

Causes of the French Revolution

Chapter 1: The French Revolution · Topic 1

Key Concept

French society was divided into three estates, with the clergy and nobility (First and Second Estates) enjoying privileges while the common people (Third Estate) bore heavy taxation.

Economic hardship, including food shortages, rising bread prices, and government debt from wars and lavish royal spending, fuelled widespread public discontent.

Enlightenment thinkers like Rousseau and Voltaire spread ideas about liberty, equality, and questioning the divine right of kings, inspiring people to demand change.

The combination of social inequality, economic crisis, and revolutionary ideas eventually led to the storming of the Bastille in 1789, marking the start of the revolution.

Quick Revision Notes

- French society had three estates: clergy, nobility and commoners.
- The Third Estate bore heavy taxation.
- Economic hardship included food shortages and government debt.
- Rising bread prices fuelled public anger.
- Enlightenment thinkers included Rousseau and Voltaire.
- Enlightenment ideas promoted liberty and equality.
- These ideas questioned the divine right of kings.
- The Bastille was stormed in 1789, starting the revolution.

Practice Questions

- 1 Research the three estates of French society.
- 2 Discuss why the Third Estate resented the tax system.
- 3 Research Enlightenment thinkers like Voltaire or Rousseau.
- 4 Explain what the storming of the Bastille symbolised.
- 5 Discuss how economic hardship contributed to revolution.
- 6 Create a timeline of events leading to 1789.