

# World History Activators

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French Revolution through World War II

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CULVER CITY, CALIFORNIA

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## Introduction

### **Purpose**

These simple-to-use Activators supplement your World History classes and immerse your students in “living history” situations. Students get up from their desks, move around in different classroom configurations, and find themselves drawn into history that becomes compellingly real. For a variety of reasons, students seem to function better and learn more when actively engaged. World History Activators provide brief, clever, and exciting experiences for your students.

### **What Are Activators?**

Activators possess three common elements, which embody a philosophical foundation.

1. Activators are simple and brief and require little background reading or preparation. Most Activators take one to two class periods.
2. Duplication requirements are minimal. Brief essays read and visual schematics projected can provide all the background information students need.
3. Activators involve most, if not all, of your students, be they of advanced, average, or low ability or of limited English fluency.

### **Special Lessons**

World History Activators provide experiences that shape students’ historical perceptions and positively enhance their understanding of past, current, and future events. As you introduce the units to your students, help them to understand that we re-create history because doing so has an inherent value.

- **Be Prepared.** Be sure to read the **Setup Directions** and **Lesson Plan** options thoroughly before introducing the Activator to your students. Enlist students’ help in setting the scene within the classroom.
- **Reinforce Student Response.** During the action of an Activator, your students are involved in issues and events. When students make personal comments, either in class or during the **Debriefing**, praise them for their astute remarks. Your reinforcement of their experiences emphasizes for all students that history is real because it touches them. Above all, express your pleasure that students are so involved.



#### **Teaching tip**

Every student in your class will be standing, walking, marching, crawling, lying down, negotiating, plotting, and perhaps even “painting” as participants at crucial turning points in the development of our modern world, so be ready to guide students through an active classroom experience.



#### **Teaching tip**

An Activator provides memorable experiences that your students will retain long after other school events fade.



### **Activating History**

Lessons in the traditional social studies classroom embody mainly visual and auditory learning. However, many students learn more effectively in kinesthetic situations. Activators emphasize the use of body movement, or the kinesthetic learning style often seen in skilled athletes, dancers, and actors. Perhaps students respond so positively and energetically to classes in physical education, shop, art, or home economics, not to mention extracurricular activities, because they can move around and socialize as they learn. Kinesthetic learning is often underutilized in social studies, yet this form of active learning generates highly effective and often indelible lessons.

### **Ability Levels**

Activators are appropriate to use for various grade and ability levels and appeal to a wide variety of student learning styles. Activators follow the thesis: "Keep it simple and get kids up and moving."

**Gifted Students.** Most gifted students love to play roles. They will probably ad lib dialogue with great success. Some gifted students are natural Directors.

**Drama Students.** Tap your drama students to play the pivotal roles. Allow them time to rehearse and document the performance by filming it.

**Middle School Students.** Spend some time before and after the action of the Activator explaining the *whys* of the event dramatized. Also, it is suggested that you tap your best and brightest to perform the key roles.

**Lower Ability and Limited English Students.** These two groups of students appreciate and respond well to the kinesthetic learning of Activators. Rehearse two or more times. Do not proceed with the action of the Activator until everyone knows exactly what will occur and when.

### **Grouping Students**

Activators promote the concept of "students as workers and players and teachers as managers and facilitators." Activators allow students to participate in their learning in ways that are often unfamiliar to them. Consider the following when planning the action of an Activator:

- **Division of the Class and Assignment of Roles.** Take into account individual ability, gender balance, maturity, and ethnic diversity.
- **Student Directors.** You may select four or five student directors early in the school year to rotate responsibilities for a series of Activators. Allow each Director three or four days to prepare for his or her Activator. Meet with the cadre before and after the action of the first Activator. Review your standards and expectations for the Activators. Grant enough latitude so they may apply their talents—and their time—fully.

# Background Essay

**Place:** Paris, France

**Time:** July 14, 1789

## ***Impending Crisis***

In 1777 the young King Louis XVI signed an alliance with the American colonies agreeing to assist them in their struggle for independence against Great Britain. Little did he know that the American War for Independence would inspire French citizens yearning to overthrow their own system of privilege and absolutism. Furthermore, by spending money to help the Americans, the French government deepened its own financial crisis, setting off the series of events that eventually cost King Louis XVI his head. Deeply in debt, the government could not pay its bills.

## ***The Need for Reform***

In fact, by the late eighteenth century most French men and women had plenty of reasons for dissatisfaction. A severe economic crisis and poor harvests created shortages that sent food prices soaring for a population that already bore a dramatically unfair tax burden. Any attempts to institute reforms that might have solved these problems encountered firm resistance by the traditional social and political system known as the Old Regime. In the Old Regime, the French people were divided into three distinct *estates* (classes) with vastly differing degrees of privilege and obligation.

## ***The Estates of the Old Regime***

**The First Estate** consisted of the clergy, from the highest bishop to the poorest parish priest. Members of the First Estate did not pay taxes to the government, and neither did the Catholic Church, which owned one-quarter of the land in France. Bishops, archbishops, and cardinals—men of noble birth—lived in luxury, while parish priests—men of the middle and lower classes—were sympathetic to the plight of the poor.

**The Second Estate** consisted of the nobility and enjoyed many privileges. Only members of this class were eligible for the highest positions in the Church, the army, and the government, though they made up less than two percent of the population. Although many were extremely wealthy and owned vast amounts of land, members of this class paid almost no taxes.

**The Third Estate** consisted of three groups: bourgeoisie (middle class), city workers, and peasants. Because members of the First and Second Estates paid so few taxes, the Third Estate carried almost all of the nation's tax burden. The bourgeoisie included lawyers, manufacturers, shopkeepers, bankers, and successful artisans; many were wealthy and well educated, and these were often the most outspoken critics of the Old Regime. The city workers suffered especially from high food prices and shortages, while many peasants, required to give their landlords traditional payments customary from the days of feudalism, lived in destitute poverty.

## ***Economic and Financial Crises***

During the 1770s and 1780s, France suffered a series of poor harvests, leading to shortages of food, which pushed prices way up. Driving the exorbitant food prices still higher were taxes levied on food brought into the cities; not surprisingly, the customs posts where these taxes were collected became hated symbols of oppression for the workers in the cities. Meanwhile the French government found itself crippled by the huge debt it owed to bankers. The government had borrowed vast amounts of money to pay for past wars (most recently the American Revolution) and for the luxurious lifestyle of the king and his court at his palace at Versailles. Finally, in 1786 the bankers refused to lend the French government any more money. King Louis XVI faced a dilemma. The

# Narration

*The students take their places, as shown on the Schematic. The DIRECTOR calls out, "Freeze!" and holds up the FREEZE! sign. The students freeze silently in place.*

**NARRATOR #1.** Armed with muskets, but virtually no gunpowder, a crowd of Parisians makes its way to the Bastille. They don't intend to seize the fortress or free the prisoners. They want the gunpowder stored inside, and while they're at it, they want the cannons on the battlements withdrawn. Leaderless and inadequately armed, they are besieging a monolithic fortress, with walls 9 feet thick and 80 feet high, protected by 18 cannons and 14 rampart guns.

**NARRATOR #2.** Inside the prison, Governor Marquis de Launay is beside himself. An indecisive man, he inherited his position from his father. When he heard of the unrest in the city two nights ago, he raised the two drawbridges of the fortress and moved his cannons into firing position, pointing them at the surrounding streets and raising the level of fear in the neighborhood. Around ten o'clock in the morning, he hears the crowd approach.

**NARRATOR #1.** Shouts ring out as the Parisians reach the Bastille, demanding gunpowder and the withdrawal of the cannons.

*The DIRECTOR calls out, "Action!" and holds up the ACTION! sign. The students act out the events just described in the Narration. The DIRECTOR should encourage the members of the crowd to voice their demands but to remain calm.*

*The DIRECTOR calls out, "Freeze!" and holds up the FREEZE! sign. The students freeze silently in place.*

**NARRATOR #2.** At this point the crowd is relatively calm and reasonable. A group of delegates sent by the electors of Paris to represent the citizens pushes its way through the crowd to negotiate with Governor de Launay.

**NARRATOR #1.** The crowd lets them through. The first drawbridge is lowered and the delegates pass into the outer courtyard. The drawbridge is raised behind them.

*The DIRECTOR calls out, "Action!" and holds up the ACTION! sign. The students act out the events just described in the Narration.*

*The DIRECTOR calls out, "Freeze!" and holds up the FREEZE! sign. The students freeze silently in place.*

**NARRATOR #2.** De Launay meets the electors' delegates in the outer courtyard and invites them to join him for lunch in his apartment. As they dine, the governor agrees to withdraw the cannons and gives his word that his soldiers will only fire if they are fired upon. He will not turn over the gunpowder. The luncheon is cordial and lengthy.

*The DIRECTOR calls out, "Action!" and holds up the ACTION! sign. The students act out the events just described in the Narration. DE LAUNAY and the ELECTORS' DELEGATES ad lib the lines in their conversation.*

# Three-Cornered Hat

Staple

Staple

- Cut out this template for one side of your three-cornered hat.
- Tracing around the template onto black construction paper, make three copies of this template.
- Cut out the three black construction paper copies of the template to make the three sides of your hat.
- Paper clip the three sides of the hat together around your head to determine the proper size.
- When you have established the proper size, staple the three sides together and wear.

# Points to Ponder Response Sheet

## Analyzing Documents A & B

**Focus Question:** What happened when the Parisians stormed the Bastille on July 14, 1789?

Based on **Document A**, the account of Keversau, the Bastille besieger, answer the following questions and provide *evidence* from the reading to support your responses.

1. Who was Keversau, what was his role in the event, and how might his participation have affected his presentation of the facts?
2. What was Keversau's opinion of the people who stormed the Bastille?
3. What was Keversau's view of Governor de Launay's character and leadership?
4. According to Keversau, which side, the attackers or defenders, was responsible for starting the violence?
5. According Keversau, how did the besiegers treat the soldiers who had been defending the Bastille after entering the fortress?
6. According to Keversau, what was the reaction of the released prisoners when they saw Governor de Launay's head on a pike?

Based on **Document B**, the account of de Flue, the Bastille defender, answer the following questions and provide *evidence* from the reading to support your responses.

1. Who was de Flue, what was his role in the event, and how might his participation have affected his presentation of the facts?
2. What was de Flue's opinion of the people who stormed the Bastille?
3. What was de Flue's view of Governor de Launay's character and leadership?
4. According to de Flue, which side, the attackers or defenders, was responsible for starting the violence?
5. According to de Flue, how did the besiegers treat the soldiers who had been defending the Bastille after entering the fortress?
6. From his description of the scene, what can you infer was de Flue's reaction to the sight of Governor's de Launay's head on a pike?
7. According to his account, how was Lieutenant de Flue treated as he was taken from the Bastille to the Hôtel de Ville? Why do you think he was treated this way?