

# The Trial of the King

### Trial Fact file.

- The trial took place in December 1792.
- Louis could have lawyers, but could not call witnesses for the defence.
- The case was heard by the National Convention whose 749 deputies acted as judge and jury.

### Reminder! Keywords!

**National Convention** - a bit like our parliament.

**Deputy** - A representative elected by the people to sit at the convention. A bit like our MPs.

**Treason** - a crime against the country.

**The Charges:** Louis faced a total of 33 charges when he was put on trial in December 1792. They included; bankrupting the nation, plotting against the revolution, trying to flee, accepting a constitution he despised, helping the Austrian invasion of France. In short, he was accused of being a traitor.

### The case for the prosecution.

Sources 1,2 and 3 below highlight the case for the prosecution. Read them carefully.

**Source 1. From a speech by a radical deputy, Goupilleau.**

"Citizens, let me repeat his infamous words: 'In my heart I cannot approve the Revolution and the detestable constitution.'"

**Source 2. From a speech by Saint-Just, the youngest deputy.**

"He oppressed a free nation; he declared himself its enemy; he abused its laws; he must die to ensure the peacefulness of the people, since to assure his own he intended that the people be crushed.

Monarchy is an outrage. No man can reign innocently. Louis is an alien among us and not a citizen. He must die."

**Source 3. From a speech by Mailhe, a deputy from Toulouse.**

"After having accepted the 1791 constitution, Louis declared he was a prisoner. That was a signal for foreign powers to come to his aid. Instead of resisting the Prussian and Austrian invasions, he organised treason in all border towns.

He continued to support the émigrés with money, and paralysed the actions of the government. His acceptance of the constitution was just a trick to keep him on the throne while he waited for the foreign armies to re-establish his rule on the ruins of the constitution."

### Tasks:

- 1) Using the trial fact file, do you think Louis's trial will be a fair one? Explain why.
- 2) Read the sources. What is Louis accused of in: a) source 1; b) source 2 and c) source 3? (Write as many as you can)
- 3) What does Saint-Just think should happen to Louis?
- 4) What impression of Louis does sources 1, 2 and 3 give you? (Short paragraph with reference to specific sources please)



### The case for the Defence.

These sources were presented as Louis's defence. Read them carefully.

**Source 4. From a speech by De Seze, one of Louis's defence lawyers.**

"Louis was the first king to voluntarily give up some of his power for the good of the people. You called him the 'restorer of French liberty'."

**Source 5. From a speech by Malesherbes, one of Louis's defence lawyers.**

"On 6<sup>th</sup> October 1789 at Versailles he ordered his armed guards not to defend him.

At Varennes he preferred to be brought back rather than cause the death of a single man.

You blame him for the blood that has been shed, but on 10 August 1792 he came to the Assembly to prevent it being shed."

**Source 6. From Louis's own defence.**

"I have not broken the law since the constitution was introduced. I will defend each of my actions as morally correct and faithful to the letter of the law. I have done nothing except for the good of the people. I will argue for my life but not beg for it."

**Source 7. Louis's response when questioned about hidden documents which showed him trying to encourage foreign armies to invade France, and trying to bribe deputies.**

"I have no knowledge of it. It is not my handwriting."

**Source 8. Louis's response to the charge of disorganising the army.**

"Never did the idea of counter revolution enter my head. There is not one word of truth in this accusation."

#### Tasks:

- 1) Read sources 4 and 5. What defence does each source offer on behalf of Louis?
- 2) What opinion do you have of Louis after reading sources 4 and 5? Why?
- 3) Read sources 6, 7 and 8. What opinion of Louis do these sources give you? Explain how.
- 4) Read Louis's answers to the charges in sources 7 and 8 again. Do you believe him? Explain why.

#### BONUS TASKS!

- A) Imagine you are a Deputy at Louis's trial. Would you find him guilty or not guilty? (Think back to your previous work on Louis's behaviour during the revolution to help you, as well as the charges shown on this worksheet)
- B) You are a lawyer for the PROSECUTION. Use sources 1 - 3 to write a closing argument. Remember! Your argument needs to convince the deputies to find Louis GUILTY!
- C) You are a lawyer for the DEFENCE. Use sources 4 - 8 to write a closing argument. Remember! Your argument needs to convince the deputies to find Louis NOT GUILTY!

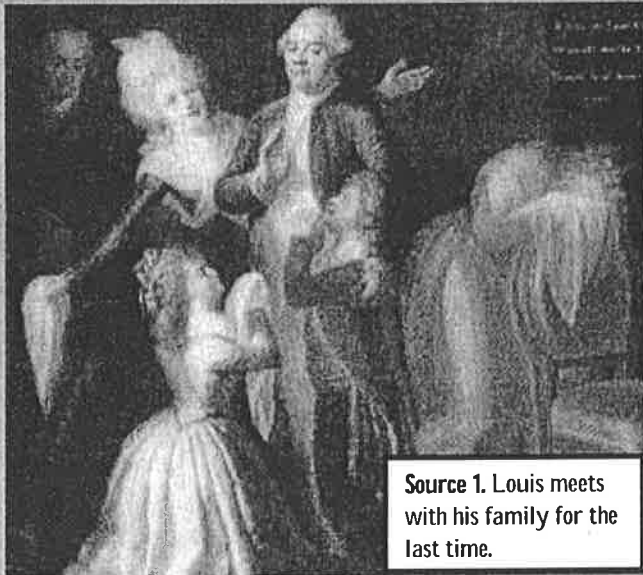


# The Execution of the King

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**The Verdict:** The outcome of Louis's trial was decided by a vote. The Jury of deputies had to answer three questions. Firstly, they had to decide whether or not Louis was guilty. All 693 deputies answered 'Yes'. Secondly, they had to decide whether there should be a referendum to decide his fate. 284 deputies said 'Yes', the rest said 'No'. Finally, the deputies were asked what the punishment should be. 321 said 'prison or exile', whilst 374 said the punishment should be death.

**21<sup>st</sup> January 1793 – the day of the execution – preparations are made:** The Convention needed to make sure that Louis's execution went smoothly. Troops were stationed at the entrances to the city to prevent crowds from entering or leaving. 200 Mounted guards and 1200 foot soldiers were to surround Louis's coach. There were around 80,000 armed men in Paris to ensure that problems did not arise. Louis's own preparations included having a final meeting with his family (source 1), attending mass at 6 o'clock in the morning, and passing on instructions to Clery, his servant (source 2).



Source 1. Louis meets with his family for the last time.

## Source 2. Louis's instructions to Clery

"Will you give this seal to my son...the wedding ring to the Queen. Tell her that I leave her with a great deal of pain.

This little package contains locks of hair of all my family. Give it to her too. Tell the Queen, tell my dear children, that I had promised to see them this morning, but that I had wanted to spare them the pain of such a cruel separation."

**The Execution...** at around 10 o'clock, Louis arrived at the guillotine. At 10.22, he was dead. (see sources 3 and 4) As soon as the head came off, there were shouts from the crowd (see source 5). Louis body was quickly taken to a cemetery in a wicker basket. He was then place in a wooden coffin and buried in a mass grave. The Convention made every attempt to suppress any details of Louis last few days, in case a legend built up around his memory.

## Keywords! Learn Them!

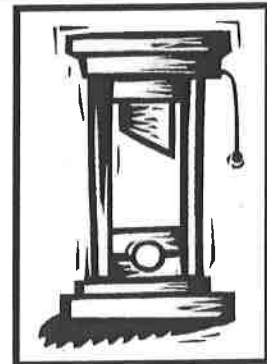
**REFERENDUM** - a way of deciding a political question by voting for or against it.

**EXILE** - banishment from country.

**GUILLOTINE** - French invention to chop off heads! (see picture)

**LEGEND** - stories and myths which build up around a certain person or event, usually to paint a positive or heroic picture of them!

**LIBERTY** - Freedom from oppression.



Sources 3 and 4 give two accounts of the execution of Louis.

**Source 3** - a description of the execution by Mercier, a deputy to the Convention.

"His blood flows; cries of joy from 80,000 armed men rend the air. His blood flows and there are people who dip a fingertip, a quill, a scrap of paper in it. One tastes it: 'It is vilely salt!' An executioner at the scaffold side sells small bundles of his hair; people buy the ribbon that tied it. Everyone carries off a small bundle of his clothing or some other blood-stained remnant. The whole populace go by, arm in arm, laughing and talking as if from some festivity. The taverns on the bloody square had their wine bottles emptied as usual. They sold cakes and patties around the beheaded body, which was put in the wicker basket of a common criminal."

**Source 4** - a description of the execution by Bernard, a supporter of Louis.

"Louis XVI lost his life on Monday at half past ten in the morning, and to the very last he maintained the greatest possible courage."

He wished to speak to the people from the scaffold, but was seized by the executioners, who were following their orders, and who pushed him straight under the fatal blade. He was able to speak only these words: 'I forgive my enemies; I trust that my death will be for the happiness of my people, but I grieve for France and I fear that she may suffer the anger of the Lord.'

The King took of his coat himself at the foot of the scaffold, and when someone sought to help him he said cheerfully, 'I do not need any help.' He also refused help to climb onto the scaffold, and went up with a firm, brisk step.

After his death his body and head were immediately taken to the parish cemetery and thrown into a pit fifteen feet deep, where they were consumed by quicklime. And so there remains nothing of this unhappy prince except the memory of his virtues and his misfortune."

### Saucy Source words!

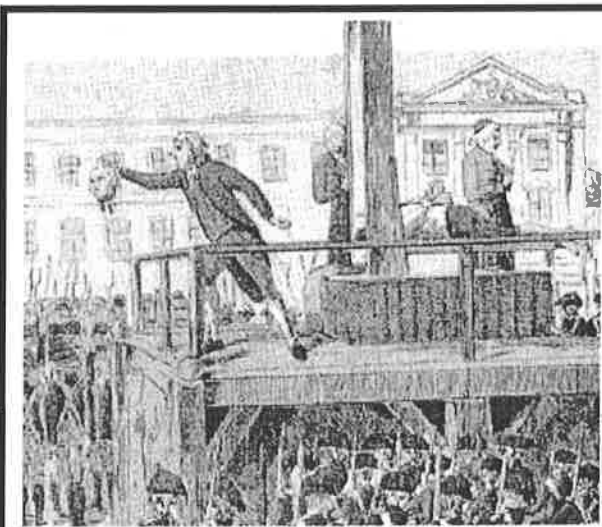
Sometimes written sources use descriptive words to emphasise a particular point or to encourage the reader to feel a particular way. It is important to read written sources very carefully, and to use a dictionary for any tricky words. Someone who did not support the king wrote source 3. The words and phrases he uses, like 'vilely', meaning horrible and 'wicker basket of a common criminal' are there to subtly put-down Louis XVI. Source 4 was written by a supporter of Louis and so is much less jolly. It has a more reverent feel to it with phrases like, 'lost his life' and 'virtues', meaning morals. The writer's description of Louis speech lets the reader feel that Louis has martyred himself by giving his life for France. Some of the other words in both sources have been underlined to help you answer some questions later on. Try and find out what they mean!

**Source 5** - The crowd's cheers as Louis's head is severed from his body.

"Long live the Republic!  
Long live liberty!  
Long live equality!"



**Source 6** - A sketch of Louis Execution, January 1793.



**Source 7**. Extracts from a modern historian's account of the execution.

"He (Louis) pronounced these unforgettable words: 'I die innocent of all the crimes with which I am charged. I forgive those that are guilty of my death, and I pray God that the blood you are about to shed will never be required of France.'...The king's last words were drowned out by the drummers..."