



Peasant

You are a French peasant. You live on a manor owned by your noble lord. You spend the day—from sunrise to sunset—farming crops for your family and your lord. If you don't produce enough food, you and your family could starve. You attend church each Sunday to gain spiritual guidance from the clergy, and you have a great deal of affection for your king and queen.

- 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:** Use scratch paper, a pen or pencil, and scissors to reproduce the food token that appears at the bottom of this role card. Since your main role in life is to produce food, work hard to replicate the food token as many times as possible. Minimally, you must produce at least 20. If you produce fewer than 20, you will “starve” and lose points for the activity.
- Step 4:** Give all your food tokens to your lord.
- Step 5:** Listen carefully to the Controller-General's announcement.





Member of Third Estate



You are a member of the Third Estate, the commoners, preparing to attend the meeting of the Estates General in 1789. Due to the urgent financial crisis facing France, the king has 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: Kneel and listen carefully to the king's speech. Applaud respectfully when he finishes.

Step 2: Work with the other members of the Third Estate to complete the tasks described below. In doing so, you must assert the rights of the Third Estate, whose members have been taxed heavily, while the nobles' and clergy's wealth has been taxed little or not at all.

- Decide whether you think the separate Estates should vote by order (each Estate, one vote) or by head (one person, one vote) during the meeting of the Estates General. Explain why.
- Write suggestions for how to solve the current financial crisis. For example, who should be taxed? Why? How much should they pay?
- Choose a spokesperson to present and read your proposal to the king and queen.
- Create banners with a slogan and a visual symbol representing the ideas and interests of the Third Estate.
- Display your banners.

Step 3: Listen as a spokesperson from each Estate kneels before the king and queen and presents the Estate's proposal. If you are the spokesperson for your Estate, kneel in front of the king and queen and read your proposal when instructed by your teacher.

Step 4: Listen silently to the king's proposal.

Step 5: Discuss with the other members of the Third Estate whether to vote for the king's proposal. When your teacher instructs you, have your spokesperson announce the Third Estate's vote. Listen to see how the other Estates voted.

Step 6: Listen to your teacher's announcement and follow her or his directions.

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



Member of National Assembly: Commoner



The French Revolution has begun. You are one of the commoners who joined the revolution and are now a member of the National Assembly, the new governmental body. King Louis XVI reluctantly accepted the Constitution of 1791 because he had no other choice. The king no longer has absolute power to rule France, but he remains the head of France and can still veto (reject) laws passed by the National Assembly. France is still in a worsening financial crisis.

Step 1: Listen silently as King Louis XVI makes an announcement. Applaud respectfully at the end.

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

Step 3: Discuss with the members of the National Assembly possible ways to raise money to save France from financial ruin. (Ideas include selling all church lands, taxing all French citizens, and declaring bankruptcy.) Afterward, if you have a proposal for the National Assembly to consider, kneel before the king and queen and announce your plan. The National Assembly will vote on it. If it passes, the king will announce whether he approves or vetoes (rejects) it.

Step 4: Listen to the new proposal.

Step 5: Listen to and participate in the debate of the National Assembly.

Step 6: Work with the members of the National Assembly to create a new constitution.

Step 7: Discuss the question your teacher raises.