

## CHAPTER 1

# The French Revolution

CBSE Class 9 · History (India and the Contemporary World – I) · Chapter 1

CBSE · Social Science · Class 9

### WHAT THIS CHAPTER DOES



Explain the four causes of the French Revolution — social, economic, political and intellectual.



Place the key events of 1789-1804 in correct order on a timeline.

Boards prep that builds confidence, not anxiety.

**TODAY'S MISSION**

# Today's mission

1

Explain the four causes of the French Revolution — social, economic, political and intellectual.

2

Place the key events of 1789-1804 in correct order on a timeline.

3

Distinguish the Estates-General, the National Assembly, the constitutional monarchy and the republic.

4

Score 7/8 marks on this chapter's slice of the History paper.

## WHY THIS MATTERS

# Why this chapter matters

- 1 6-8 marks every term paper — one of the highest-yield History chapters in Class 9.
- 2 It is the birthplace of the modern ideas of liberty, equality, fraternity and citizens' rights that shape democracies today, including India's.
- 3 Real-world bridge — the words 'revolution', 'republic', 'rights' and 'citizen' that we use every day were given new meaning here.

TOPIC

**A**

# French society in the late eighteenth century

TOPIC

# The three estates - a society of privilege

## THE FIRST ESTATE — CLERGY

At the top of French society sat the First Estate, the clergy of the Roman Catholic Church. Though small in number, it owned vast lands and enjoyed a privilege the rest of France did not: exemption from most state taxes. Worse, it collected the tithe from peasants — a religious

## THE SECOND ESTATE — NOBILITY

The Second Estate was the nobility, who held their status and lands by birth. Like the clergy, they were exempt from taxes to the state, and they extracted feudal dues from the peasants who lived and worked on their estates — payments and services owed simply for using the noble's land.

## THE THIRD ESTATE — EVERYONE ELSE

The Third Estate contained the overwhelming majority of the French people: peasants and agricultural labourers (the largest group), artisans, servants and workers, as well as the prosperous and educated middle class. This estate did ALL the productive work and

## TAXES — TAILLE AND TITHE

The tax system was the engine of resentment. Members of the Third Estate paid the taille, a direct tax to the state, along with a long list of indirect taxes on items of everyday use such as salt and tobacco. On top of this they paid the tithe to the Church and feudal dues to their lord. The

TOPIC

# Why the Third Estate could no longer cope

## A GROWING POPULATION

The population of France rose sharply through the eighteenth century, from about 23 million in 1715 to around 28 million by 1789. More people meant a rising demand for food grains, but the production of grain could not keep pace with the growth in population. The price of bread — the staple food of the

## THE SUBSISTENCE CRISIS

Matters tipped into a **SUBSISTENCE CRISIS** — a situation in which the basic means of living are threatened. When a bad harvest struck, the price of bread shot up; bakery queues lengthened; and the weakest could no longer feed themselves. Such crises, made worse by drought or hail that destroyed the harvest

## AN EMPTY ROYAL TREASURY

While the poor starved, the state itself was bankrupt. Long and costly wars had drained French resources, and France's expensive help to the American colonies in their war of independence against Britain added a debt of over a billion livres. The lavish upkeep of the royal

## THE TRIGGER — NEW TAXES NEEDED

By 1789 the French government could not pay its bills without raising fresh taxes, and only the long-dormant Estates-General could approve them. This financial dead-end is what forced Louis XVI to summon the Estates-General in May 1789 — the single act that

TOPIC

**B**

# New ideas — the middle class and the philosophers

## TOPIC

# The rise of a thinking middle class

### WHO THE MIDDLE CLASS WERE

The eighteenth century saw the rise of a new social group within the Third Estate: an educated and prosperous MIDDLE CLASS, or bourgeoisie. It included merchants and manufacturers grown rich from a booming overseas trade in goods and from the production of items like woollen and

### JOHN LOCKE

The new ideas came from a generation of philosophers. The Englishman John Locke, in his 'Two Treatises of Government', had set out to refute the doctrine of the divine and absolute right of the monarch — the claim that the king's power came directly from God and could not be questioned. Locke

### ROUSSEAU AND MONTESQUIEU

Two French thinkers carried the argument further. Jean-Jacques Rousseau, in 'The Social Contract', proposed a form of government founded on a contract between the people and their representatives — authority should rest with the people, not a hereditary king.

### HOW THE IDEAS SPREAD

These ideas did not stay locked in heavy books. They were discussed and debated in the SALONS — gatherings in the houses of the well-to-do — and in the coffee-houses of the towns, and they were carried further by printed books and newspapers that were often read aloud so that even those who could

TOPIC

C

# The outbreak of the Revolution — 1789

TOPIC

# From the Estates-General to the Bastille

## 5 MAY 1789 — ESTATES-GENERAL

Needing approval for new taxes, Louis XVI summoned the Estates-General, the old assembly of the three estates, to a grand session at Versailles on 5 May 1789. By long custom each estate voted as a single body, so the privileged first and second estates could always outvote the

## 17-20 JUNE — THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY

Rejected on the voting question, the Third Estate's representatives walked out in protest. On 17 June 1789 they declared themselves a NATIONAL ASSEMBLY, claiming to represent the whole French nation rather than a single estate. Locked out of their usual hall, on 20

## 14 JULY 1789 — THE BASTILLE

As the Assembly worked, Paris seethed. Rumours that the king would send troops to crush the Assembly, combined with a severe bread shortage, drove an agitated crowd onto the streets. On the morning of 14 July 1789 they stormed and demolished the Bastille — a fortress-prison that

## COUNTRYSIDE IN REVOLT

The unrest spread from Paris to the countryside. Grippled by fear and rumour, peasants in village after village rose against their lords, attacked the chateaux of the nobles, looted hoarded grain and burned the documents that recorded their feudal dues. Faced with this wave of rural revolt

TOPIC

**D**

# France becomes a constitutional monarchy

**WORKED EXAMPLE**

# Abolition of feudalism + the Declaration of Rights

- 1** On the night of 4 August 1789 the National Assembly passed a decree **ABOLISHING** the feudal system of obligations and taxes — peasants were freed from feudal dues, and the tithe was scrapped.
- 2** Members of the clergy too were forced to give up their privileges; Church lands were confiscated by the state, releasing assets worth a large sum.
- 3** In August 1789 the Assembly passed the **DECLARATION OF THE RIGHTS OF MAN AND CITIZEN**, proclaiming natural rights — the right to life, freedom of speech, freedom of opinion and equality before the law — as inalienable rights of every human being by birth.
- 4** These measures shifted the source of authority from the king to the nation, and laid the foundation for a written constitution.

TOPIC

# A monarchy with a constitution

## WHAT THE CONSTITUTION DID

In 1791 the National Assembly completed the draft of a constitution. Its central object was to **LIMIT** the powers of the monarch: instead of being concentrated in the hands of one king ruling by divine right, power was now separated and assigned to different institutions — the

## WHO COULD VOTE

The Constitution of 1791 gave the power to make laws to a National Assembly that was elected indirectly — citizens chose electors, who in turn chose the members of the Assembly. But the vote was **NOT** universal. Only men above 25 years of age who paid taxes equal to at least three days of

## LIBERTY AS A NATURAL RIGHT

The Constitution opened with the Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen. Certain rights were established as **NATURAL** and **INALIENABLE** — belonging to each person by birth and impossible to take away. These included the right to life, freedom of speech and

## THE SYMBOLS OF THE REVOLUTION

Because many people could not read, the Revolution communicated through powerful **SYMBOLS**. The broken chain stood for the act of becoming free; the bundle of rods, or fasces, showed that strength lay in unity; the eye within a triangle radiating light stood for

TOPIC

**E**

# The Republic and the Reign of Terror

TOPIC

# From republic to terror

## FRANCE BECOMES A REPUBLIC — 1792

The constitutional monarchy did not last. Louis XVI was suspected of plotting with the rulers of Prussia and Austria to crush the Revolution, and in 1792 France went to war. As war fever and food shortages gripped Paris, ordinary citizens — the sans-culottes — stormed the royal palace.

## EXECUTION OF LOUIS XVI — 1793

The Convention put the former king on trial. Found guilty of treason against the nation, Louis XVI was sentenced to death and executed publicly by GUILLOTINE on 21 January 1793; his queen, Marie Antoinette, met the same fate later that year. The execution of an anointed king sent

## THE REIGN OF TERROR — 1793-94

From 1793 to 1794 France passed through the REIGN OF TERROR. Maximilien ROBESPIERRE and his Jacobin followers, who now controlled the Convention, pursued a policy of severe control and punishment. Anyone judged an 'enemy of the republic' — nobles,

## THE FALL OF ROBESPIERRE

Robespierre pursued his policies so relentlessly that even his own supporters began to demand restraint, living in fear of the guillotine themselves. In July 1794 the Convention turned against him; Robespierre was arrested and, in the same month, sent to the guillotine he had used on

TOPIC

**F**

# The Directory and the rise of Napoleon

**WORKED EXAMPLE**

# 1774 → 1804 in one strip

- 1 1774 — Louis XVI becomes king of a France already short of money.

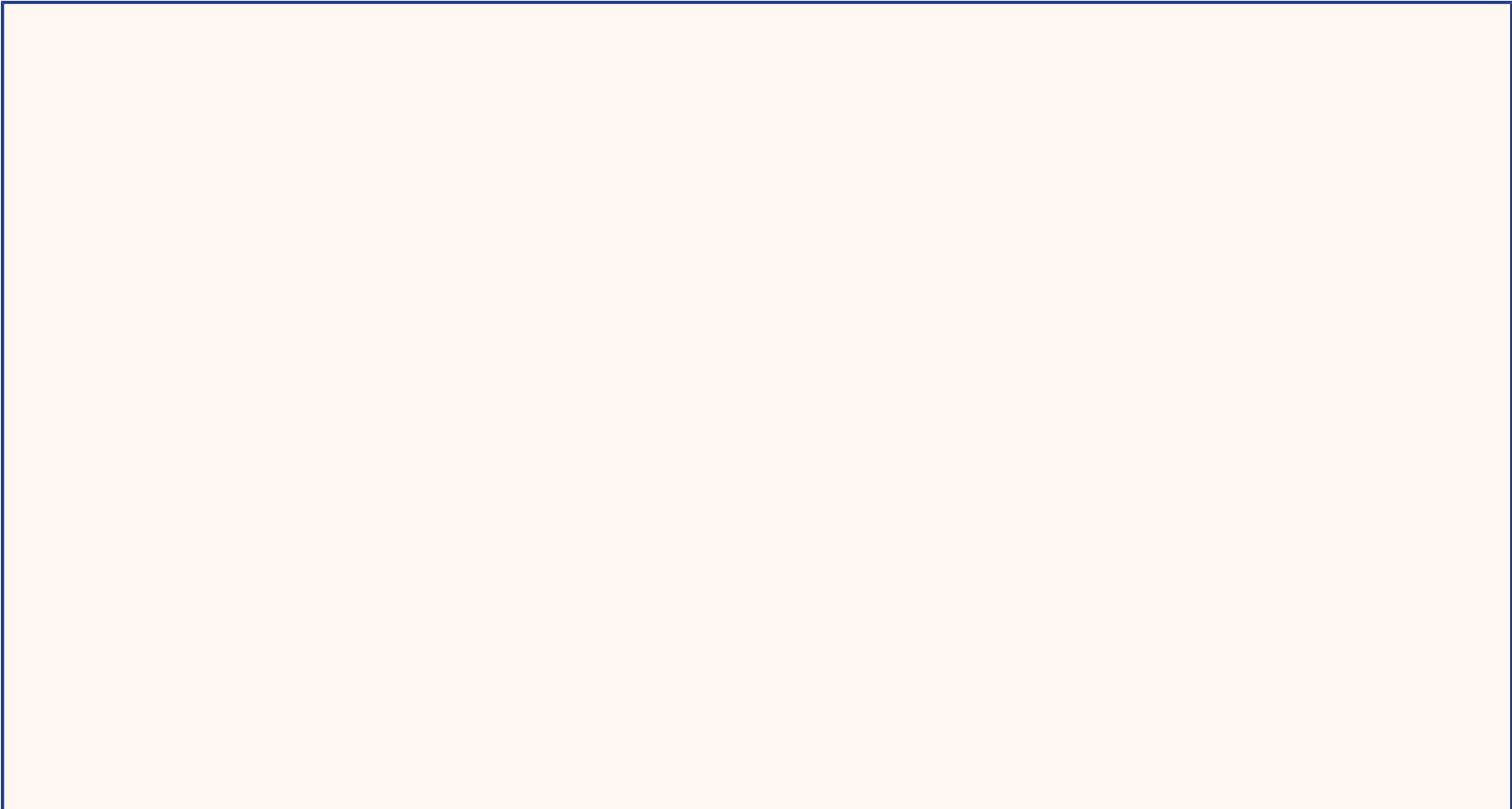
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- 2 1789 — Revolution erupts: Estates-General (May), Tennis Court Oath (June), storming of the Bastille (14 July), Declaration of Rights (Aug).

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- 3 1791 — Constitution makes France a constitutional monarchy.

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TOPIC

# The Directory and Napoleon

## THE DIRECTORY

After the fall of Robespierre, the wealthier middle classes seized control and a new constitution of 1795 set up an executive of FIVE members called the DIRECTORY, meant to prevent any single person from gaining the dictatorial power Robespierre had held. But the five directors

## NAPOLEON BONAPARTE

In 1804 Napoleon Bonaparte crowned himself EMPEROR of France, bringing the revolutionary republic to an end and setting out to conquer much of Europe. Yet he saw himself as a moderniser: he introduced uniform laws (the famous Napoleonic Code), a standard system of weights and measures

## ABOLITION OF SLAVERY

One of the most radical acts of the Revolution concerned the French colonies in the Caribbean — Martinique, Guadeloupe and San Domingo — whose plantations of tobacco, indigo, sugar and coffee ran on the labour of enslaved Africans bought and shipped across the Atlantic. In 1794 the

## THE LEGACY OF THE REVOLUTION

Even after the Revolution ended in empire, its ideas could not be undone. The vision of LIBERTY, EQUALITY and FRATERNITY, and the conviction that sovereignty belongs to the people and not to a hereditary king, travelled out of France and inspired movements for

TOPIC

**G**

# The role of women

TOPIC

# Women in the French Revolution

## WOMEN'S DAILY STRUGGLE

Most women of the Third Estate had to work for a living — as seamstresses and laundresses, selling flowers, fruit and vegetables in the market, or working as domestic servants in the houses of the wealthy. Few had access to education or job training, and their wages were lower than

## WOMEN'S POLITICAL CLUBS

Hoping that the Revolution would bring them equal rights, women started their own **POLITICAL CLUBS** and newspapers. The most famous was the Society of Revolutionary Republican Women. Through these clubs women demanded the same political rights as

## OLYMPE DE GOUGES

The boldest voice for women's rights was Olympe de Gouges. In 1791 she wrote the **DECLARATION OF THE RIGHTS OF WOMAN AND THE FEMALE CITIZEN**, a direct answer to the men-only Declaration of 1789, insisting that women be granted the same natural and political rights as men. When she

## WHAT WOMEN FINALLY WON

During the Reign of Terror the new government even ordered women's clubs to be closed and their political activities banned. The struggle for women's rights would continue for over a century and a half: it was only in 1946 — long after the Revolution — that women in France

## TOPIC

# Estates-General vs National Assembly

### TRAP → TRUTH

- × **MISTAKE** The Estates-General and the National Assembly are the same body with two names.
- ✓ **CORRECT** They are DIFFERENT. The Estates-General was the old feudal assembly of the three estates that Louis XVI summoned on 5 May 1789, where each estate voted as a single bloc (one vote per estate). When the Third Estate's demand for voting by head was refused, its representatives walked out and on 17 June 1789 declared themselves the NATIONAL ASSEMBLY — a new body claiming to represent the whole nation. The walkout is the turning point; do not merge the two.

## TOPIC

# The Bastille

## TRAP → TRUTH

× **MISTAKE** The Bastille was stormed to free its many hundreds of prisoners.

✓ **CORRECT** On 14 July 1789 the Bastille held only SEVEN prisoners. The crowd attacked it not to free prisoners but because it was a HATED SYMBOL of the king's despotic power, and because they hoped to find gunpowder and arms stored inside. Its fall mattered as a symbol of the collapse of royal authority, not as a prison-break.

## TOPIC

# Republic vs execution of the king

### TRAP → TRUTH

× **MISTAKE** France became a republic and executed Louis XVI in the same event in 1789.

✓ **CORRECT** These are SEPARATE events, years apart. France remained a CONSTITUTIONAL MONARCHY under the Constitution of 1791. The monarchy was abolished and France was declared a REPUBLIC on 21 September 1792. Louis XVI was tried for treason and executed by guillotine on 21 January 1793. Keep 1789 (Revolution begins), 1791 (constitution), 1792 (republic), 1793 (king executed) distinct.

## TOPIC

# Who paid taxes

### TRAP → TRUTH

- × **MISTAKE** Everyone in France paid the same taxes, including nobles and the clergy.
- ✓ **CORRECT** Only the THIRD ESTATE paid taxes. The first estate (clergy) and second estate (nobility) were PRIVILEGED and EXEMPT from most state taxes. The Third Estate alone bore the direct tax (taille) and many indirect taxes, AND had to pay the tithe (one-tenth of produce) to the Church and feudal dues to nobles. The unequal tax burden is the heart of the economic cause.

## TOPIC

# The cause of the Revolution

### TRAP → TRUTH

× **MISTAKE** The French Revolution was caused only by the ideas of the philosophers.

✓ **CORRECT** Enlightenment ideas (Locke, Rousseau, Montesquieu) were ONE cause, but not the only one. The Revolution had MULTIPLE causes acting together: social inequality of the estates, the financial bankruptcy of the state (war debt + Louis XVI's lavish court + costly help to America), the SUBSISTENCE CRISIS (bad harvests, soaring bread prices), the rise of an aspiring middle class, AND the spread of new ideas. A 5-mark answer must give several causes, not just the philosophers.

## TOPIC

# The 'middle class'

### TRAP → TRUTH

× **MISTAKE** The middle class were poor peasants who led the Revolution.

✓ **CORRECT** The middle class (the bourgeoisie) were a NEW, EDUCATED and PROSPEROUS group — merchants, lawyers, officials, manufacturers — who had grown rich from overseas trade and manufacture. They were NOT poor; they resented that wealth did not bring them the privileges enjoyed by the nobility by birth. It was this educated middle class, reading Rousseau and Montesquieu, that gave the Revolution its leadership and ideas.

TOPIC

# Olympe de Gouges and women's rights

## TRAP → TRUTH

- × **MISTAKE** The Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen (1789) gave equal rights to women.
- ✓ **CORRECT** It did NOT. The 1789 Declaration's rights were, in practice, extended to MEN; women were treated as 'passive' citizens without political rights such as the vote. This is why Olympe de Gouges wrote the 'Declaration of the Rights of Woman and the Female Citizen' in 1791, demanding the same rights for women. She was executed in 1793. Do not assume the Revolution delivered gender equality at once.

TOPPER TEMPLATE · MARK-BY-MARK

# 5-mark question: 'Explain the causes that led to the outbreak of the French Revolution.' OR

## 1 SOCIAL CAUSE — THE THREE ESTATES

1 m

Open with the structure of society: France was divided into three estates. The First (clergy) and Second (nobility) estates enjoyed privileges by birth and were exempt from taxes; the Third Estate — peasants, artisans, workers and the middle class — did all the work and paid all the taxes. State the inequality crisply.

## 2 ECONOMIC CAUSE — TAXES + SUBSISTENCE CRISIS

1 m

The Third Estate alone paid the taille and other taxes, the tithe to the Church and feudal dues to nobles. Add the subsistence crisis: a rising population, bad harvests and soaring bread prices meant the poor could not afford bread. Name BOTH the tax burden and the food crisis.

## 3 POLITICAL / FINANCIAL CAUSE — AN EMPTY TREASURY

1 m

The state was bankrupt — long wars, the cost of helping the American colonies against Britain, and the lavish spending of the royal court at Versailles had drained the treasury. To raise money Louis XVI was forced to summon the Estates-General in 1789, which set events in motion.

## 4 INTELLECTUAL CAUSE — THE PHILOSOPHERS

1 m

Name the thinkers and their works: John Locke (against the divine right of kings), Jean-Jacques Rousseau ('The Social Contract' — government by the consent of the people) and Montesquieu ('The Spirit of the Laws' — division of power). Their ideas, spread through books, salons and coffee-houses, gave the middle class a new vocabulary of liberty and equality.

## 5 CONCLUSION — THE TRIGGER AND THE RISING MIDDLE CLASS

1 m

Conclude by linking causes to outbreak: a prosperous but unprivileged middle class, armed with these ideas, demanded change; the summoning of the Estates-General in May 1789 and the king's refusal of voting by head triggered the formation of the National Assembly and the storming of the Bastille on 14 July 1789.

TOPPER TEMPLATE · MARK-BY-MARK

# 3-mark question: 'What was the significance / importance of the Declaration of the Rights of

- |  |  |
|--|--|
| <p><b>1</b> <b>WHAT IT WAS + WHEN</b><br/>1 m</p>              | <p>State the fact: in August 1789 the National Assembly passed the Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen. It proclaimed natural and inalienable rights — the right to life, freedom of speech, freedom of opinion and equality before the law — as belonging to every human being by birth.</p>   |
| <p><b>2</b> <b>WHAT IT CHANGED</b><br/>1 m</p>                 | <p>Explain its effect: it declared that the source of all authority lay in the nation (the people), not in the king. It ended the system of privilege by birth and made all citizens equal before the law, striking at the foundations of the old order.</p>   |
| <p><b>3</b> <b>ITS WIDER SIGNIFICANCE / LIMITS</b><br/>1 m</p> | <p>Assess it: the Declaration became a charter of human rights that inspired struggles for liberty across the world. But note its limit honestly — in practice these rights were extended to men; women and 'passive' citizens were excluded, which is why Olympe de Gouges demanded equal rights for women in 1791. This balanced point earns the third mark.</p> |

## TOPPER TEMPLATE · MARK-BY-MARK

# 4-mark source/extract-based question: a short passage on French society, the estates, or the

### 1 READ TWICE; UNDERLINE THE DATED FACTS AND NAMED TERMS

1 m

On first read, underline every date, proper noun and term in the passage (e.g. 'Third Estate', '1789', 'taille'). The answers to sub-questions are almost always lifted directly from these underlined anchors. Do not write yet.

### 2 ANSWER EACH SUB- QUESTION IN 1-2 LINES, QUOTING THE PASSAGE

2 m

For a 'identify / state' sub-question, answer in one line straight from the text. For an 'explain' sub-question, add ONE line of your own chapter knowledge to the passage's fact — e.g. the passage says the Third Estate paid taxes; you add that the first two estates were exempt. Keep each answer tight; do not over-write.

### 3 THE EVALUATE / 'IN YOUR VIEW' SUB- QUESTION

1 m

The last sub-question usually asks for your reasoning ('Why was this unfair?' / 'What did this lead to?'). Give a one-line judgement supported by a fact from the chapter — e.g. 'This inequality was the key social cause of the Revolution because it placed the whole tax burden on those who could least afford it.'

## PYQ PATTERNS

# Top PYQ patterns to drill

**#1**

Explain the causes that led to the outbreak of the French Revolution. / Describe the conditions in French society before 1789. (5 marks)

Almost every term paper (SQP 2018, 2020, 2022, 2023)

**#2**

Describe the system of the three estates in eighteenth-century France. Who paid taxes and who did not? (3-5 marks)

SQP 2019, 2021, 2023

**#3**

Source/extract-based: read a short passage on French society OR the Declaration of Rights and answer 3 sub-questions. (4 marks)

Annual in the case-study section

**#4**

What was the importance of the Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen? OR What did the Constitution of 1791 establish? (3 marks)

SQP 2018, 2022

**#5**

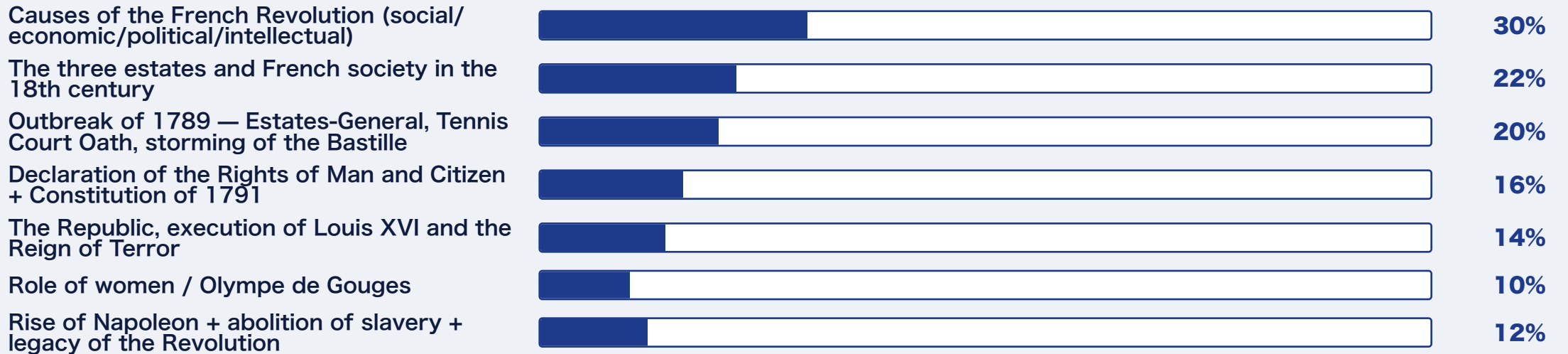
Describe the role of women in the French Revolution. Who was Olympe de Gouges? (3 marks)

SQP 2020, 2024

**MARKS DISTRIBUTION**

# 10-year marks distribution

**10-YEAR PYQ MARKS DISTRIBUTION**



**RECAP · MEMORISE THESE****5-line revision**

**1** Causes — FOUR causes: social (three estates), economic (taxes + subsistence crisis), political (empty treasury), intellectual (Locke, Rousseau, Montesquieu).

**2** Outbreak 1789 — Estates-General (May) → National Assembly + Tennis Court Oath (June) → storming of the Bastille (14 July).

**3** From monarchy to empire — Constitution 1791 (constitutional monarchy) → Republic 1792 → king executed 1793 → Reign of Terror 1793-94 → Directory → Napoleon Emperor 1804.

**WHAT'S NEXT**

# What's next

- Chapter 2 — Socialism in Europe and the Russian Revolution (builds on the idea of revolution and rights you met here).
- Sit the 15-MCQ Quick Drill (companion PDF) — under 20 minutes, target  $\geq 12/15$ .
- Then the full term-pattern paper — 30 marks, History pattern with a source-based question.

# You've understood how the modern world's idea of 'rights' was born.

Now prove it. Take the drill, sit the paper, beat the chapter.

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