

PEOPLE IN WORLD HISTORY

PROFILE 41

Marie Antoinette (1755–1793)

Courage! I have shown it for years; think you I shall lose it at the moment when my sufferings are to end?—Marie Antoinette on the way to the guillotine, 1793

From childhood, Marie had been told that she would someday be a queen. At the age of 15, she was married to the French *dauphin*, or crown prince. In only four years, he became King Louis XVI, and Marie Antoinette—at the age when people today graduate from high school—became the queen of France.

Like many royal marriages of the day, the one between Marie and Louis was based not on love, but on politics. The marriage was arranged to strengthen France's ties to Marie's native Austria. Unhappy in her marriage, Marie sought comfort in elaborate balls at Versailles, horse races, expensive parties, and lavish theater productions. In her extravagance, Marie became an important symbol of royal excess and indifference. As such, her influence on the French Revolution was incalculable.

Marie's reputation was under attack for much of her reign, although not always justifiably. The quotation most commonly associated with Marie is "Let them eat cake." This was supposedly her unthinking reply to a courtier's remark that the peasants were rioting outside her palace because they had no bread. She never said these words, but the fact that people were



willing to believe otherwise says much about the way the public perceived her. Many French citizens viewed Marie as simply frivolous. Others thought she was dangerous, an untrustworthy foreigner who would plot against France. Indeed, Marie tried constantly to influence French foreign policy to benefit her native Austria. When France went to war with Austria in 1792, Marie, who hoped for the defeat of the French revolutionaries, passed information to the enemy. Her

treason gave the Republicans their reason to try and convict the queen. She was guillotined on October 16, 1793.

The last years of Marie's life were full of heartache. She spent four years as a virtual prisoner of the revolutionaries. In her final months, her husband was executed and her surviving son was taken from her. Surprisingly, the superficial queen demonstrated remarkable character during these tragedies. Accounts of the time portray her as courageous, steadfast, and above all else, dignified as she approached the guillotine. Her noble death, in such contrast to her frivolous life, is one reason why Marie Antoinette has intrigued people for generations.

Reviewing the Profile

Answer the following questions on a separate sheet of paper.

1. How did Marie Antoinette become queen of France?
2. Why was she so unpopular with the French people?

Critical Thinking

3. **Evaluating Information** Make a list of adjectives you think apply to Marie Antoinette.

4. **Drawing Conclusions** Does it surprise you that Marie Antoinette, famous for her frivolity, demonstrated such character toward the end of her life? Explain your answer.

- Austin Cather and Devon Bassett
- Marie Antoinette was number fifteen out of sixteen children.
- Marie was involved deeply in the french revolution.
- The words "let them eat cake" was never said by Marie Antoinette in fact she cared very much about her kingdom and its people.
- the public was displeased with Marie for the fact she came from Vienna Austria Frances enemy.
- Many people tried to slander Marie's name by calming her for many affairs of adultery against the king.
- Many believed that Marie was involved in the affair of the diamond necklace.
- Marie was blamed for the downfall of France's economy but it was here husbands fault Marie had no say in government.
- the family were treated very well till the french invaded Tuileries place for The family when Marie and her Family were accused of treason her husband king Louis the 16 then he was convicted of treason and then executed. After which Marie was left with her son and daughter.
- Her son and daughter were taken from her.
- Her son was tortured till he died her daughter was the only survivor left.
- Marie was convicted of treason and was sentenced to death by beheading the same as her husband king Louis 16.

Loyal to Austria and France she cared for their people and did not live a very lavish life.

Brave when faced with the death of her son and husband and separation from her daughter Marie Antoinette keep a straight face.

impacted 10%

caring 9%

knowledge 10%

all around score 29%

Marie Antoinette received a better score than Tiger Woods which is not surprising.