Power Changes Hands

Trace how revolution reshaped government in France

9-12.WC.46 "Analyze the major events of the French Revolution (e.g., storming of the Bastille, execution of Louis XVI, reign of terror), and trace the evolution of France's government from constitutional monarchy to democratic despotism."

NAME _____ DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

YOUR JOB Underline events that changed who could govern France, then number those events in chronological order. Circle a nearby phrase that shows who gained or lost power after each event.

From King to Committee

(1) In 1789, high bread prices and anger at royal privilege pushed France toward revolution. King Louis XVI called the Estates-General, but representatives of the common people formed the National Assembly and demanded a constitution. Fearing that royal troops might attack, Parisians seized the Bastille, a prison and fortress, on July 14. The attack freed few prisoners, yet it showed that crowds could challenge the king by force. The Assembly later ended feudal privileges and issued a declaration of rights. By 1791, a constitution kept Louis as king but gave lawmaking power to an elected legislature; voting was limited to certain men.

(2) France went to war with Austria in 1792, and military setbacks sharpened fears that Louis would help foreign enemies. In August, an uprising in Paris toppled the monarchy. A new National Convention, elected by men without the earlier property requirement, declared France a republic in September. Louis was put on trial for conspiring against the nation's security and executed in January 1793. His death made a return to constitutional monarchy far less likely: the king was no longer a partner in government, and elected representatives claimed authority from the nation instead of a crown.

(3) Yet the republic faced invading armies, internal revolts, and severe economic pressure. In 1793, the Convention gave the Committee of Public Safety sweeping power to direct the war and defend the revolution. During the Reign of Terror, revolutionary courts sentenced thousands to death, often on charges of opposing the republic. Officials argued that harsh measures protected the people's freedom, but political dissent could mean prison or execution. This tension helps explain the term democratic despotism: leaders claimed to rule for the people while concentrating power and using fear to silence opponents. In July 1794, the Convention overthrew Robespierre, a leading committee member, and the Terror subsided.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. How did the storming of the Bastille show a change in the king's power, even though it did not create a new government?

2. How did political authority change between the 1791 constitution and the republic declared in 1792?

3. Why did the execution of Louis XVI make a return to constitutional monarchy less likely?

4. Why does the passage call the government during the Reign of Terror a democratic despotism?

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

Write an 80 to 105 word museum label titled "Who Ruled France?" Trace three turning points from 1789 to 1794, and explain how power moved from a limited king to leaders who claimed to act for the people while using force. Judge whether the later government fulfilled the Revolution's promise of rights.

ANSWER KEY

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HIGH SCHOOL · 9-12.WC.46

PART 1 · READ AND MARK

Underline events that changed who could govern France, then number those events in chronological order. Circle a nearby phrase that shows who gained or lost power after each event. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 · ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	How did the storming of the Bastille show a change in the king's power, even though it did not create a new government?	**Crowds challenged the king by force, showing that royal authority could be resisted. The constitution came later.**
2	How did political authority change between the 1791 constitution and the republic declared in 1792?	**Under the 1791 constitution, Louis remained king while an elected legislature made laws. In 1792, an uprising ended the monarchy, and the elected National Convention declared a republic.**
3	Why did the execution of Louis XVI make a return to constitutional monarchy less likely?	**Louis could no longer serve as a limited monarch. Elected representatives claimed authority from the nation rather than from a crown.**
4	Why does the passage call the government during the Reign of Terror a democratic despotism?	**Its leaders claimed to defend the people, but the Committee of Public Safety held sweeping power, and dissent could lead to imprisonment or execution.**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

Who Ruled France? In 1789, the storming of the Bastille showed that ordinary Parisians could challenge royal force. The 1791 constitution then limited Louis XVI and gave an elected legislature power to make laws, though voting remained restricted. After an uprising ended the monarchy, the republic tried and executed Louis in 1793, rejecting rule by a king. During the Terror, the Committee of Public Safety concentrated power and used courts to silence suspected enemies. The government claimed to defend the people, but executions and fear violated the Revolution's promise of rights.

Accept other well-supported turning points from the passage. Strong responses distinguish the republic's claim to represent the people from the concentrated power and coercion used during the Terror.