

“The French Revolution was true to its principles of ‘Liberte, Egalite, Fraternite.’” Does the evidence you have here support this interpretation of the French Revolution?

Suitable for students aged 16-18

Do these sources accurately tell the story of the French Revolution, and do they help us to answer the enquiry question? Each of these sources adds something to our understanding of the French Revolution. Each needs to be examined critically to decide its utility to the enquiry. Remember to think about origin, purpose, content and context of a source.

Encourage students to gain as much information as they can simply from looking at and questioning each source (some prompts have been provided), before reading the accompanying notes and conducting further research. Images can be projected onto the whiteboard, printed or viewed on computers or tablets.

Source 1: Napoleon’s Hat, worn at the Battle of Waterloo, 1815 - ageofrevolution.org/200-object/napoleons-hat/

Napoleon was immediately recognisable from the uniforms he wore, and his hat. How does a study of Napoleon’s hat from the Battle of Waterloo help us understand the French Revolution and the role Napoleon played in it? Use the Napoleon’s hat notes to help your enquiry.

Source 2: 'La Marseillaise' - ageofrevolution.org/200-object/la-marseillaise/

Listen to La Marseillaise – now the French National Anthem, and study the lyrics. It was written in 1792 by Claude-Joseph Rouget de Lisle, a captain in the French army.

- How do the words fit with the ideals of the French Revolution?
- What do they tell us about the response of the French to a threat from outside?
- Why do you think La Marseillaise is still the National Anthem of France today?

Source 3: Guillotine – ageofrevolution.org/200-object/a-french-guillotine-blade/

- When was the guillotine introduced in France?
- How was it used there?
- Who by?
- It has been described by some historians as a 'democratic' method of execution. Why did you think that is? Do you agree?

Source 4: Painting – *The Death of Marat*, by Jacques-Louis David, 1793 - ageofrevolution.org/200-object/the-death-of-marat-by-jacques-louis-david/

- How do you think Jean-Paul Marat died?
- Where was he when he died?
- What does he appear to have been doing?
- What atmosphere has the artist created with this painting?
- How do you think the artist wants us to feel about Marat?

Use the Death of Marat notes and further research to answer the questions:

- Who was Jean-Paul Marat?
- How did he die?
- What were the consequences of his death?
- Who was Jaques-Louis David?
- Who was the intended audience of the painting?

- Was it widely circulated or could just a few people have access to it?
- Do you think this is a reliable depiction of Marat's death? How might the intended audience have affected the image the painter produced?
- What message did the artist hope to tell with this painting?
- What impact would the painting have had when it was first painted?

Taken together, do these sources:

- Suggest a focus on 'Liberte, Egalite, Fraternite?'
- Suggest a smooth acceptance of these ideas or a violent and troubled revolution?
- Help us to understand the events after 1789?

Students can consider:

- What else do they need to know to be able to support this interpretation of the French Revolution?
- What do they already know that might cast doubt on this interpretation?
- What does studying the context of each of these sources add to the investigation? Does it make it easier, or harder, to reach a conclusion?

Are there other sources they know of that could be used to build up a picture of the Revolution? Are there any other interpretations of the French Revolution that they know of? Understand? Prefer? Fit the statement more closely?

Further sources

Bonaparte at the Pont d'Arcole by Antoine-Jean Gros - ageofrevolution.org/200-object/bonaparte-at-the-pont-darcole-antoine-jean-gros/

Napoleon's Departure from Egypt - ageofrevolution.org/200-object/napoleons-departure-egypt-23rd-march-1799/

Napoleon's Cloak - ageofrevolution.org/200-object/napoleons-burnous/