



King Louis XVI

You are King Louis XVI of France. You live in the enormous Palace of Versailles with your wife, Queen Marie Antoinette. Thanks to your grandfather, King Louis XIV, you have absolute power to rule France. You are a devout Catholic who supports the traditional role the Church and nobility play in French society. You want France to continue to be a great nation. You enjoy hunting very much.

- Step 1:** Read this background information about France during the reign of King Louis XVI: King Louis XIV ruled France from 1638–1715 and built the enormously extravagant Palace of Versailles. The king invited nobles to stay at the palace and showered them with parties and royal attention. At the same time, Louis XIV transferred all political power into his own hands. From 1754 to the late 1780s, Louis XIV’s grandson, King Louis XVI, ruled the French nation. Louis XVI married Marie Antoinette, a member of the royal family in Austria, who became Queen of France. The noble lords of France owned much of the farming land, which they allowed the peasants to use in exchange for food. Nobles had the privilege of not being taxed and the duty to protect their peasants. The Catholic clergy provided religious support and social services for the poor. The clergy were not allowed to be taxed by the government, and they also collected a tithe, a 10 percent tax on all income.
- Step 2:** Listen to the questions your teacher asks about France during the reign of Louis XVI. Use the information you just read in Step 1 to help you answer the questions.
- Step 3:** As the peasants work to produce food, chat with the queen, relax on the throne, quietly watch, and/or provide words of encouragement.
- Step 4:** Relax and watch as the church collects its tithe and the Controller-General collects taxes for the government.
- Step 5:** Listen quietly to the Controller-General’s announcement. Nod your head in agreement with what he or she says.



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Due to the urgent financial crisis facing France, you have decided to assemble the Estates General, a group that serves as representatives for the people of France. When last used 175 years ago to advise the king, the Estates General met as three separate Estates, or orders, with one vote each. The First Estate is the clergy, the Second Estate is the nobility, and the Third Estate represents the rest of France (peasants, workers, and other commoners). Now, in the 1780s, some people question whether the Estates General should be changed to have all the Estates meet together and allow each representative one vote.

Step 1: When the teacher directs you, stand and read the following statement to the class announcing the meeting of the Estates General:

“French citizens, we are faced with a grave financial crisis that threatens to ruin France. We collect far less money than it costs to run this nation. We must either raise more money for the royal treasury or perish as a nation. I seek your advice and support. This is why I have assembled the Estates General. I instruct each of the Three Estates to decide and explain 1) whether they think the separate Estates should vote by order (each Estate, one vote) or by head (one person, one vote) and 2) how they propose France and its people can solve this horrible economic crisis.”

Step 2: Once the Three Estates begin working on their tasks, visit the First and Second Estates with the queen and the Controller-General. Remind those Estates that voting “by order” will help them preserve their privileges. Afterward, relax and talk quietly with the queen and the Controller-General.

Step 3: Listen as a spokesperson from each Estate kneels before you and presents the Estate’s proposal.

Step 4: When the teacher directs you, read the following proposal for the Estates General to consider:

“After hearing the wishes of each Estate, here is my plan. As established by long-standing precedent, I hereby proclaim that voting by the Estates General will continue to be by order. Furthermore, I strongly recommend that we continue our existing system of taxation in order to solve our dire financial crisis.”

Step 5: Listen as the spokesperson for each Estate announces the Estate’s vote on your proposal. When the vote of the Three Estates has been announced, say, *“The meeting of the Estates General is now over. Thank you for being here. France appreciates your courage and devotion.”*

Step 6: Listen to your teacher’s announcement.

Step 7: Listen carefully to the class discussion. Respond honestly when called upon.



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The French Revolution has begun. You reluctantly accepted the Constitution of 1791 because you had no other choice. You no longer have absolute power to rule France, but you remain the head of France and can still veto (reject) laws passed by the new government, the National Assembly. France is still in a worsening financial crisis.

Step 1: When the teacher directs you, read the following statement announcing your support of the new Constitution:

“French citizens, as your king, I recognize the Constitution of 1791, which abolishes noble privileges and allows the National Assembly, as a representative body of the people, to make laws for France. I recognize your power, and I recognize the new limitations on mine.”

Step 2: Listen carefully as the Controller-General describes the financial crisis.

Step 3: Wait quietly as the National Assembly discusses possible solutions to the financial crisis. Then listen as members of the National Assembly kneel before you and explain their proposals. Wait to hear the result of the vote by the National Assembly on each. If a proposal is passed, your teacher will ask if you approve of it. To every proposal that passes, reply, *“I exercise my constitutional right to veto (reject) that proposal.”* Using your veto shows the National Assembly that you still have ultimate power.

Step 4: Listen to the new proposal.

Step 5: When called upon, speak in defense of yourself. Then listen to the debate in the National Assembly.

Step 6: Listen and watch quietly.

Step 7: Listen and watch quietly.