

Chapter 19 Primary Source Activity

The only member of the French royal family to survive the Revolution was the young Marie-Therese Charlotte de France, called “Madame Royale,” the daughter of Louis XVI and Marie Antoinette. Along with her parents and her younger brother the Dauphin (1785–1795), she was imprisoned in 1792 (textbook pages 488–490). The excerpts below are from her memoirs. ♦ *As you read, consider the many different ways of viewing the events of French Revolution. Then, on a separate sheet of paper, answer the questions that follow.*

The Royal Family in Prison

[August 1792]

Because of my brother’s health, we went for walks in the garden every day, and almost every time my father was insulted by the guards. Rocher [the doorkeeper] tried to molest my father in every way: he sang the “Carmagnole” [a street song] and other horrors, and in passing blew smoke into his face, knowing that my father was bothered by the smoke. My father suffered all this very gently.

One other day, they sounded alarm during dinner; one thought the foreigners [the Allied army] were coming; this awful Rocher seized his big sabre and told my father: If they come, I will kill you! . . . Simon [her brother’s caretaker] abused my brother when he wept because of the separation from us; the child became disturbed and no longer dared to shed any tears. Simon put a red cap on his head and put a Jacobin’s coat on him. . . . Several soldiers. . . appeared and. . . insisted that my father should show himself at the window. . . . When my father asked what was going on, one young officer told him: “Well, Monsieur, if you want to know, they want to show you the head of the Princess de Lamballe.” My mother [Marie Antoinette] was petrified with horror.



ILLUSTRATION/PHOTO CREDIT: BETTMANN.

On August 2 [1793] they woke us up at two in the morning to read a decree of the Convention to my mother . . . she was brought to the Conciergerie to be put on trial. . . . When she arrived, they put her in the dirtiest, dampest, unhealthiest room of the whole building. She was being watched constantly by a gendarme. . . . Her answer to all these shameful accusations was : “I appeal to all mothers.”

The people were touched. The judges. . . hurried to send her to her death. My mother listened to the sentence with great composure.

. . . The young prince was left to the brutal treatment of that monster Simon, a former shoemaker and drunkard. . . . Simon asked him one day: “Capet, if those Vendeens free you, what will you do?” The young king replied: “I shall pardon you.” During the winter, my brother suffered several attacks of fever; he was always close to the fire. . . . He grew weaker and weaker and died in agony. . . . I do not believe he was poisoned.

Source: *Memoirs of the Captivity* (1892), in *The French Revolution and Napoleon: An Eyewitness History*, by Joe H. Kirchberger (Facts on File, 1989).

Questions to Think About

1. In what ways were various members of the royal family harassed by the prison guards?
2. In what ways was the young Dauphin treated worse than the others?
3. **Identifying Bias** What picture does Marie-Therese try to give of her parents’ and brother’s behavior in prison?
4. **Activity** Write a short letter to the editor in which you defend or object to the treatment of the royal family in prison, on the basis of humanitarian views or of the need for revolution.