

Activity 4. Execution of Louis XVI (1793)

Instructions: As we act out this scene, think about questions 1 – 3.

Questions

1. Who were the Jacobins?
2. Why are the Jacobins suspicious of the King?
3. Would you have supported the execution of Louis XVI? Why?

Narrator: In September 1791, a new Constitution makes France a limited monarchy. King Louis XVI and his royalist supporters are outraged by this restriction on the King's power. They begin plotting to restore the King's earlier full powers. The Constitution creates a new legislature, but restricts the right to vote to middle and upper class men who own property. This angers some radical leaders called Jacobins, who want to extend democratic rights to everyone. Around the city of Paris, the Jacobins meet to discuss France's future. Men such as Robespierre, Danton, Saint-Just, and Marat lead them.

Robespierre: Citizens! The king and queen are plotting against our revolution. We must be on our guard.

Saint-Just: Robespierre is right. There are rumors that Antoinette is communicating with the King of Prussia and the King of the Holy Roman Empire, asking them to invade France and overturn our revolution.

Danton: These are dangerous times. What is our National Assembly doing to protect our revolution?

Marat: Good question, Danton. The Assembly members are nothing but a group of bourgeois and noble dogs! They do not care at all about the rights of the common people.

Saint-Just: Marat is right. See how they have denied the vote to all but men of property.

Marat: Disgraceful.

Narrator: Just then, a messenger runs in with extremely important and troubling news.

Messenger: Citizens! I have amazing news. The king and his family have been arrested as they were trying to flee France to join our enemies! And there is more. King Leopold and King Friedrich Wilhelm have threatened to invade France and restore absolute monarchy.

Robespierre: It is counter-revolution.

Danton: Our enemies are ready to pounce on us.

Marat: The National Assembly will not protect the revolution. We must abolish it.

Saint-Just: We must form a National Convention. We need a new government that represents the common people.

Robespierre: We must write a new Constitution. It must be a Constitution that insures the rights of the people.

Danton: We must abolish the monarchy.

Marat: We must declare a republic.

Saint-Just: Yes. A republic.

Robespierre: The king cannot be allowed to organize his supporters. He must be put to death.

Danton: We must declare war against our foreign enemies.

Marat: Louis to the guillotine.

The People: Death to the king! Long live the Republic!

Narrator: Sixteen months after the creation of the new French Constitution, the King and Queen of France are led to the guillotine, and beheaded.

