry Lesson: What Caused the French Revolution?

Overview:
In this lesson students will work together in pairs and as a class to answer the question, “what caused the French Revolution?” Students will receive background information on the French Revolution from their text and from a handout. With knowledge of the topic, students will construct their own understanding of the events that culminated in Revolution. Students will take on the role of historians and evaluate primary and secondary documents, along with other historical data to arrive at a theory. Students will demonstrate what they have learned in a writing assessment where they will write a short essay where they propose and argue the causes of the Revolution.

As an inquiry lesson students will control the majority of what they learn. The teacher will be a facilitator with the role of proposing a question, building upon student knowledge, and encouraging them to discuss, debate, and discover. Student participants will be engaged throughout the lesson. They will work together to make predictions, formulate relations, propose theories, support conclusions, and interpret data. Through cooperative work, and document analysis, students will understand that history is not always written in stone.

Grade Level/Class:
This concept formation lesson in designed for a World History II class composed of ninth and tenth graders.

Time:
This lesson is designed for a 90-minute block schedule class.

Background Information:
In 1789 it became increasingly apparent that King Louis XVI was not capable of solving France’s financial crisis. The streets of Paris were rife with famine, malnutrition, sickness and disease. As bread prices rose and the national debt increased, the King and Queen lived a life of luxury at Versailles amongst their courtiers, ignoring the cries of the poor. In May of that year the Third Estate demanded reform and two months later the Bastille fell to insurgents preaching reform. Violence, rioting, and looting soon spread throughout Paris and the French countryside. In a few years the King and Queen found themselves without a kingdom and without their heads. The failed constitutional monarchy brought anarchy and chaos to France. Democracy would arrive in France behind a period of great violence and war. The result was the Republic of France which would soon be in the hands of Napoleon Bonaparte. Just how this dramatic series of events began is still a question for debate among historians.

Rationale:
The French Revolution provides a wonderful topic for an inquiry lesson. There is no clear answer to what exactly caused the revolution to begin. Current historians still debate the causes of the event, and provide a deliberation that can be brought into the classroom. The French Revolution provides a plethora of documents for students to encounter. It gives students the opportunity to work with primary documents and learn important skills like analysis and interpretation. The French Revolution also provides a number of perspectives from various historical actors sometimes overlooked by textbooks including women and the poor.
engaging in inquiry, students are learning content, and meeting SOL objectives. Students will learn about political theories, government and political structures, war, and economics.

There is further value to teaching an inquiry lesson. The lesson is conducive to group work. Here they will practice and learn discussion skills and how to support their claims. Inquiry lessons simultaneously teach the steps historians engage in. Like historians students will familiarize themselves with the historical background of an event. They will pursue a question which has multiple and competing answers and develop a theory or hypothesis. Next they can support, test, and refute their hypothesis. The lesson provides an opportunity for students to express their ideas in writing, and improve skills in writing an essay by defending an argument. For these reasons and for the sake of differentiating classroom instruction, I have chosen an inquiry lesson on the French Revolution.

Objectives:
1) The student will use primary and secondary sources to improve skills in historical research identification, analysis, interpretation, and both reconstruction and reinterpretation of the past (WHII 1.a. and b./NCSS 2.d.).
2) Students will learn the events and actions that impacted government, political theory, and the economy which led to the French Revolution (WHII.6.e.).
3) Through group discussion, document analysis, and debate, students will propose a supported theory on the cause of the French Revolution which can be presented in the form of a short essay.
4) Students will understand that historical events, including the French Revolution, are the result of a number of causes and actors.
5) Students will learn proper use of technology in the classroom to assist in historical inquiry.

Assessment:
In order to assess student learning and engagement in the activity, students will write a brief essay. Students will be required to write between two and three paragraphs in accordance with a model established in a rubric. In the essay students will answer the following question: What caused the French Revolution? Students will argue whether the French Revolution was the result of one cause or of a combination of causes. Students must use the documents and data sets to support their thesis.

Content and Instructional Strategies:

Introduction (5 minutes)
1. Pair students together. To increase instructional time, have students get into pairs as they enter the classroom. Arrange desks, and place name tags in seats ahead of time. When pairing students, attempt to capitalize on strengths and weaknesses and keep IEP and 504 plan accommodations for seating preferences in mind.
2. Present a photo story video created by the instructor on the French Revolution and Napoleonic war to get students interested in the topic.
3. Explain to students that today they will become historians with a mission to find out what caused the French Revolution. Summarize the activities students will be engaging in during class, as well as the assessment at the end. Let students know that they will be working with
primary documents and technology. Write objectives on the board and briefly introduce what an inquiry lesson is if students are participating in one for the first time.

Eliciting Hypotheses (10 minutes)
1. Distribute a handout that contains background information on the conditions in France that lead to the revolution.
2. Using the handout and pages 478-479 in their text, student pairs will create a list of four to six possible causes of the Revolution.
3. Ask students to think outside of the box. Students will attempt to add one or two more causes of the French Revolution to their list that may not have been suggested by the text or what they have been taught. Encourage students to explore possibilities that are less obvious and may have been overlooked by historians.

Presenting Hypotheses (10 minutes)
1. Each pair will present a cause that they believe contributed to the start of the French Revolution.
2. The pair will be handed a wireless keyboard and will add their cause to a web diagram using Inspiration. The diagram will be displayed on the screen by a computer projector.
3. Before handing students the keyboard, go over guidelines for appropriate use.
   - When typing on the keyboard it must be flat on top of your desk.
   - When passing the keyboard to classmates or returning it to the teacher, do so carefully using both hands.
   - Everything that is typed must be appropriate for class and on topic. Use of vulgar or inappropriate language will result in a loss of privilege to use the keyboard.

Data Gathering and Processing (50 Minutes)
1. Hand out data set number one and a scaffolding sheet to each pair.
2. Have students read the data set and discuss the impact of the new data on their causes.
3. Have pairs turn their data sets over and answer the questions on the back. Does the data support your list of causes, disprove them, modify them or suggest new causes?
4. Have pairs share their findings with the class.
5. Present pairs with the wireless keyboard and add any new causes to the inspiration web diagram.
6. Repeat steps 1 through 5 for the remaining three data sets.
7. Allot 12 minutes for each data set.
   - Display the data set using a document camera so students know which they should be analyzing.
   - Make timing explicit and assist students with transitions from each set and activity.

Conclusion (15 Minutes)
1. Have pairs rank their top five causes based on what they believe is the most important cause of the French Revolution and list them on their scaffolding sheet.
2. Go around the classroom and have each pair share their top cause.
3. Tally the number of times causes are ranked number one.
4. Distribute and explain assessment.
Resources:
- Laptop
- Document Camera
- Photo Story 3
- Inspiration software
- Wireless keyboard
- Computer Projector
- Handouts/written directions
- Notebooks, pens/pencils

Data Sets:
1. Social Causes of the Revolution
3. “The Tennis Court Oath”
5. Alternative Data sets
   - “Grievance of a Feminist”
   - “The Declaration of Independence”

Differentiation:
The inquiry lesson has been designed for a 90 minute block schedule but can be taught over the course of two days for 45 minute periods. There are other key elements of flexibility to the lesson. The purpose of the lesson is for students to form their own informed hypothesis and ideas. I encourage teachers not to force particular causes on students during the lesson. That being said, students will likely create different lists of causes from class to class. There should be common themes, but the element of unpredictability can send the lesson in different directions. So long as students are kept on topic, they should be encouraged to experiment and explore.

No two students learn the same or come to class with the same ability levels. I am prepared to issue different data sets depending on the skill level of the students. Students that struggle with reading, or work at a slower pace should be issued documents that are more easily understood. They should be issued primary documents with understandable language which are excerpted to make causes more obvious. For students that work quickly and perform reading and analysis at higher levels, issue more complex data sets. The data sets can be new documents all together, or simply more challenging versions. These documents may contain less-recognizable vocabulary and less obvious causes. If students have not engaged in an inquiry lesson, the teacher should be prepared to eliminate or add data sets as students either struggle or succeed. To introduce students to the structure of the lesson, we will analyze and answer questions for Data Set One together as a class.

Adaptations:
The lesson was created for a classroom that includes students with disabilities; mostly AD/HD. Aside from oral directions, explicit written directions should be handed out or displayed. When pairing students up or putting them in groups, attention should be paid to where students with disabilities are placed. It is recommended that students use strengths and weaknesses to succeed in the lesson. Another option is to cluster group the class. Create three
groups of different achievement levels. You can monitor their progress or difficulties, and adapt difficulty levels of data sets to each group. As always, modifications outlined in an IEP or 504 plan should be strictly adhered to.

To assist students with AD/HD, attempt as much scaffolding as possible. The scaffolding worksheets were created in order to help students with and without disabilities, to organize their notes and ideas. It is also beneficial for students with AD/HD to receive explicitly written instructions and copies of oral directions. To assist with the essay, students will receive a worksheet to scaffold ideas and examples before writing them in paragraph form. Prepare students for transitions and keep them focused the best you can. If they become frustrated, allow them to take a break, or work independently if they are more comfortable working alone.

**Pre-Reflection:**

Before actually teaching this lesson, I would like to reflect on a few points. Overall I feel this will be a successful lesson. I believe that students will come up with some good theses and ideas as a result of their brainstorming. I feel as though the data sets provide enough variety and information to help my students learn. That being said I have a few concerns.

The data sets, and alternative sets contain a lot of useful information but students may struggle to extract it. I worry that students will not move quick enough to get to all four data sets. There are many instructions, worksheets, and directions. I fear that students will be extremely confused, especially if they have not encountered an inquiry lesson before. I have similar concerns with the assessment. I’m not confident that they will be comfortable enough to write two to three paragraphs, or complete it in the time allotted. The structure of the lesson gives students a lot of creative freedom. The data sets provide evidence that should result in a list of causes, but students will be engaging in a lot of self-discovery. As a teacher that may have mixed results. I want my students to think for themselves, but I also want to make sure they understand certain key causes without giving them away. I will be monitoring the lessons closely, and reflecting upon what can be changed for the better.
Background Information

- During the Eighteenth Century France participated in a number of costly wars, most recently the Seven Years War and the American Revolution. Participation resulted in deficit spending, when the government spends more money than it receives. The French government went into debt and was forced to borrow money. To solve their financial problem they increased taxes.

- Since the Middle Ages, France continued to follow a strict social system. All citizens belonged to an Estate. The First Estate was made up of the clergy who owned 10% of all land. The Second Estate was composed of nobles who controlled the top jobs in the government, army, courts, and Church. The Third Estate was made up of 98% of the entire population of France. The Third Estate was controlled by the middle class known as bourgeoisie, but 9 out of 10 members were poor peasants.

- In the 1780’s several bad harvests resulted in less food. Food that was available was too expensive for many peasants to afford. This led to bread riots and violent attacks in the countryside as people demanded reform.

- The Estates General was the only legislative governmental body in France. It was composed of representatives from each of the three estates. The Estates General had no real political power. Whenever the Estates were required to vote, they met separately. This resulted in the First and Second Estates banning together to outvote the Third. Whenever the King wanted, he could call a meeting of the Estates General, or send them home. Until 1789 the Estates General had not met for 175 years.

- In 1789 the Third Estate created the National Assembly in order to represent the people of France. The members of the First and Second Estates soon joined them in order to work together and create a constitution.

- On July 14th 1789 violence in Paris dramatically increased. Over 800 Parisian citizens surrounded the Bastille, a fortified prison, and demanded weapons, gunpowder, and the release of prisoners. A fight resulted leaving the commander, five guards and many rioters dead. When told of the attack, Louis XVI, King of France, was informed that a revolution had started.
Data Set One

Directions:
- Read the following secondary document by yourself. Once you are finished turn the page over and answer all questions together with your partner.

Introduction:
The data set below is an excerpt taken from a secondary document. The document is part of an online resource project on the French Revolution created and maintained by George Mason University.

“At the beginning of the eighteenth century, France had 20 million people living within its borders, a number equal to nearly 20 percent of the population of non-Russian Europe. Over the course of the century, that number increased by another 8 to 10 million, as epidemic disease and acute food shortages diminished and mortality declined. By contrast, it had increased by only 1 million between 1600 and 1700. Also important, this population was concentrated in the rural countryside: of the nearly 30 million French under Louis XVI, about 80 percent lived in villages of 2,000 or less, with nearly all the rest in fairly small cities (those with fewer than 50,000 inhabitants).”

“…Amid these broad economic and population shifts, daily life in the countryside remained much the same, particularly on small family farms. Their owners and workers were known as peasants, although they differed considerably in wealth and status. A few could claim to be "living nobly," meaning they rented their land to others to work, but many were day-laborers desperate for work in exchange for a place to stay and food to eat. In the middle were others, including independent farmers, sharecroppers, and renters. Historians have estimated that in lean years 90 percent of the peasants lived at or below the subsistence level, earning only enough to feed their families. Others inhabited the countryside, most notably small numbers of noble and non-noble owners of manors, conspicuous by their dwellings, at the least. Consequently, documents on life in the countryside at this time reflect the omnipresence of poverty. One of the most well-known observers of the late-eighteenth-century French countryside, the Englishman Arthur Young, considered these small farms the great weakness of French agriculture, especially when compared with the large, commercial farms he knew at home. Others commenting on the lot of impoverished peasants before 1789 blamed the tensions between rich and poor on the country's vast social differences.”

Source:
Directions:
Look at the following cartoon. Try to analyze the image on your own, and then compare
your thoughts with your partner. When you are done answer the questions on the back.

Background:
The image below is a political cartoon created in the 1780’s before the French Revolution.
The inscription on the rock reads “Taille Impôts et Corvées.” This roughly translates to
“cut taxes and labor.”

Source:
Data Set Three

Directions:
Read the following primary document to yourself. When you are finished reading, turn this worksheet over and work with your partner to answer all questions.

Background:
The data set below is an excerpt taken from the Tennis Court Oath. The Oath was a pledge signed by the Third Estate and some members of the other Estates at a meeting of the Estates General on June 20th 1789. They met in a tennis court after being locked out of their normal meeting place. The Oath resulted in a new legislative body composed of all three Estates known as the National Assembly.

The Assembly quickly decrees the following:

The National Assembly, considering that it has been called to establish the constitution of the realm, to bring about the regeneration of public order, and to maintain the true principles of monarchy; nothing may prevent it from continuing its deliberations in any place it is forced to establish itself; and, finally, the National Assembly exists wherever its members are gathered.

Decrees that all members of this assembly immediately take a solemn oath never to separate, and to reassemble wherever circumstances require, until the constitution of the realm is established and fixed upon solid foundations; and that said oath having been sworn, all members and each one individually confirm this unwavering resolution with his signature.

Bailly: I demand that the secretaries and I swear the oath first; which they do immediately according to the following formula:

We swear never to separate ourselves from the National Assembly, and to reassemble wherever circumstances require, until the constitution of the realm is drawn up and fixed upon solid foundations.

All the members swear the same oath between the hands of the president.

Data Set Four

Directions:
Read the following document below on your own. Once you are finished, work together with your partner to answer all questions on the other side.

Background: The document contains articles from The Declaration of Rights of Man and of the Citizen approved by the National Assembly Aug. 26th 1789. The articles below were the first step taken to write a French Constitution.

1. Men are born and remain free and equal in rights. Social distinctions may be founded only upon the general good.

2. The aim of all political association is the preservation of the natural and imprescriptible rights of man. These rights are liberty, property, security, and resistance to oppression.

3. The principle of all sovereignty resides essentially in the nation. No body nor individual may exercise any authority which does not proceed directly from the nation.

6. Every citizen has a right to participate personally, or through his representative, in the law. All citizens, being equal in the eyes of the law, are equally eligible to all dignities and to all public positions and occupations, according to their abilities, and without distinction except that of their virtues and talents.

7. No person shall be accused, arrested, or imprisoned except in the cases and according to the forms prescribed by law.

9. As all persons are held innocent until they shall have been declared guilty, if arrest shall be deemed indispensable, all harshness not essential to the securing of the prisoner's person shall be severely repressed by law.

11. The free communication of ideas and opinions is one of the most precious of the rights of man. Every citizen may, accordingly, speak, write, and print with freedom, but shall be responsible for such abuses of this freedom as shall be defined by law.

14. All the citizens have a right to decide, either personally or by their representatives, as to the necessity of the public contribution; to grant this freely; to know to what uses it is put; and to fix the proportion, the mode of assessment and of collection and the duration of the taxes.

17. Since property is an inviolable and sacred right, no one shall be deprived thereof except where public necessity, legally determined, shall clearly demand it, and then only on condition that the owner shall have been previously and equitably indemnified.

Source:
http://www.yale.edu/lawweb/avalon/rightsof.htm
Alternative Data Set A

Directions:

- Read the following primary document. When you are finished, flip over this worksheet and answer the questions with your partner.

Grievance of a Feminist

“It is in this moment of general revolution that a woman who is astonished by the silence of her sex, which should have so many things to say, so many abuses to combat, so many grievances to present, dares to raise her voice in defense of the common cause. She will plead her case before the tribunal of the nation, whose justice already assures her of success.”

“…My claims may at first seem ill-considered; the admission of women to the Estates-General is, one may think, inconceivably and ridiculously pretentious. Never have women been admitted to the councils of kings and republics.” Moreover, even sovereign queens who have governed states have only admitted men to their councils.

Under our current system of government, the strongest have made the laws, subordinating the weakest. But today, enlightenment and reason have demonstrated the absurdity of all this.

Women do not aspire to the honors of government, or to the advantages of being initiated to the secrets of ministries. But we believe that it is entirely equitable to allow women, widows or girls who possess land or other properties, to bring their grievances to the foot of the throne, and that it is also just to collect their votes, because they are obligated, just as are men, to pay the royal taxes and to fulfill the engagements of commerce.

It may be alleged that all that would be possible to accord them, is to permit them to be represented by proxy, at the Estates-Generals.

Source:
Excerpt from the Declaration of Independence

“We hold these Truths to be self-evident, that all Men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty, and the pursuit of Happiness.—That to secure these rights, Governments are instituted among Men, deriving their just Powers from the consent of the Governed, that whenever any Form of Government becomes destructive of these Ends, it is the Right of the People to alter or to abolish it, and to institute new Government, laying its Foundation on such principles, and organizing its Powers in such form, as to them shall seem most likely to effect their Safety and Happiness. Prudence, indeed, will dictate that Governments long established should not be changed for light and transient Causes; and accordingly all Experience hath shown, that Mankind are more disposed to suffer, while Evils are sufferable, than to right themselves by abolishing the Forms to which they are accustomed. But when a long Train of Abuses and Usurpations, pursuing invariably the same Object, evinces a Design to reduce them under absolute Despotism, it is their Right, it is their Duty, to throw off such Government, and to provide new Guards for their Future Security. Such has been the Patient Sufferance of these Colonies; and such is now the Necessity which constrains them to alter their former Systems of Government. The History of the present King of Great-Britain is a History of repeated Injuries and Usurpations, all having in direct Object the Establishment of an absolute Tyranny over these States. To prove this, let Facts be submitted to a candid World.”
Causes of the French Revolution
Scaffolding Worksheet

List all possible Causes of the French Revolution below. Please ADD to your list if you come up with new causes, or hear something different from a classmate.

Rank the top five causes of the French Revolution. The cause that you believe is most important will be #1.

1.

2.

3.

4.

5.
Data Set Questions

Directions: After reading the data set on the other side, answer the following questions below with your partner.

1. Does this document support any of the causes you listed in your scaffolding worksheet? Which ones? Please list them below.

2. Does this document disprove or falsify any causes of the French Revolution that you listed in your scaffolding worksheet? Which ones? Please list them below.

3. Does this document make you want to modify any of your original causes from your scaffolding worksheet? Which ones? Please list them below.

4. After reading the document, do you want to add any possible causes to your list of causes of the French Revolution? What are they? Write them below.
Essay-Causes of the French Revolution

Directions:
Using what you have learned from class, from the textbook, and from today’s lesson, answer the question below. Work must be completed independently. You are NOT allowed to work with your partner to complete your essay. You ARE allowed to use your list of causes, textbook, and data sets to support your thesis. Please let me know if you have any questions about the essay.

The Big Question:
Following your rubric on how to write an essay, write a 2 to 3 paragraph essay that answers the following question: What caused the French Revolution? Was there one main cause of the French Revolution, or was it the result of several causes? Why? Be sure to use evidence from the documents in your data set. You MUST include at least two examples to support your thesis.
Grading Rubric for Essay Assessment

Essay on the Causes of the French Revolution - Total 20 Points

Essay Structure - 10 Points
- Essay contains two to three paragraphs - 2 points
- A clear thesis statement is included at the end of the first paragraph - 2 Points
- Topic sentences begin each paragraph - 2 Points
- Sentence structure/fluency - 2 Points
- Grammar and Spelling - 2 Points

Essay Content - 10 Points
- The student argues that their was either one main cause of the French Revolution, or a multitude of causes - 2 Points
- The student supports their argument with examples - 3 points
- The student supports their thesis with evidence presented in the data sets - 3 Points
- The student acknowledges and disproves any arguments against their thesis - 2 Points

Notes:
The student should not be graded on the thesis they support. The idea of the assessment is to engage students and have them evaluate in their own historical opinion what caused the French Revolution. If the goal is to have students identify a set of causes for school or state curricula, those causes should be identified elsewhere in the lesson. This is the opportunity for students to form their own theory and defend it. So long as they remain on topic, students should be allowed to choose any cause or group of causes to argue for.