



The French Revolution Begins

In 1789, the French were divided into three social groups called Estates. The First Estate was made up of Church leaders, and the Second Estate was made up of nobles. The Third Estate included everybody else, and more than 95 percent of the French people belonged to it. Like in other European countries, a king who had absolute power ruled the country. France also had a group of representatives called the Estates-General. That group was made up of representatives from each Estate.



France was having serious money trouble. The government had huge war debts to pay. Prices of goods were rising, and many people were out of work. Because of a bad harvest, there was very little food. In 1789, the country's economy was about to fall apart. King Louis XVI called the Estates-General to meet and come up with a solution.

At the meeting, representatives from the Third Estate said the best solution would be to change the government. Although the poorest people made up the Third Estate, it was the only one that had to pay taxes. The representatives thought France could start a constitutional government like the one the United States had just started. The new government would make the First and Second Estates pay taxes too. This would raise money for the country.

The First and Second Estates did not like this idea. By tradition, each Estate got one vote. So, the Third Estate was outvoted two to one by the other Estates. Third Estate representatives argued that, to be fair, each member should get a vote instead of each Estate. In the current government, the largest group of people had nearly no say in the government. King Louis said no to the proposed change.

Set on making changes, the Third Estate voted to rename itself the National Assembly on June 17, 1789. This action was the symbolic end of absolute monarchy and the beginning of representative government. Members of the National Assembly planned to write a constitution. But when they arrived at the meeting hall three days later, the doors were locked. Determined to meet, the delegates moved to a nearby tennis court. They swore to keep meeting until they had written a constitution. This famous pledge is called the Tennis Court Oath.

The king had to give in. He told the other two Estates to join with the Third Estate in the National Assembly. At the same time, however, King Louis was getting troops ready. He would tell the troops to force the National Assembly to stop meeting. The French Revolution had begun.



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Multiple Choice

Circle the best answer, and write the letter in the box.

1. The _____ Estate included more than 95 percent of the French people.

A. First
B. Second
C. Third
D. Fourth

2. France's _____ was made up of representatives from each Estate.

A. Parliament
B. Estates-General
C. Congress
D. Senate

3. France was having money trouble because _____.

A. the government had huge war debts to pay
B. prices of goods were rising
C. many people were out of work
D. all of the above

4. The _____ Estate voted to rename itself the National Assembly.

A. First
B. Second
C. Third
D. none of the above

5. National Assembly members made a famous oath called the _____.

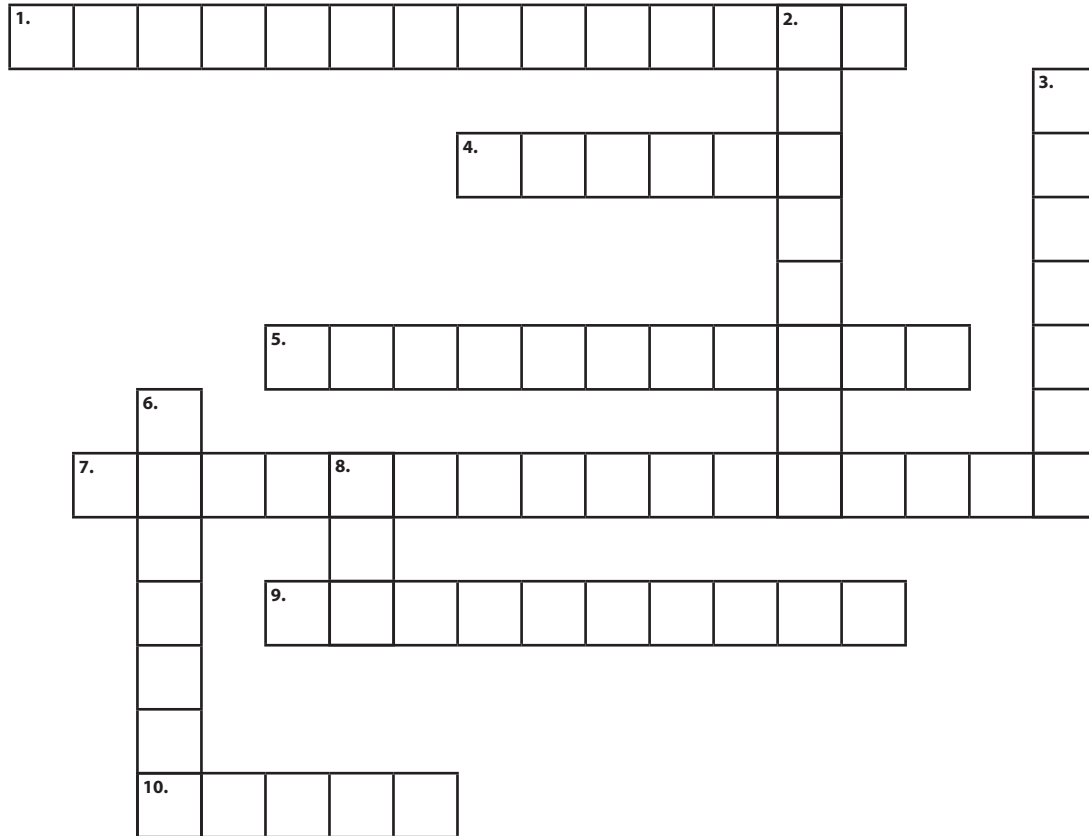
A. Tennis Court Oath
B. Racquetball Court Oath
C. Squash Court Oath
D. Constitution Hall Oath



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Crossword Puzzle

Write the best answer in each blank, and complete the crossword puzzle.



ACROSS

1. The Third Estate representatives thought France could start a/an _____ government like that of the United States.
4. The king was getting _____ ready to force the National Assembly to stop meeting.
5. With the _____ Oath, the National Assembly delegates swore to keep meeting until they had written a constitution.
7. The king told the other two Estates to join the _____.
9. The French _____ started in 1789.
10. The Third Estate was the only one that paid _____.

DOWN

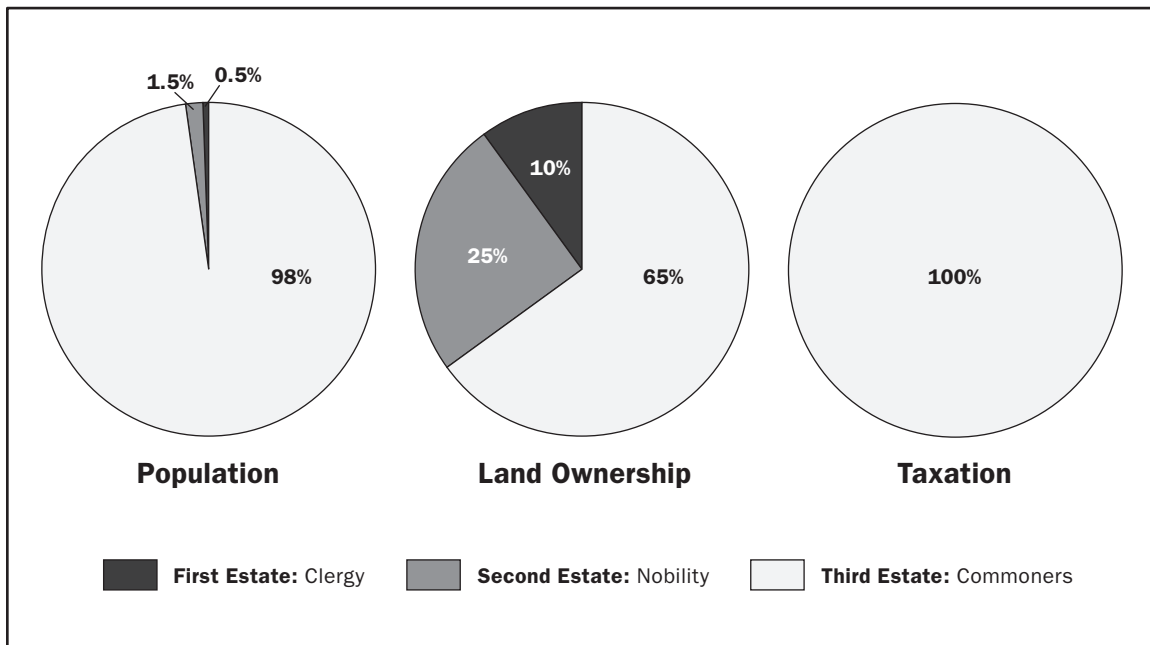
2. King Louis XVI had _____ power.
3. In 1789, France's _____ was about to fall apart.
6. The _____ group of people had nearly no say in the government.
8. By tradition, each Estate got _____ vote.



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Pie Chart – The Three Estates

Use the pie chart to answer the following questions. Write the answers in complete sentences.



1. What percentage of the population was made up of the First Estate?

2. Which Estate owned 25 percent of the land?

3. What percentage of the taxes were paid by the Third Estate?



Quiz: The French Revolution Begins

True/False

Decide if each statement is true or false, and write "true" or "false" in the blank.

- _____ 1. The Estates-General was made up of representatives from each Estate.
- _____ 2. The National Assembly voted to rename itself the Third Estate.
- _____ 3. The Tennis Court Oath was a promise to lower taxes.
- _____ 4. King Louis XVI had absolute power.
- _____ 5. The largest group of people made all the government decisions.

Multiple Choice

Circle the best answer, and write the letter in the box.

6. The _____ Estate was the only one that paid taxes.

A. First
B. Second
C. Third
D. all of the above

7. In the Estates-General, each Estate got _____.

A. one vote
B. one vote for each member
C. 33 votes
D. 1,789 votes

Short Answer

Answer the following question in complete sentences.

8. List one reason that France was having money problems.
