

Social Causes of the French Revolution: The Three Estates

Background information

▪ One cause of the French Revolution was tension between different social groups. Society had been very strictly ordered in the Middle Ages in a “Feudal System”. However, by 1789 this was coming under great strain as some social groups declined in influence, and others rose in importance.

Task 1: “Back to Back” Drawing Exercise

- The class will be put into pairs. Each pair should be seated back to back.
- Each pair of students will be given a pair of pictures. Take one each but don’t show your partner the picture you have been given.
- The person with the “Middle Ages” diagram describes it to their partner, who draws it in the space provided as accurately as possible.
- The roles are then reversed: the person with the “1789” diagram describes it to their partner, who draws it in the space provided as accurately as possible.

Task 2: Discussion

What is the message of each diagram? What are the differences and why might these be significant?

Task 3: Analysis

- Use your two diagrams to (a) complete the gaps in the first paragraph and (b) write your own second paragraph.

In the Middle Ages, France was ruled by the _____. Underneath him were three groups known as the Three Estates. The first estate was the _____ and the second estate was the _____. Neither of these groups had to pay any tax. The largest and poorest group in society was the _____. This group had to pay all of the taxes.

By 1789, things had changed in a number of ways....