

[www.interact-simulations.com](http://www.interact-simulations.com)

# LOUIS XVI



A Re-creation of His 1792 Trial for Treason





# LOUIS XVI

A re-creation of his 1792 trial for treason

BILL LACEY, the author of LOUIS XVI, is also Interact's editor of this WORLD HISTORY TRIALS series. Bill has written for our company since 1974. His items include GREEKS, SKINS, FIFTIES, VIKINGS, several in the GREAT AMERICAN CONFRONTATION series, and four of the trials in the 25 AMERICAN RE-CREATIONS series. Bill has taught for nearly 30 years in California public schools, the last 23 at Fountain Valley High School. While away from his teaching responsibilities, he enjoys running, rejuvenating his golf game, and puttering around his home.

Copyright © 1991

**Interact**

10200 Jefferson Boulevard

P.O. Box 802

Culver City, CA 90232

ISBN 1-57336-200-X

All rights reserved. Only those pages of this simulation intended for student use as hand-outs may be reproduced by the teacher who has purchased this teaching unit from **Interact**. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form or by any means—electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording—without prior written permission from the publisher.



## PURPOSE - 1

Few historians would disagree that the French Revolution stands as one of history's most significant events. Its happenings are so stirring, its impact so immense, and its characters so vivid, that writers, film makers, poets, and scholars have found the years 1789-1799 to be an immensely fertile ground.

The year 1789 was a watershed moment for France and Europe. An unruly mob broke into the Bastille on July 14, captured seven prisoners, and confiscated enough gunpowder to ward off the king's loyal troops. On that day, centuries of autocratic rule in France began to dissolve, and, as a result, the western world changed irrevocably. Like America less than 15 years before, the explosion of revolution advanced the bumpy course of freedom for the common man.

When the hated symbol of the Bastille fell, it signaled a need to destroy more so-called symbols of the old regime. Indeed, what followed was more like a bloodbath of murder and destruction. In 1793-94, the carnage reached its zenith when more than 20,000 were shot or decapitated. Perhaps one event moved the revolutionary fervor to a higher pitch from a moderate revolt to a radical one: the trial and execution of King Louis XVI, the most odious symbol of the Bourbon monarchy's corruption and greed. The reign of this particular Louis, as it turned out, was ill-timed.

Louis XVI was tried for treason before a revolutionary tribunal in the National Convention and executed weeks after he first defended himself. It had been more an arraignment than a trial. The radicals in the convention listened only to help them make up their minds, not about his guilt or innocence, but about whether to sentence him to die under the "slippery blade" of the guillotine or to allow him to live either in exile or in prison.

Your students are about to re-create this important trial. After doing so, they will perceive why you made the decision to spend a few hours on Louis' fate in the National Convention and its proper place in history. On this note, the French Revolution itself is the backdrop for the trial, and doing the trial re-enforces the dramatic events of that movement. Second, trials are people activities. That is, raw human emotions are displayed, confrontations are played out, and clear-cut decisions are made at the end. What better way to have your students introduced to the French history-makers of this era. They were all there—Louis XVI, Robespierre, Danton, Barère, Marat, and others. Only a very young Napoleon was missing.

# XVI

# Louis



## PURPOSE - 2

Finally, the trial itself needs to be studied not only because it kept the revolutionary fervor alive (by executing the king), but also because it just precedes the Reign of Terror, when the revolution rushed perilously beyond moderation to extremes.



### **Important:**

*Be certain you spend some time making certain your students understand how American and French historical events influenced one another during the 1770s and 1780s ...*

Specifically, when your “citizens” role play Girondins and the Mountain in the convention, or major participants in the legal proceedings themselves, they will sharpen skills that include the following:

### **Knowledge**

1. the differences between the American justice system and the French “tribunal” system Louis XVI faced in 1792-93
2. French political thought in the 18th century
3. major arguments which led to the guilt and execution of the French king, a symbol of the Old Regime
4. the major events of the French Revolution
5. acquaintance with the trappings of the Revolution, including the “spirit” of the movement, its anthem, colors, flag, and weapon of death—the guillotine
6. the movement of the Revolution from moderate to radical

### **Attitudes**

1. appreciating the cataclysmic events French men and women, including the royal family, experienced
2. sensing how revolutionary zeal and its power can change a nation’s history.
3. appreciating that King Louis XVI’s guilt was not really in question and that the real issue in the convention was decided by the regicides who persuaded, or outnumbered the antiregicides
4. realizing how a nation’s mood can change from a moderation to radicalism

### **Skills**

1. speaking clearly and forcefully before a group, in this case, the National Convention of revolutionary France
2. researching and logically sequencing/ordering evidence
3. sorting out evidence, analyzing a verdict, and formulating a proper sentence for the accused found guilty
4. working in a group to render a verdict



## OVERVIEW

The trial of Louis XVI refocuses on an event within an event. Were it not for the French Revolution taking a radical turn (what do we do with this hated symbol of the Old Regime?), the king wouldn't have faced "The Mountain" in the National Convention, and your class wouldn't be re-creating this episode. Most schools require an analysis of the upheavals of the 18th and 19th centuries, and it is possible that a student would study the French Revolution more than once in a three to four year period. The author sees this as an opportunity not for repetition but for illustrating just how important this trial re-creation in "the best of times" and "the worst of times" really is. Your version of this event will be a watershed for your unit.



*Be thinking about the possibility of having your students dress up for their late 18th-century characters. Ask yourself:*

*"Where might I go to help them find partial or complete period costumes?"*

Students will be selected to play several roles:

- King Louis XVI;
- leaders of the National Convention;
- defense attorneys for the king; and
- several speakers who will present arguments for and against the execution of Louis, including evidence of his "treason" against the state.

As you follow the TRIAL PROCEDURE, you will note that this activity has four parts. Each of the four was actually days or weeks apart. But to re-create what happened in 1792-93 and to maintain continuity for your students, these segments have been structured to flow together so that the activity can be completed in one and a half to two class periods.

The four parts are as follows:

1. The king comes to the convention to hear and to answer the charges against him.
2. The king's brief defense is delivered by one of his attorneys.
3. Speeches on the king's guilt and sentencing are followed by three separate votes.
4. The king's dramatic execution under the blade of the guillotine (if found guilty, of course) is carried out.

Hopefully, all four segments will flow smoothly for you and your students. Even though Louis' name is attached to the trial, he is not the cornerstone of the activity. He does answer the charges early on. The trial's early dramatic focus is, and should be, on the various speeches on his fate delivered by the two major factions in the convention's ranks, the moderate Girondins versus the radical Mountain Jacobins. The past of French history catches up with its destiny in these well-delivered arguments.



# SETUP DIRECTIONS - 1

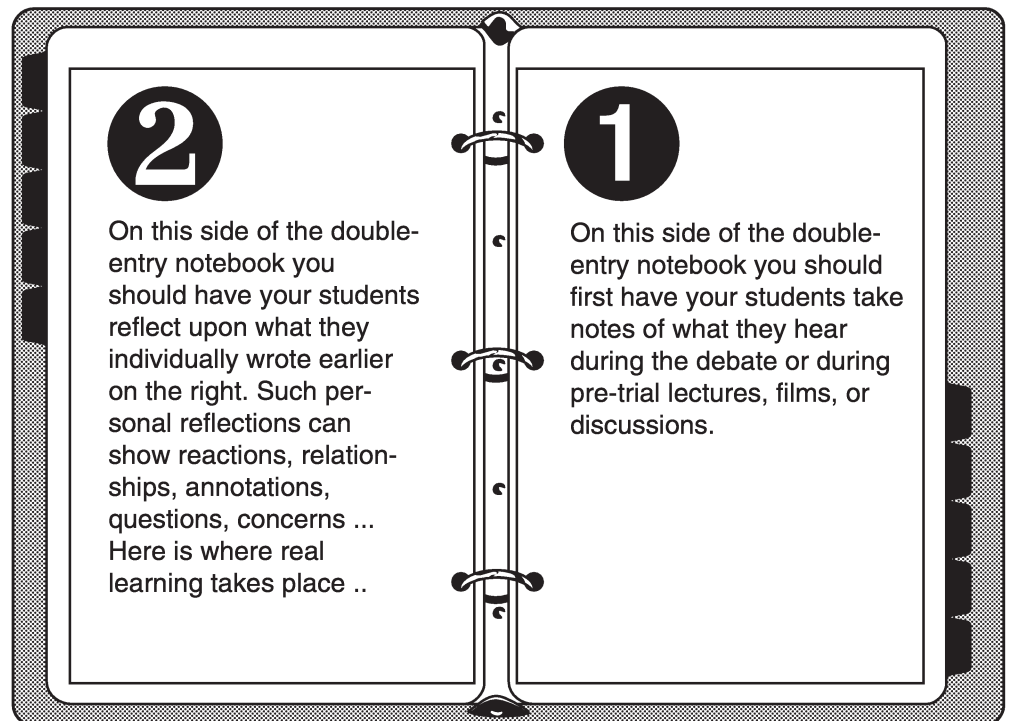
- 1. Major roles** Needless to say, it is important that you select good and responsible students to fill the roles in this activity, especially President Barère, De Sèze, and the delegates, who make speeches. Barère’s role is central or key to a successful re-creation. An unprepared or less than serious re-enactor in this pivotal role could be the difference in whether or not the class has an indelible learning experience.
- 2. Minor roles** The rest of the roles, notably the speakers in the convention who address the issue of regicide, should also be dependable and enjoy delivering a formal speech in front of their colleagues. Remember, there are no witnesses to testify for and against the king; so, these debates on the king’s fate serve to sort out the “evidence” and express the various viewpoints.
- 3. Note-taking** Everyone in your class should be accountable for what goes on, even those students who don’t get selected for a role. *Stress that they all are members of the convention.* To insure understanding consider requiring *all* students while not on their feet speaking to take notes on key arguments and testimony. Cooperative learning and peer teaching can help here. Set aside some time at the end of or the beginning of key class periods. Allow pairs or trios of students to copy and supplement one another’s notes.

*Research shows that the process of writing in the classroom is as important as the product...*

*If you are serious about helping your students learn more through the writing process, please contact **Interact** about our powerful Responding cross-disciplinary writing program. Hints about Responding’s power can be found at the right under*

**1**  
and

**2**





## SETUP DIRECTIONS - 2

*You might set up a table in your classroom during your students' study of the French Revolution. Include appropriate illustrations and books for students to browse through while you're building up to the trial.*

4. **Extra research** Encourage *all* participants to supplement your French Revolution instruction with some outside research of their own. Several appropriate books are listed in the bibliography.
5. **Room arrangement** A week before the trial, assign some students to make one or two tricolor flags to drape or hang in class during the activity. Another student or two could find a copy of the French national anthem "La Marseillaise" in a library or record store, make a copy for the activity and bring it in to be used. (One is included in this packet.) Another task for some volunteers: Have them make badges to wear representing the Girondins and the Jacobins. Each of the latter's badges has a *mountain* on it since most Jacobins sat in the upper tier of seats and benches in the Manège and were called the "Mountain." Radicalism became synonymous with the "Mountain," and often Jacobins were, or voted, with the "Mountain." Include too, if you wish to be historically accurate, badges with *P* on them. The *P* would stand for the "Plain," a large group from the largest section of the hall who usually voted moderate or who were uncommitted. Additionally, these same students might want to create cockade hats for French "citizens" to wear.
6. **Duplication** About a week prior to the trial, select students for the roles and duplicate the following materials to give to them when appropriate:
  - TRIAL PROCEDURE sheets (one per student, class set, or one to each major participant per class)
  - BACKGROUND ESSAY (class set, or one per student)
  - HOW TO MAKE A GUILLOTINE IN CLASS (one transparency .. or give 3 to 5 copies to one construction team)
  - FACTION PROFILE SHEET: THE GIRONDINS (10 per class)
  - FACTION PROFILE SHEET: THE MOUNTAIN/JACOBINS (10 per class)
  - FACTION PROFILE SHEET: THE PLAIN (10 per class)
  - PROFILE SHEET: KING LOUIS XVI, FORMER KING OF FRANCE
  - PROFILE SHEET: THE KING'S ATTORNEYS (two per class)
  - GIRONDIN SPEAKERS #1, #2: (one each per class)
  - MOUNTAIN SPEAKERS #1, #2, #3: (one each per class)
  - MINOR ROLES (one per class, or one per each role on sheet)

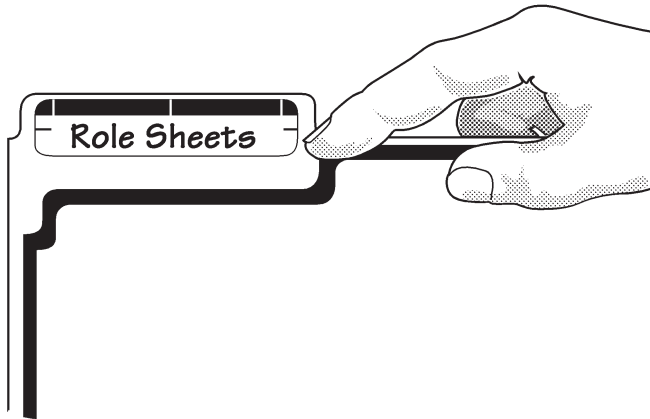


## SETUP DIRECTIONS - 3

---

*Set up several folders for the duplicated handouts several days in advance.*

- LA MARSEILLAISE (transparency or class set)
- INTERROGATION OF THE KING (two per class)
- AFTERMATH OF THE TRIAL (class set, or transparency)
- DEBRIEFING (one per each character, plus one for the emcee)







# TEACHING SUGGESTIONS - 1

## A week prior to the trial

1. As a motivator have a student demonstrate an already constructed guillotine.
2. Duplicate and hand out necessary materials to the students playing roles. (See Setup Directions.)
3. Arrange for any furniture additions or changes for your classroom.
4. If you want to involve some students in helping out with some flourishes (flags, anthem, and badges or armbands), instruct them at this time (see Setup Directions).



*The BACKGROUND ESSAY here, as in all INTERACT publications, is vital to understanding the "Big Picture."*

## Day 1

1. Hand out BACKGROUND ESSAY and have everyone read it. Here are some options:
  - A cooperative learning team read-around or reader's theater version might be better than an oral or silent one. In some classes this might take all period, but, if it does, arrange to have major participants work on their roles while the remainder of the class reads the essay.
  - Consider teaching students to highlight and underline key ideas and facts in the BACKGROUND ESSAY. Such training can help students succeed in their future education and training. In any case, the information is vital in connecting all the events and the reason Louis XVI is on trial.
  - Of course, be sure you spend some time, too, reviewing why the class is re-creating the trial. (See Purpose and Overview sections earlier in this Teacher Guide.)
2. If you have time, show a brief excerpt from a video, film, or filmstrip on the French Revolution. Recommended are any of several versions of the storming of the Bastille, but especially the PBS mini-series of Dickens' *Tale of Two Cities* shown in 1989-1990. If you select this, also show the end when Sidney Carton goes to the guillotine. Even Ronald Coleman's version done in the 1930s is worthwhile.

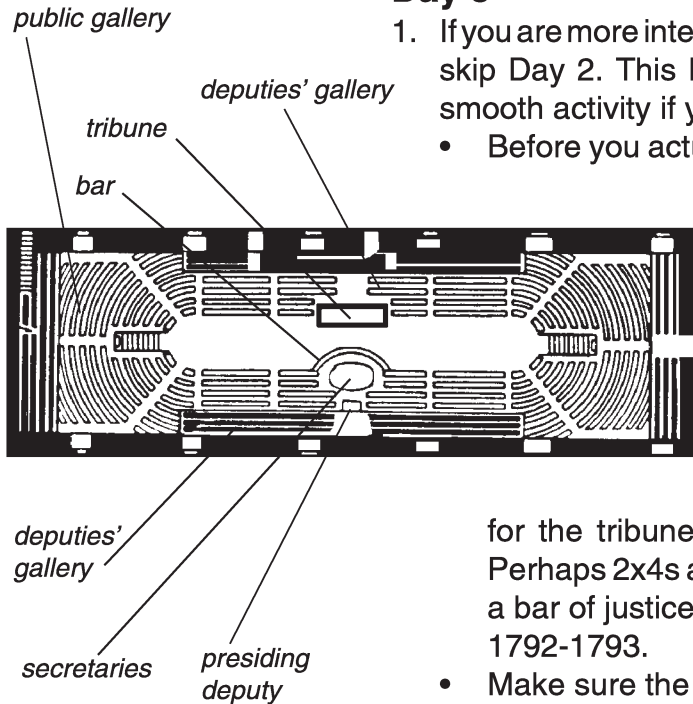
## Day 2

1. You could schedule a Preparation Day to help those in need, and give time for creative students to make badges, etc. Furthermore, the students who will make speeches in the convention need time to make an outline, to practice their speeches, and to get into being a Girondin ... or a member of the Plain or the Mountain. Perhaps each faction could sit together, wear their own badges and cockade hats, and work up a club cheer or chant.



## TEACHING SUGGESTIONS - 2

### Day 3



1. If you are more interested in *substance* than *mood* or *spirit*, then skip Day 2. This Day 3 is trial day, and you should have a smooth activity if you follow the sequence below.

- Before you actually begin (and de Thionville is recognized to speak—see TRIAL PROCEDURE), make sure the room is set up the day before to resemble the Manège of 1792 (It had been the riding academy of Louis XVI). The diagram at left shows the Manège as it was in 1792. Try to set up your classroom in a similar fashion. Several risers would elevate the convention delegates. A small table could be used for the tribune, where speakers made their arguments. Perhaps 2x4s and PVC plumbing pipe could be turned into a bar of justice similar to the one the king stood behind in 1792-1793.
- Make sure the TRIAL PROCEDURE is in the hands of all major participants (and/or perhaps taped to all desks in the room). Also ascertain who's absent and who needs a substitute and a profile sheet.
- Overview the trial's sequence and what you expect from each individual or group. (An observer's note-taking log could be provided for all non-participants, along with advice on how they—the deputies—should behave). Make it clear when and how you want bursts of loyalty and enthusiasm.
- Begin the trial, following the TRIAL PROCEDURE. Hopefully all speakers will not read their lines. Encourage them to "deliver" them as if the words are in their heads and hearts and not merely on paper.
- You will not complete the trial during this day; therefore, try to recess at an appropriate time (after the king's interrogation?).



*The ultimate teacher woe: absenteeism of key students. A possible solution would be to have understudies for major roles.*

### Day 4

1. Make sure all students are in their proper places, all major participants are in class ready to fulfill their roles, and observers absent the day before are given materials.
2. Continue with the trial as specified in the TRIAL PROCEDURE sheet. Perhaps playing the "Marseillaise" will get them into the proper frame of mind. Or maybe try some "Mountain" chants.
3. If there is not enough time to execute the king after the verdict and sentencing, stage that event tomorrow.