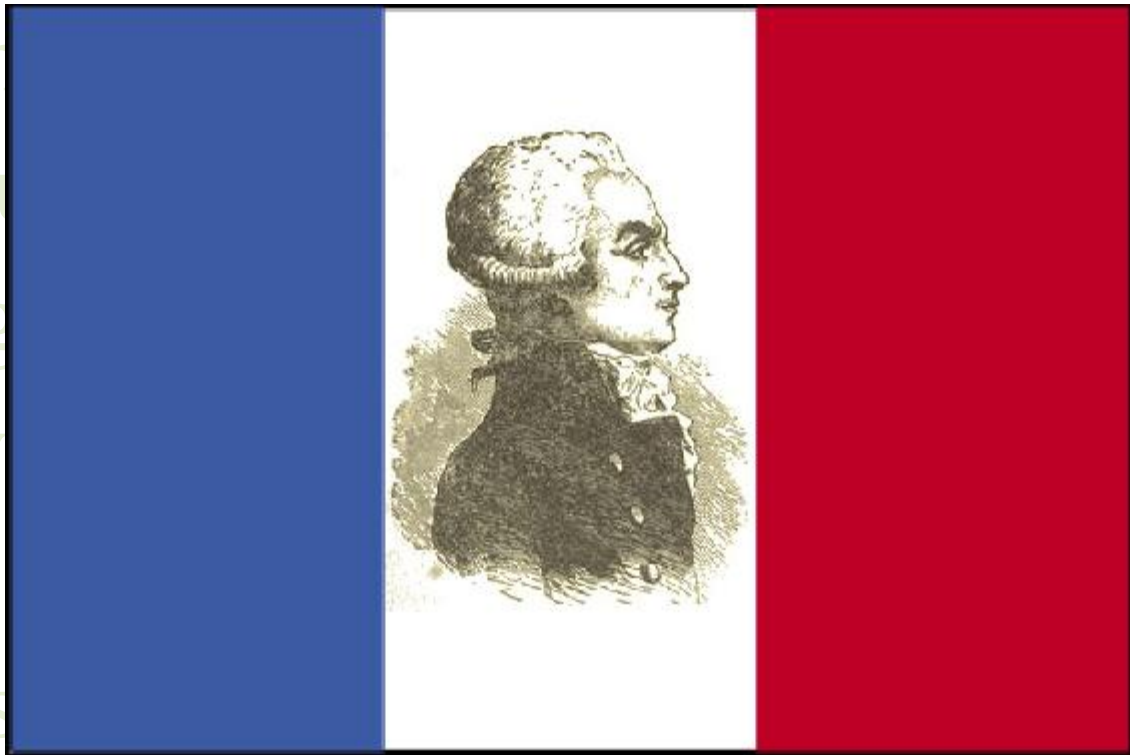


Maximilien Robespierre



Biography Workbook Series

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MAXIMILIEN ROBESPIERRE

(1758-1794)

Maximilien Isidore Robespierre was a leading figure in the French Revolution, which took place between 1789 and 1799. Robespierre was the leader of the most violent of those theorists who overthrew the French monarchy, headed by Louis XVI. Robespierre was the exponent of all that deep-rooted hatred which the commoners of France, as the result of long centuries of oppression, harbored against their king, nobles, and clergy. Robespierre ruled the infant republic during its first bold defiance of united Europe. Yet his name has become, even among his countrymen, a symbol of horror.

1. Who ruled France prior to the French Revolution?

- a. Henry IV
- b. Louis XIV
- c. Louis XVI
- d. Robespierre

Robespierre was born at Arras in 1758. His father was an advocate in the supreme council of Artois, and, ruined by his dissipation, had left France long before the revolution. An orphan at the age of nine, and without

fortune, Maximilien was indebted to the benevolent protection of the Bishop of Arras, M. de Conzié, for the situation of bursar of the College of Louis XIV.

2. At what age was Maximilien Robespierre orphaned?

- a. 1
- b. 5
- c. 9
- d. 13

From his infancy, Robespierre manifested a cruel, reserved, and timid disposition, and an ardent love of liberty and independence. After having passed through his studies, Robespierre obtained the honor of being chosen by his fellow students to address Louis XVI, upon the entrance of that monarch into Paris—a king whose death Robespierre would one day call for.

3. Robespierre manifested a hatred of liberty and independence at a young age.

- a. True
- b. False

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Robespierre was unable to distinguish himself among the orators of the Constituent Assembly. His principles appeared obnoxious to the innovators acting from sentiment in 1789. They often drew upon him the indignation of his colleagues. They

were the means of his acquiring among the Jacobins that reputation and favor which, daily increasing, rendered him at last the idol of the people and the ruler of the government. He was called "The Incorruptible."

Vocabulary Terms: Write each term (found in the text above) twice, using your best handwriting. Then define the term.

6. avowed

7. benevolent

8. bursar

9. disposition

10. exponent

11. harangues

12. harbored

13. incorruptible

14. indignation

15. inviolability

16. oppression

17. sovereign

18. strictures

19. temerity

20. theorizers

The day of the closing of the Assembly, the populace surrounded him on his coming out of the hall, put a crown of oak upon his head, placed him in a carriage, and, taking out the horses, dragged him to his house, exclaiming as they moved, "Behold the friend of the people, the great defender of Liberty!"

Robespierre was fully sensible of the advantages which might result from his alliance with the Jacobins. He devoted himself entirely to the direction of a club bearing that name. He refused, in order to give up his whole time to the objects they had in view, the office of accuser in the

criminal tribunal at Paris, to which he had been appointed.

21. Robespierre was aligned with what political faction?
- a. Cordeliers
 - b. Girondists
 - c. Jacobins
 - d. Royalists

Until his election to a seat in the Convention, Robespierre was never seen personally to engage in those insurrections which produced the atrocious attack upon the king, nor in the horrible massacres which, in 1792, covered Paris with murder and blood,

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and the French name with eternal opprobrium. He refused even to preside at the tribunal of August 10th, because, as he said, "He had long since denounced and accused the conspirators, whom this tribunal was ordained to judge."

22. Why do you suppose that Robespierre avoided publicly partaking in actions which he personally advocated?

But Robespierre had scarcely entered the Convention when he resolved to raise his faction upon the ruins of all the others, and his power upon the destruction of those factions which he might employ. To attain this end, he was seen at first to strengthen the ties by which he had already been united to Marat¹ and Danton².

¹ Jean-Paul Marat (May 24, 1743-July 13, 1793) was a journalist who advocated against "enemies of the revolution." Marat was infamously murdered in his bathtub by Charlotte Corday.

Robespierre availed himself particularly of the latter, in order to overthrow the Girondins, who, from the fifth session, had suspected his ambition, and accused him of aspiring to the dictatorship.

23. What political faction did Robespierre hope to overthrow?

It was during this struggle that Louvet³ pronounced against him that very eloquent harangue, which Madame Roland called the "Robespierriad." Assisted by his brother and by Danton, Robespierre, in the sitting of November 5th, overpowered the Girondists. Robespierre then went to the Jacobins to enjoy the fruits of his victory, where Merlin de Thionville declared him an eagle, and a barbarous reptile.

24. Who declared Robespierre both an eagle and a barbarous reptile?

² Georges Danton (October 26, 1759-April 5, 1794) was a leading figure in the overthrow of Louis XVI. He served as the first president of the Committee of Public Safety, yet was himself later killed on the guillotine after being accused of being too lenient toward enemies of the French Revolution.

³ Jean-Baptiste Louvet de Couvrai (June 12, 1760-August 25, 1797) was a French writer aligned with the Girondists.

From that moment, Robespierre never ceased to promote the death of Louis XVI, with an asperity and a perseverance almost incredible. In short, until the fatal day of the execution of that amiable and unfortunate king, Robespierre continually importuned the tribune to

pronounce upon him (according to the expression of one of his colleagues) *des vociférations de cannibale*, and the most atrocious prejudgments. It is almost superfluous to add, that Robespierre voted for his death on the day of the nominal appeal to the nation.

Vocabulary Terms: Match each term (found in the text above) to its meaning.

25. ____ acrimony or severity
26. ____ acts of rebellion or revolt against governmental authority
27. ____ extremely brutal or cruel
28. ____ helped or served
29. ____ indiscriminate and unnecessary mass killings
30. ____ infamy
31. ____ possessing the power of fluent and forceful speech
32. ____ pressed with solicitations
33. ____ putative or so-called
34. ____ the second of two things mentioned

- (a) asperity
- (b) atrocious
- (c) availed
- (d) eloquent
- (e) importuned

- (f) insurrections
- (g) latter
- (h) massacres
- (i) nominal
- (j) opprobrium

Within any moderate limits, it would be impossible to give the details of this monstrous proceeding. Of all the disorders which had occurred during the stormy period which had seen him on the throne of France, Louis XVI was accused. He was assigned counsel; and MM. Tronchet, Lamoignon, Malesherbes, and De Séze, with his approbation, undertook his defense.

35. Which of the following was not a member of the king's defense team?
- a. Danton
 - b. Lamoignon
 - c. Malesherbes
 - d. Tronchet

Their exertions, though creditable to themselves, were of no avail. On January 16, 1793, after hearing them in his defense, and his solemn denial of the crimes laid to his charge, and after a sitting of nearly thirty-four hours, the punishment of death was awarded.

36. When was Louis XVI awarded a death sentence?

Constant in his hatred of the Girondins, Robespierre attacked them with great vehemence until May 31st, when he obtained a complete triumph. Robespierre's most dangerous enemies among the men of that faction were outlawed, and others arrested. The success of this day rendered him absolute ruler of the Convention, and founded that tyrannical empire which only terminated with his life.

37. When did Robespierre gain absolute control over the Convention?



Robespierre's arrest.

Among the factions which had lent Robespierre their assistance, the Hebertistes were the first that separated from his cause. This faction aspired to sole dominion, but the good fortune or the address of Robespierre was able at once to oppose to it the Jacobins and the Cordeliers, and it sunk in March, 1794, under their united efforts.

38. What faction was sunk, through Robespierre's efforts, in March of 1794?

Georges Danton, who had been particularly serviceable on this occasion, whose energy had been of such utility, who had aided Robespierre in sweeping away the other factions; Danton, in short, whom Robespierre ought to have considered as the instrument of his power, became a formidable enemy, after being for a length of time a most devoted friend and faithful ally. The two parties were at issue; one or the other must necessarily be overcome.

The cunning of Robespierre triumphed over the inconsiderate ardor of his rival, whom Robespierre took pains to render unpopular by sending him to enrich himself in

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Belgium. A few days afterward, Danton was accused, arrested, and conveyed to the scaffold with Desmoulins, La Croix, Fabre, and others. Georges Danton met his end on the guillotine on April 5, 1794.

39. Imagine that today's political parties are living under a political climate similar to that of revolutionary France. Conjecture what it might be like if a modern political party began accusing members of the opposing political party of disloyalty, then conducting treason trials and having these people executed.

In the course of the same month (April, 1794), Robespierre delivered over to the Revolutionary Tribunal the remainder of the party of the Hebertistes, and that of the Cordeliers, whom he degraded by the name of Atheists. From that moment to the period of his downfall, Robespierre met no opposition. It was then that his language assumed a different tone. "I must be," "it is necessary," "I will," were his general expressions. The Convention, as Robespierre himself called it, was only his *machine à décrets*.

40. One of the major reasons why the French overthrew their monarch (Louis XVI) was because of their hatred of absolute rule. Why do you suppose that one form of absolute rule (Louis XVI's monarchy) was so quickly replaced by another (Robespierre's Committee of Public Safety)?

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What is worthy of remark is, that France, groaning under the struggles of different parties, should applaud the conduct of Robespierre, from an idea that it would be less miserable under a single tyrant. Robespierre's new plan of religion, ridiculous as it was, gained him some adherents. But it must be evident to every reflecting mind that Robespierre must have conceived himself at the head of the government, since he, whose sole object had hitherto been to destroy, attempted to rebuild.

It is impossible to conjecture how long his power might have continued, had he spared his colleagues, and if he had not incited to resistance men who, until then, had blindly executed his orders, and who desired nothing more than to continue to serve and obey him. But in sacrificing the leaders of the Revolutionary Government, Robespierre sought support from the moderate party. This policy ruined him. Those whose destruction he had meditated occasioned his downfall.

41. Robespierre caused his own downfall by executing those revolutionary leaders who were as radical as himself.

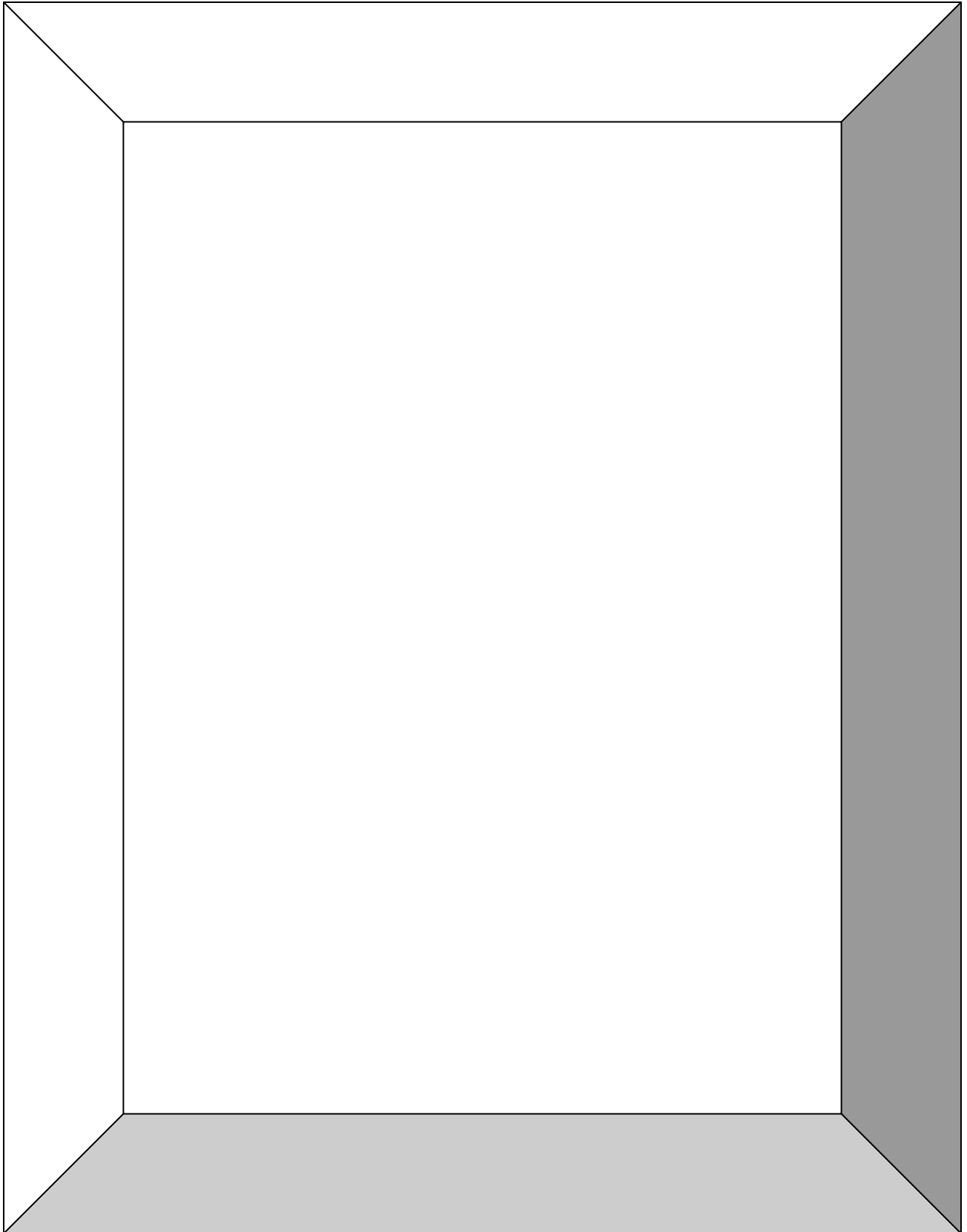
- a. True
- b. False

Danger, however, inspired Robespierre with courage. From June 10th, Ruamps and Bourdon de l'Oise, in particular, had expressed some distrust of the Committee of Public Safety. This produced a discussion in which Robespierre, speaking with an air of despotism, had the good fortune to silence them. This was the moment he should have chosen to overwhelm the party, which redoubled its intrigues for his destruction; and at whose head Tallien rendered himself remarkable.

Robespierre's friend, St. Just, advised him to strike the first blow. Robespierre had passed several days in retirement, occupied in projecting, at a moment when he ought to have acted. When Robespierre reappeared on the 26th, at the Convention, his partisans abandoned him. He in vain endeavored to regain the ground he had lost.

Sensible of the danger which threatened him, Robespierre called together his most intimate friends on the night of the 26th. St. Just pressed him immediately to act. He hesitated for twenty-four hours, and this delay was the sentence of his death. The next day Billaud-Varennes removed the veil, and Robespierre having rushed to the tribune to reply to him, the cries of "Down with the tyrant!" drove him instantly from the assembly. A few minutes after a

Artistic Expression: Illustrate a scene from the life of Maximilien Robespierre.



Word Search Puzzle



Commune
Convention
Danton
enemy
faction
France
Girondists
guillotine

Jacobins
Marat
Paris
revolution
Robespierre
trial
tribunal
tyrant