

**EARLY MODERN
FRANCE (1498-1789):
THE SUN KING: LOUIS
XIV**



EARLY MODERN FRANCE (1498-1789): THE SUN KING: LOUIS XIV

Description

Through an examination of both primary and secondary sources on the subject, including various types of visual media in addition to electronic and written sources, students in this lesson will identify, understand and be able to explain French absolutism and the divine right theory as it developed under Louis XVI, how he used his power to subjugate the Roman Catholic Church in France, and how he turned the Palace at Versailles into one of the largest and grandest royal palaces in the world.

Subjects

European History
World History
Art
Art History

Grade Level

11-12

Duration

90 minutes

Tour Links

- Versailles
- Louvre
- Place Vendome

Essential Questions

- Who was Louis XIV? Where does he stand in the long list of French monarchs?
- Where is the Palace of Versailles? Why was it expanded during the reign of Louis XIV?
- What are the concepts of absolutism and divine right? How were they used in France during Louis XIV's reign?
- Why was Louis XIV called the "Sun King"?

Academic Summary

He loved splendor, magnificence, and profusion in all things, and encouraged similar tastes in his Court; to spend money freely on equipages and buildings, on feasting and at cards, was a sure way to gain his favor, perhaps to obtain the honor of a word from him. Motives of policy had something to do with this; by making expensive habits the fashion, and, for people in a certain position, a necessity, he compelled his courtiers to live beyond their income, and gradually reduced them to depend on his bounty for the means of subsistence. This was a plague which, once introduced, became a scourge to the whole country, for it did not take long to spread to Paris, and thence to the armies and the provinces; so that a man of any position is now estimated entirely according to his expenditure on his table and other luxuries. This folly, sustained by pride and ostentation, has already produced widespread confusion; it threatens to end in nothing short of ruin and a general overthrow.

Louis de Rouvroy, Saint-Simon, Memoirs of Louis XIV and His Court and of the Regency (approximately 1750)

God establishes kings as his ministers, and reigns through them over the people ... the prince must be obeyed on principle, as a matter of religion and of conscience.

Jacques-Benigne Boussuet, Politics Drawn from the Very Words of Holy Scripture (1709)

In 1715, after a 72+ year reign, Louis XIV passed away at the Palace of Versailles. Europe's longest reigning monarch at the time, Louis XIV ruled France as an absolute monarch, backed by the Roman Catholic Church's idea of the Divine Right of Kings. During Louis's reign, France prospered as never before, growing economically and politically at the expense of its European neighbors. Many historians today point to his reign as the high point of French absolutist society. Called the "Sun King" for his choice of a blazing sun as his royal emblem, Louis was a patron of the arts and strove to modernize the French legal system over the long years of his reign. Unfortunately many of his later years were troubled by the death of most of his heirs and his choice to involve France in a series of wars that would ultimately prove disastrous. In the end, the system of absolutism and divine right, so central to the Sun King's reign, would come crashing down during Louis XVI's reign when revolutionaries took the government into their own hands.

Through an examination of both primary and secondary sources on the subject, including various types of visual media in addition to electronic and written sources, students in this lesson will identify, understand and be able to explain French absolutism and the divine right theory as it developed under Louis XVI, how he used his power to subjugate the Roman Catholic Church in France, and how he turned the Palace at Versailles into one of the largest and grandest royal palaces in the world.

Objectives

1. Students will identify, understand and be able to explain how the concepts of absolutism and the divine right of kings came together in France during the reign of Louis XIV.
2. Students will identify, understand and be able to explain how Louis XIV maintained control over the nobility and the Church during his reign.
3. Students will identify, understand and be able to explain how Louis XIV used the Palace of Versailles as a symbol of his royal authority.

Procedures

I. Anticipatory Set

- Writing / Question: From where does a government get its authority to rule? (5 min)
- Handouts – Copies of documents and readings from the websites listed. (5 min)

II. Body of Lesson

- Lecture / PPT – French Absolutism: Louis XIV (20 min)
- Videos – Absolutism in France / History of Versailles (15 min)
- Independent Activity – Students read the articles and sources on French Absolutism and Louis XIV, taking notes as appropriate. (30 min)
- Suggestion: Have the students read some of these articles and sources for homework before class.
- Group Activity – Discussion on French Absolutism and the Divine Right of Kings. (15 min)

III. Closure

- Assessment – Essay: Explain in detail the concepts of French Absolutism and the Divine Right of Kings under Louis XIV.

Extension

On tour: Versailles

While on tour, you will visit the Palace of Versailles, where students will have the opportunity to see for themselves how Louis XIV used his power and authority to create the greatest palace in Europe. One can imagine how the king must have appeared to those who were summoned to court. Unfortunately, the Sun King's great-great-great grandson, Louis XVI would, by 1789, insolate and isolate himself from the French people in such a way as to cause his own downfall during the French Revolution.

Web Links

Lesson Plan Websites

- uvm.edu/~lstoff/hist025/presentations/RISEOFABSOLUTISM.ppt
French Absolutism PowerPoint – University of Vermont website for History 025: European Civilization, 1600-1815
- swrglobal.wikispaces.com/file/view/The+Reign+of+Louis+XIV.ppt
“Reign of Louis XIV” – PowerPoint
- indepthinfo.com/history/french-absolutism.htm
French Absolutism (website article) – good site for basic info on Louis XIV’s reign
- learner.org/courses/globalart/work/12/expert/1/index.html
Art through Time: A Global View: Ceremony and Society: Louis XIV – an expert analysis of the most famous painting of the Sun King (artist: Hyacinthe Rigaud, court artist during Louis XIV’s reign). Analysis is by Patrick Hunt, director of the Stanford Alpine Archaeology Project.
- historylearningsite.co.uk/louis_xiv_and_religion.htm
History learning Site (UK) – Louis XIV and Religion
- education.com/study-help/article/european-history-age-monarchy-king-louis-xiv/
King Louis XIV website on Education.com
- teachingchannel.org/videos/choosing-primary-source-documents?fd=1
Reading Like a Historian: Primary Source Documents (video) – great 2 minute video on how to incorporate primary sources into the Common Core and history classes. From Shilpa Duvoor of Summit Preparatory Charter High School in Redwood City, CA – highly recommended for teachers.
- historyteacher.net/APEuroCourse/DocPackets/DocPkt-Absolutism-1.pdf
European Absolutism Document Packet from Susan Pojer, AP European History teacher at Horace Greeley HS in Chappaqua, NY through her Historyteacher.net website
- fordham.edu/halsall/mod/1687domat.asp
Jean Domat: On Social Order and Absolute Monarchy – primary source from the Internet History Sourcebooks Project at Fordham University. Spells out the link between absolutism and the divine right of kings.
- youtube.com/watch?v=XxlzMr2Ekpo
History of the Palace of Versailles (video)
- youtube.com/watch?v=VyQtBZs8jqw
Absolutism in France (video)

Background Information

- en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Louis_XIV_of_France
“Louis XIV of France” – Wikipedia article
- en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Palace_of_Versailles
“Palace of Versailles” – Wikipedia article
- passports.com/group_leaders/on_the_road/france/versailles
On the Road: Versailles – from Passports Educational Travel
- passports.com/group_leaders/on_the_road/france/le_chateau_de_versailles_walking_tour
On the Road: Versailles Walking Tour – from Passports Educational Travel
- passports.com/group_leaders/on_the_road/france/paris
On the Road: Paris – from Passports Educational Travel

Key Terms

- Cardinal Richelieu
- Divine Right
- Edict of Nantes
- Louis XIV
- Nobility
- Sun King
- Versailles

