François-Marie Arouet, known by his nom de plume Voltaire, was born on November 21, 1694, in Paris, France. He was educated by the Jesuits at the Collège Louis-le-Grand, where he received a classical education and developed a sharp wit. Early in his life, he decided to pursue a career as a writer, rather than following his father's footsteps into law. This decision set the stage for his future as one of the Enlightenment's most influential philosophers. Voltaire's early work was marked by his sharp wit and a propensity for controversy, which often landed him in trouble with the authorities and the French aristocracy. In 1717, Voltaire was imprisoned in the Bastille for nearly a year due to his satirical verse that mocked the French Regent, Philippe II, Duke of Orléans. This was the beginning of a long and tumultuous relationship with the French authorities, which included multiple imprisonments and periods of exile. During his first imprisonment, he began his epic poem 'La Henriade,' an ambitious work that celebrated the French king Henry IV as a model of enlightened leadership, contrasting with the corruption Voltaire perceived in his own time. Voltaire's exile to England (1726-1729) was a turning point in his intellectual life. There, he was deeply influenced by the works of John Locke and Isaac Newton, and he became a proponent of freedom of speech and religion. His observations and experiences in England led to the writing of 'Letters Concerning the English Nation' (1733), published in England as 'Letters on the English.' This work praised the English for their freedoms and indirectly criticized the French regime, which led to the book being banned in France and further solidified his reputation as a critic of the French establishment. Voltaire was a prolific writer, producing works in almost every literary form: plays, poetry, novels, essays, historical and scientific works, over 21,000 letters, and over two thousand books and pamphlets. He was an outspoken advocate for civil liberties and was often critical of the Catholic Church and French institutions, which led to his works being censored and banned. Despite this, his writings were widely read and circulated, often in secret, and they played a significant role in shaping the intellectual movement of the Enlightenment. In his later years, Voltaire focused on advocating for justice and fighting against religious intolerance. One of his most famous interventions was in the case of Jean Calas, a Protestant merchant who was wrongfully executed for the alleged murder of his son in 1762. Voltaire's campaign to vindicate Calas was successful, leading to the family's exoneration and a royal decree that granted French Protestants civil rights. This case exemplified Voltaire's commitment to justice and tolerance, themes prevalent throughout his life's work. Voltaire's relationship with Frederick the Great of Prussia was both significant and complex. Invited to Frederick's court in 1750, Voltaire spent several years there, where he was initially welcomed as a literary genius and became a member of Frederick's inner circle. However, their relationship deteriorated due to personal and intellectual disagreements, leading to Voltaire's departure in 1753. Despite the falling out, their correspondence continued for many years, reflecting the deep intellectual bond and the turbulent friendship they shared. Voltaire's philosophical novel 'Candide, or Optimism' (1759) is considered one of his greatest works. In it, he satirizes the philosophy of optimism, famously associated with the German philosopher Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz. The novel follows the young protagonist, Candide, through a series of increasingly disastrous adventures across the world, challenging the notion that 'all is for the best in the best of all possible worlds.' The work is a scathing critique of theodicy, war, and the cruelty of man, and it remains a cornerstone of Western literature. Despite his criticism of the Church and the monarchy, Voltaire was not a revolutionary. His ideal form of government was a benevolent and enlightened monarchy, which he believed could best ensure the welfare of the people. He was skeptical of democracy, fearing the potential for mob rule and the tyranny of the majority. Voltaire's advocacy for reform within the existing structures of power distinguished him from later revolutionaries who sought to overthrow the entire system. Voltaire's impact on the French Revolution is a topic of considerable debate among historians. While he died in 1778, eleven years before the Revolution began, his ideas on civil liberties and criticism of the French monarchy and social system were influential among the revolutionaries. However, Voltaire's vision of reform did not include the violent overthrow of the monarchy or the radical egalitarianism that came to characterize the Revolution. His legacy is thus seen as a contributing factor to the Enlightenment thinking that underpinned the Revolution, rather than a direct blueprint for it. Voltaire died on May 30, 1778, at the age of 83. He had returned to Paris after several years at his estate in Ferney. Shortly before his death, he was initiated into the Freemasons, reflecting his enduring commitment to the Enlightenment principles of reason, freedom, and fraternity. His death was widely mourned, and he was celebrated as one of the greatest writers and thinkers of his age. In 1791, his remains were enshrined in the Panthéon in Paris, a mausoleum for the remains of distinguished French citizens, as a national tribute to his enduring influence on French culture and philosophy.