

**History Revolutions: French  
Teach Yourself Series  
Topic 2: Historians views on the causes  
and consequences of revolution**

SAMPLE

# Contents

Historiography .....	3
Causes of the French Revolution .....	3
As it appears in Units 3 and 4 .....	3
Outcomes of the French Revolution .....	4
As it appears in Units 3 and 4 .....	4
What are the 'big questions' about the French Revolution? .....	5
As it appears in Units 3 and 4 .....	5
Lefebvre's four French Revolutions .....	6
As it appears in Units 3 and 4 .....	6
Solutions to Review Questions .....	6

SAMPLE

# Historiography

Historiography is the writing of history and studying how history is written. In VCE, students must understand that every historian has different interpretations of 'the facts.' Historians generally aim to be objective, but every historian is influenced by their own lives: where they grew up, their education and the values they developed, the values implicit in the culture in which they lived and worked, when they were researching and writing. We can imagine that Edmund Burke, an Englishman who wrote *Reflections on the Revolution in France*, in 1790, would have quite a different view of the French Revolution than, say, Simon Schama, writing his history of the revolution, *Citizens*, published for the 200th anniversary of the French Revolution in 1989. As well as different time frames, historians may focus on a particular aspect of the revolution; for example, Robert Darnton on cultural aspects and Lynn Hunt on feminist issues. All historians are working from a series of events that occurred in the late 18th century, but their interpretations of those events differ.

## Causes of the French Revolution As it appears in Units 3 and 4

Area of Study 1 for Units 3 and 4: Revolutions is titled 'Causes of revolution.' Students investigate:

- What caused the revolution?
- How did the actions of popular movements and particular individuals contribute to triggering a revolution?
- To what extent did social tensions and ideological conflicts contribute to the outbreak of revolution?

The key knowledge for France for Area of Study 1 includes:

- the events and other conditions that contributed to the outbreak of revolution, including involvement in the American War of Independence, friction between monarchy and Parlements, noble privileges, peasant grievances, economic change, the calling of the Estates-General and their regulation, the 'Cahiers de Doléances', decisions made by Louis XVI, political pamphlets, the harvest crisis and food shortages and the dismissal of Necker.

### Review Questions

1. List the eleven possible causes of the French Revolution that are outlined in the Study Design.

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|----|-----|
| 1. | 7.  |
| 2. | 8.  |
| 3. | 9.  |
| 4. | 10. |
| 5. | 11. |
| 6. |     |

# Outcomes of the French Revolution

## As it appears in Units 3 and 4

The Study Design for Area of Study 2: Consequences of revolution, asks four key questions:

- How did the consequences of revolution shape the new order?
- How did the new regime consolidate its power?
- How did the revolution affect the experiences of those who lived through it?
- To what extent was society changed and revolutionary ideas achieved?

The key knowledge for France for Area of Study 2 includes:

- the challenges the new regime faced in attempting to consolidate its power, including power of the Church and nobility, hostility of foreign powers and the Papacy, the scale of reforms envisaged by the Revolution, economic challenges, the outbreak and course of war, internal divisions over the aims of the Revolution, the abolition of absolute monarchy and privileged corporations, the introduction of popular sovereignty and representative government, changes to laws and taxes, the abolition of feudalism, the abolition of slavery and reforms to the Church.

### Review Questions

2. As used in the Study Design, what do these words and phrases mean?

a. attempting to consolidate its power:

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b. privileged corporations:

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c. popular sovereignty:

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d. representative government:

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## Outcomes of the French Revolution

### As it appears in Units 3 and 4

The Study Design includes lists of key skills for both areas of study. For Area of Study 1, two key skills are:

- evaluate historical interpretations about the significant causes of a revolution
- construct arguments about the causes of revolution using primary sources and historical interpretations as evidence.

For Area of Study 2, two key skills are:

- evaluate historical interpretations about the significant consequences of a revolution
- construct arguments about the consequences of revolution using primary sources and historical interpretations as evidence.

#### Review Question

3. Recalling all you have read for this topic, write a short paragraph outlining why there are different interpretations of the causes and consequences of the French Revolution.

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## What are the 'big questions' about the French Revolution?

### As it appears in Units 3 and 4

There are two 'big questions' for the student of the French Revolution. The first is: what caused the ancien regime to fail in 1789 and a new regime to take over? The second: What changed as a result of the French Revolution?

These two 'big questions' underpin the Study Design. Area of Study 1 deals with what caused the French Revolution. What was the relative importance of factors such as friction between monarchy and Parlements, or ideas such as the Enlightenment, the role of individuals such as Louis XVI or Emmanuel Joseph Sieyès, and popular movements such as the storming of the Bastille in bringing about the revolution? Area of Study 2 deals with the consequences of the revolution. How did the new regime attempt to make the new society? What challenges did it face and how did it overcome those challenges? Did it achieve what it set out to achieve, and how was the Revolution lived out in the everyday lives of various groups in French society?

#### Early interpretations of the French Revolution

One of the first books published on the French Revolution was Englishman Edmund Burke's *Reflections on the Revolution in France*, published in 1790. Burke does not so much investigate the causes of the French Revolution, but condemns it as the people throwing off 'the yoke of laws and morals.' He believed the revolution was trying to destroy past institutions and traditions, and that it would lead to more violence and more authoritarian rule.

## Solutions to Review Questions

### 1. Possible causes of the French Revolution as outlined in the Study Design:

1. *France's involvement in the American War of Independence*
2. *Friction between monarchy and Parlements*
3. *Noble privileges*
4. *Peasant grievances*
5. *Economic change*
6. *The calling of the Estates General and their regulation*
7. *The Cahiers de doléances*
8. *Decisions made by Louis XVI*
9. *Political pamphlets*
10. *The harvest crisis and food shortage*
11. *The dismissal of Necker*

### 2.

#### a. attempting to consolidate its power:

*Once the new government was established, how difficult was it to establish its governance.*

#### b. privileged corporations:

*The old regime in France had powerful groups, for example nobles of the sword, or the Church, that enjoyed special customs and privileges.*

#### c. popular sovereignty:

*The belief or reality that the people should rule.*

#### d. representative government:

*The government 'represents' the people. Laws exist only after the government has consulted the population in general.*

### 3. *Historians attempt to objectively interpret the 'facts' of the causes and consequences of the French Revolution. However, they are influenced by their upbringing, their cultural and educational experiences and when they are researching and writing. Therefore, they may interpret 'facts' in different ways to historians who have had different experiences. They write at different times, which means they have access to different information: for example, Edmund Burke, writing in 1790, had access to quite different information than, say, Simon Schama writing in the late 20th century. As a result of these variations, historians may interpret the 'facts' quite differently, so arriving at different causes and consequences of the French Revolution.*

## 4.

<b>Historian</b>	A comment on possible causes of the French Revolution
<b>Edmund Burke</b>	<i>People don't respect the traditions, laws and morals of the society</i>
<b>Jean Joseph Mounier</b>	<i>The philosophes/Enlightenment ideas were not important in causing the French Revolution</i>
<b>Abbé Barruel</b>	<i>Freemason conspiracies were an important cause of the revolution</i>
<b>Georges Lefebvre</b>	<i>The bourgeois class challenged the authority of the king and nobility, which led onto revolution</i>
<b>George Rudé</b>	<i>Classes 'from below' rise up and challenge those in authority</i>
<b>Albert Soboul</b>	<i>Class struggle was the overarching factor that created revolution</i>
<b>Richard Cobb</b>	<i>Not a Marxist, but workers and peasants are important in the revolution</i>

## 5.

<b>Historian</b>	<b>Interpretation of the French Revolution</b>
<b>Alfred Cobban</b>	<i>France was already changing from feudalism to a capitalist society before the revolution. Since the bourgeoisie were not capitalists, he rejects the Marxist historians' interpretation of 'class struggle.'</i>
<b>William Doyle</b>	<i>The French Revolution was caused by a series of 'accidents', not a straightforward pattern. He doesn't think the bloodshed was worth it.</i>
<b>Simon Schama</b>	<i>He emphasises the violence of those in the revolution.</i>
<b>Robert Darnton</b>	<i>Researched what people were reading prior to the revolution.</i>