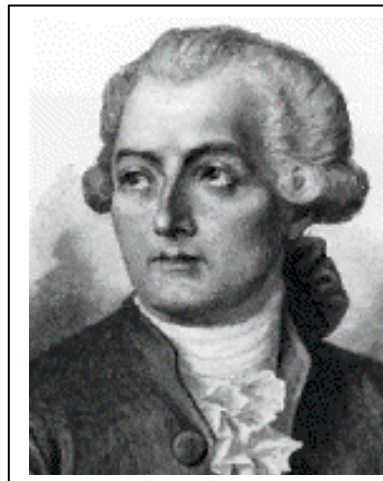


**Antoine Laurent Lavoisier (1743 – 1794)**

Antoine Lavoisier was a great French chemist. From the 1770s, he changed the face of chemistry. He was the leading light among the Parisian scientists of the 1780s. He contributed in the reform of chemical nomenclature.

Antoine Laurent Lavoisier was born in August 26, 1743 in Paris, France. His father was a lawyer. He attended one of the best schools in France, the College des Quatre Nations. There he received a sound classical and literary education and gained a prize in rhetoric. In the senior school he was able to study mathematics and astronomy. He learned mineralogy and chemistry after leaving school, when he was able to take advantage of public lectures.



After leaving school he had followed the family tradition and studied law. He found that nobody was willing to pay him to make chemical experiments, so in 1768 he accepted a job as a 'Farmer General', or tax collector. Lavoisier's paid employment, therefore, was not as a chemist but as an inspector of taxes. He was able to finance his experiments with the profits of the tax business. He would get up early in order to devote two hours to science before going to his paid employment; he would regularly set aside a further three hours in the evening. But one day a week he would spend the entire day in the laboratory. Lavoisier concluded in 1783 that respiration is a slow combustion. In the last years of his life he carried out further respiration experiments on himself and his assistant.

He never held a teaching position, yet through his book he was to teach the new chemistry to the next generation. Lavoisier's greatest unpopularity came from his deep involvement in the tax Farm. When he was arrested in 1793, during the 'Terror', it was not as a chemist but as a tax official, and when he was sentenced to the guillotine (a machine used for beheading criminals) on 8<sup>th</sup> May 1794, he was executed as a lackey of the old regime rather than as a symbol of the new science. The wonder is that Lavoisier's exceptional scientific talents did not save him. The tragic death of Lavoisier and the happy survival of his colleagues proved something of an embarrassment to them. The mathematician Lagrange said shortly after the execution of the chemist that it had taken only an instant to cut off his head but it might take a hundred years to produce a man of equal talent.