

Apply your skills

Discuss a historical text

The Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen was drafted in 1789, at the beginning of the French Revolution. This document has become a model for many subsequent declarations and a source of inspiration for most of the constitutions of the 19th and 20th centuries.

DECLARATION OF THE RIGHTS OF MAN AND OF THE CITIZEN, 1789

Article 1. Men are born and remain free and equal in rights. Social distinctions can only be based on the common good.

Article 2. The aim of all political association is the preservation of natural and inalienable rights of man. These rights are liberty, property, safety and resistance to oppression.

Article 3. The principle of all sovereignty resides essentially in the nation. No individual can exercise authority which does not emanate expressly from it. (...)

Article 4. Freedom is the ability to do anything that does not harm a third person; therefore, the exercise of the natural rights of each man has no limits except those which assure the other members of society an enjoyment of the same rights. These limits can only be fixed by law. (...)

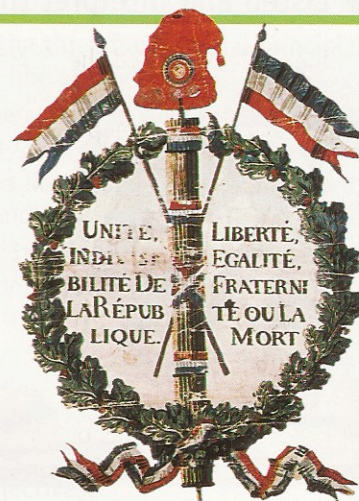
Article 6. Law is the expression of the general will. All citizens have the right to participate personally or through his representatives, in its formation. The law must be the same for all (...).

Article 7. No man can be accused, arrested or imprisoned unless it is according to the law and its norms. (...)

Article 10. No one should be bothered on account of their opinions, even religious, provided their manifestation does not disturb the public order established by law. (...)

Article 11. The free communication of thoughts and opinions is one of the most precious rights of man. Every citizen may therefore speak, write and print freely (...).

Article 13. Certain taxes are indispensable for the



Symbols of the French Republic, 1793.

maintenance of public forces and for the expenses of administration. The payment of these taxes should be shared among all citizens according to the wealth of each. (...)

Article 16. A society in which the observance of the law is not assured, nor the separation of powers defined, has no constitution at all.

Article 17. Since property is a sacred and inviolable right, no one can be deprived of it unless required by public necessity. (...)

GUIDE FOR ANALYSIS

a) Presentation

- Identify the historical context: date the document was written, its authors and the intended audience.
- Classify the source: type of document, its purpose, any conventions or traditions it reflects.

b) Interpretation

- Identify key words, assumptions and values.
- Group the articles by content: rights, limits on rights, the origin of power and the law, property, etc.
- Identify three problems the document aims to solve.

- Which social group benefited most from this declaration? And least?

c) Explanation

Explain when these situations might have arisen and cite the relevant article.

- The government took away your property.
- You were arrested for expressing your beliefs.

d) Valuation and conclusions

- Identify any problems, arguments or ideas this text shares with others from this period.
- In your opinion, which article is most important?