

# The Trial of Louis XVI

**Key questions:** Why was Louis XVI put on trial? Why was Louis XVI executed? What happened at the trial of Louis XVI?

**Step 1:** *Set the class up as a courtroom with areas for the jury, lawyers, King and Judge, allocate role play cards.*

Hand out the role play cards.

**Step 2:** *Setting the scene:*

Talk about the characters in the room. Introduce the judge, ask the King how he is feeling, and if he is confident of winning the trial.

Questions to the jury: Some questions like, have you got a good view from there? What does the King look like? What are thoughts about the King? Do you think he is guilty? Etc. Then bring in the judge and make everybody stand up. Begin the trial.

**Step 3:** *Hear from the defence then the prosecution, write on board cases for and against the King.*

Pleas, Defence lawyers. Stand up and read the cards out twice (in order).

Two diagrams on the board: one for prosecution, one for defence.

After each person speaks, ask the Jury what the defence/prosecution lawyers point/argument was.

**Step 4:** *Verdict and sentencing.*

After hearing all the evidence, write on the board 3 punishments for the King. Execution, Exile (which I had to explain) or Stay in France without power.

Get the jury to gather and discuss their answer.

Verdict and punishment.

Judge asks the jury's verdict, then sentences the King.

## The Judge

King Louis XVI you are charged with the following:

- Wasting the countrys money
- Plotting with other countries governments' against the Revolution
- Trying to run away
- and finally plotting against the Republic.

How do you plead?

.....*The Kings reply*.....

We will first hear from the Defence (*they will speak*)

*After we have heard from the defence you must say:*

"We will now hear from the Prosecution."

*After the jury has made it's verdict you need to sentence the King to Death.*

### Defence Lawyer #1

Louis was the first King in the whole of France's history to give up some of his power. He has given power back to the people he has not tried to stop the Revolution. How can you call him a traitor?

### Defence Lawyer # 2

On 6<sup>th</sup> October at the palace of Versailles, when his palace was invaded he ordered his armed guards **not** to defend him. At Varennes he preferred to be brought back captive rather than shed any more blood. The King is a **peaceful** man and does not want bloodshed. Louis has not tries to stop the Revolution with his army.

### Defence Lawyer # 3

Louis was trying to escape because he was afraid for his family. France has become very dangerous, people are not safe anymore. He is only a loving father concerned for his family. Louis only wants peace and harmony.

## Defence Lawyer # 4

The King is chosen by God he is the saviour of the French people. France needs his support and guidance. He is not to blame for all of France's problems. Louis supports the Revolution.

## Defence Lawyer # 5

There is a conspiracy against Louis some people are trying to frame him. The letters asking foreign armies to help are **not** written by the King.

## King Louis XVI

I have done **nothing** except for the good of the people. I will defend each of my actions to the letter of the law. **I have not broken any law so I am not guilty.** I will argue for my life but I will not beg for it.

*Answers to prosecution:*

*Answer to question 1*

"Never did the idea of taking control by force enter my head. There is not one word of truth in this accusation"

*Answer to question 2*

"I have no knowledge of it. It is not my handwriting"

## Prosecution Lawyer # 1

Citizens, let me repeat his famous words: "in my heart I cannot approve the Revolution and the destable constitution" These are the words of the King, we cannot trust him. Louis hates the Revolution and wants his powers back.

## Prosecution Lawyer # 2

The king has bankrupted France. He has spent all the peasants' money on palaces, clothes and jewellery for his wife. How can the people of France trust this man with their lives? He must die to make sure the people of France are spared the opportunity that Louis may become King.

### **Prosecution Lawyer # 3**

Louis has organised rebellions in all of Frances' border towns. He is a traitor to the people of France. He is just waiting for the Austrian army to come and rescue him. Louis has been sending money abroad to raise foreign armies to invade France. We must kill Louis so that he never becomes King of France.

### **Prosecution lawyer number 4**

I will ask the king two questions firstly: Why is here evidence that suggests that you were trying to take charge of the army?

*Kings reply ...*

Secondly why were there written documents found in your iron chest that showed you trying to bribe Government officials and also encouraging the Austrian army to attack France.

*Kings reply...*

France no longer needs a royal family. In the new French Republic, the leaders should be chosen by the people. You are a traitor and deserve to die!!!!

### **Prosecution Lawyer # 5**

Louis has tried to stop the Revolution from being successful. He has pretended to support the Revolution while plotting against it. He is only interested in keeping power and money.

### **Prosecution Lawyer # 6**

We will never be safe while Louis is alive. If the Revolution is to survive Louis must die. It is a simple choice; you must decide the fate of France.