

King Louis XVI

Some historians argue that the French Revolution happened because the King and the Queen were hopeless (for example, on the day the Bastille fell, Louis made a one word entry in his diary – “rien” = “nothing”)! In this lesson we will learn more about the King and Queen and decide how far we agree with this idea.

Task 1: Picture Sources

Three pictures of the king, produced at the same time.

A



B



C



1. What is the message of the first two pictures (A&B)?
2. How is picture C different? Which do you believe? Why?

Task 2: Written Sources

Source A

"Amongst the King's furnishings was a 'lit de justice' – a bed from which he was at liberty to pass any law without contradiction. Louis XVI infuriated his advisers on one occasion by retiring to bed to recite a new law, then, in front of hundreds of magistrates and peers, in a gesture worthy of Homer Simpson, falling asleep" – the historian Mark Steel, in his book "Vive La Revolution"

Source B

"The king eats four cutlets, a fried chicken, six eggs in gravy and a slice of ham and drinks a bottle and a half of champagne; he gets dressed, leaves for the hunt, and returns to dine with an incredible appetite"
- An account by one of Louis' courtiers

Source C

"One can see the King spending his afternoons in his office watching people arriving at his palace of Versailles through his telescope. He often occupies himself sweeping up or knocking in nails...he has a sturdy enough intelligence, simple tastes, an honest heart and a true soul. But on the other hand he has a tendency for indecisiveness and a feeble will" - An account by the Abbot of Veri

Source D

"Louis XVI was an awkward, clumsy man who had a good heart but was able to relate on a personal level with very few. He often appeared unfeeling and gruff. He was insecure and seems to have disliked being King of France. When one of his ministers resigned, he was heard to remark, 'Why can't I resign too?' He often said his dream was to become a locksmith" - from www.historywiz.com

Source E

"He is an honest man and wishes really to do good, but he has not either genius or education to show the way towards the good which he desires" - The American Ambassador in France

Source F

"He was really good and tender hearted. You could never speak to him of disasters or accidents, without people seeing a look of compassion come over his face, yet his replies were often hard, his manner unfeeling" - One of Louis' Ministers

Source G

He was so short-sighted that he could not recognise anyone at a distance of more than three paces. He was stout, about five foot six inches tall, square shouldered and with the worst possible bearing. He looked like some peasant shambling along behind his plough" – a Lady-in-Waiting

3. Go through each written source highlighting obvious bad points about Louis in one colour, good points in another.
4. Go through these as a class. Are there any disagreements about which points are criticisms, and which are praise? Discuss these.
5. a. Using your findings, complete the following table by providing three single words (e.g. “humble”) to summarise Louis’ best qualities and three single words to summarise his worst qualities (e.g. “ignorant”).

b. Then add a quote next to each word from one of the sources to back up your point

Example: humble (“simple tastes, an honest heart” – Source C)

	Best Qualities	Worst Qualities
1		
2		
3		

