



Member of National Assembly: Robespierre

The French Revolution has begun. Your name is Maximilien Robespierre, and you joined the revolution and are now a member of the National Assembly, the new governmental body. At certain points in the activity, you will stand and deliver dramatic and impassioned speeches, which are scripted for you below. Keep your identity secret from all students until Step 4.

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, listen to proposals made to the king by members of the National Assembly. The National Assembly will vote on all proposals. For each proposal that passes, the king will announce whether he approves or vetoes (rejects) it.
- Step 4:** When the teacher shows the class “Step 4: Robespierre announces a revolutionary plan,” stand up dramatically on a chair, point to the king, and read the following speech with passion and anger:
- “French citizens, we have just uncovered secret documents from the royal palace that prove beyond a doubt that the king is a traitor. He attempted to leave France. He collaborated with the Austrian enemy. He conspired to stop the revolution and take back his power. I hold the proof in my hands. See for yourself!”*
- Reveal the secret document to the class. After they have seen it, say:
- “French citizens, revolutionary brothers and sisters, we have been tricked by this wicked king. I propose we sell off the church lands, tax all citizens equally, fight the Austrians with revolutionary spirit, and put the king on trial for treason. Raise your hand if you’re in favor!”*
- Step 5:** When directed by the teacher, ask: “Who will speak in defense of this wicked king?” Watch to see who speaks in defense of the king. You can call anyone who speaks a “traitor.” When directed by the teacher, ask: “Who votes to convict the king as guilty of treason?” Take note of the traitors who do not vote the king as guilty. Watch what the teacher does to the king.



Member of National Assembly: Robespierre (continued)

Step 6: When the teacher directs you, read the following speech:

“Revolutionary brothers and sisters, the problem with France is that there are too many traitors. If we execute all traitors, we will have a Republic of Virtue and then will be able to continue the revolution. To all traitors of the Revolution, terror is now the order of the day. I ask you revolutionary citizens of France to write a new constitution that will save France.”

While the students are working, point out to the teacher any traitors to the Revolution, and they will be “executed.” These could be people who simply defended the king or were part of his administration, such as the queen and Controller-General. Also, you may want to “execute” anyone who isn’t working to solve the problems of France or anyone who asks you questions that bother you. You may “execute” six to eight students.

Step 7: Discuss the question your teacher raises.

Secret Document

*In the Year of Our Lord,
Seventeen hundred and ninety-one*

Dear Louis-Charles, Noble Baron de Breteuil,

This new Constitution of 1791 is absurd and detestable. Though I have signed it, I regret it. I have contacted the Royal Court in Austria and plan to flee there when possible. From there, perhaps I can organize support for the return of the monarchy. God bless you in these times of shame.

*Respectfully,
Louis XVI, King of France*