

Appendix A14

The Reign of Terror

The Revolution Turns Bloody

When the French citizens decide to take action against its monarch in 1789, many people in Europe and America supported their efforts and were very excited. Then, the foreign supporters changed their minds. They could not believe the chaos and the heartlessness of the revolutionaries; they decided to wage war against France. What the foreigners did not know was that things were about to get even uglier.

Death Every Afternoon

Tumbrels, carrying “traitors” of the French Revolution, would go up and down the streets everyday. These traitors could be anyone including, men, women, and children. Their “crimes” ranged from crying over a relative killed by the guillotine, someone chopping down a tree that was “planted in honor of the revolution”, anyone who discussed their dislike of the revolution, or anyone who would use the wrong terminology—using “monsieur” or “madame” instead of citizen and citizeness. All these acts could be punishable by death under the Law of Suspects—more than 40,000 citizens would be murdered.

The Jacobins and the Committee of Public Safety

The Jacobins were members of the Bourgeois and were very much in favor of violence. They were the ones who insisted on killing the king and queen and waging war on Austria. However, there were people (especially in the countryside) who did not agree with the tactics of the Jacobins—and made sure they knew it. Unfortunately, the Jacobins were able to take control of the government causing the country to spiral totally out of control. The foreign wars were taking their toll on France, civil war was breaking out in many places and people who did not support the Jacobins were allowing foreign troops to stay in their homes, food was becoming scarce and prices were still rising, and everybody was suspicious about each other—something had to be done. So a committee was created—The Committee of Public Safety—and a man, a very violent man was put in charge.

Maximilien Robespierre

Robespierre was a strong supporter of the French Revolution and of violence. He believed the only way to for the Revolution to succeed was to rid all those who opposed it—the motto would become, “Let terror be the order of the day!” This was the man who was responsible for creating the Law of Suspects. However, his fate would come after he tried to accuse other members of the National Convention of being traitors; he would be taken to jail. Realizing he had reached the end, he tried to kill himself that night, the plan failed and he was taken to the guillotine with bloody rags wrapped around his face. Along with Robespierre, other members of the Committee of Public Safety would meet their fate as well.

Adapted from the Person textbook for 6th grade Core Knowledge History and Geography

Appendix A15

Journal Entry: Losing Focus?

Do you think the citizens of France lost sight of their purpose—to gain more freedom? Who do you think lost the most? Why?

[illegible]