PROFILE: The Jacobins had been a radical faction in the National Convention. Originally, it was a small club which sent delegates in June, 1789 to the National Assembly, a governing body consisting of some influential members of the Three Estates-General. The National Assembly sought to write a constitution for France. The Jacobins supported a constitutional monarchy, in which the king would be recognized as the ruler and agree to protect the rights of citizens.

The Jacobins, however, became more convinced that this type of government was not the answer. King Louis XVI had refused to take action to solve the many problems of French society, and used military troops to quell riots during July and August 1789. Membership rapidly grew in this faction from August to October 1789, primarily due to those Jacobian leaders who advocated more extreme measures, such as violence, should be taken to further the cause of the National Assembly. These leaders supported overthrowing the monarchy and creating a democratic republican government for France.

The Jacobian delegates, which included artisans, small shop-keepers, and farmers, had been known as the "Mountain" since they occupied the highest seats at the National Convention. Like the Girondins, the Jacobins were dedicated to the principles of the French Revolution--freedom from oppression, equality for all, the guarantee of certain rights, and the right to participate in government.

Unlike the Girondins, the Jacobins preferred to bring about these reforms quickly. They feared that those people, in particular the nobility, who continued to support absolute monarchy would undermine the revolution. They believed the trial and conviction of King Louis XVI would serve as a step in the right direction in destroying the remnants of oppressive rule.

POSITION: The Jacobins believe that without a doubt King Louis XVI is guilty of the charges brought before him, deserves no mercy, and must be beheaded by the "slippery blade" of the guillotine. Alive, the king represents extravagance and corruption. Dead, the new democratic republic can move forward and no longer symbolize greed and oppression. As radicals, the Jacobins are willing to spill blood to achieve this goal and are absolutely convinced that the revolution cannot be completed until the king's head is in the executioner's bucket.
PROFILE: The Girondins had been a conservative faction in the National Convention. They were leading delegates from 1792 to late 1793 in the National Assembly, a governing body consisting of some influential members of the Three Estates-General. The National Assembly sought to write a constitution for France.

The Girondin delegates, which included lawyers, writers, and other professionals (merchants, educators), were bound together by moderate wealth, common political beliefs, and ambition. They occupied the middle seats at the Convention. Like the Jacobins, the Girondins were dedicated to the principles of the French Revolution—freedom from oppression, equality for all, the guarantee of certain rights, and the right to participate in government.

Unlike the Jacobins, the Girondins preferred to slowly bring about these reforms. They feared that too much power in the hands of those people who traditionally had been oppressed would take full advantage of this situation for their own purposes and not for France as a whole, making it vulnerable to her enemies. They also believed this trial should not occur at this time, since all French citizens, not a small convention of influential people, had the right to determine the fate of King Louis XVI.

POSITION: ALL members of the Girondins think the National Convention is not the proper place or time to try King Louis XVI. They believe the Jacobins are more concerned about their own personal glory and not looking out for the interests of France as a whole. Many Girondins personally believe that he is guilty. They feel, however, the king’s fate should be decided on a later date by the entire French population and not a governing body that, in their view, do not necessarily have the majority consent of the people. In this way the integrity of the French judicial system, as outlined in the French Constitution, would be preserved. It states that all people are entitled to due process and a fair trial. Should their efforts fail to convince the Plain that the trial must be delayed, and if King Louis XVI is found guilty of treason by the Convention, then the king should be sent into exile, and not beheaded, as advocated by the Jacobins. Their reasoning is that the Convention would be as cruel and unjust as those acts committed by the king during his reign.

PLAIN FACTION

PROFILE: The Plain were mostly common people—artisans, shopkeepers, and farmers—who attended the National Convention. They were often referred to as the “sans-culottes”—those people who wore long pants, as differentiated from the aristocrats who generally wore short pants with long, silk stockings. Few members of the Plain were educated; therefore, in the ensuing debates, you have no say in the matter until the final vote.

POSITION: The Plain for the most part are unsure about the matter before them. It is the responsibility of the Girondins and the Jacobins
The king, by doing very little to reverse centuries of royal abuse, deserved to lose his head. We wish we could have released the rope that dropped the slippery blade onto Louis's neck. He was no friend of French peasants.

Peasants throughout France lived in squalor for centuries, usually in one room houses made of clay and straw with dirt floors and thatched roofs. The presence of animals gave the dwelling the smell of a stable.

Food was meager and unnourishing. Most often it was a plain soup that tasted like dishwater. Small chunks of moldy bread might accompany the soup.

Because of such unattended conditions, many were forced to steal, to beg, and even to murder. Many women sold their bodies as prostitutes. Children became pickpockets.

The king and his arrogant foreign queen never addressed the widespread problems of his people. Calling for a meeting of the Estates-General in July 1789 hardly excused his lack of attention since his reign started in 1774.

When the cry of "We want bread" was voiced throughout the country, it was met by that Austrian alleycat queen of Louis, when she replied: "Let them eat cake." How uncaring!

Even if there was bread to buy, the wages we receive from our landlord is woefully lacking. I receive 15 sous a day, and bread costs 14 1/2 sous a pound! What coins we might have left would be greedily taken by the unfair taxes we had to pay to feed the aristocracy's lavish lifestyle in estates and palaces. Mademoiselle de Gouges will speak about taxes in a few minutes.

We have been oppressed, taxed, and starved. Louis's execution was deserved! We support the revolution. I only wish Christine and I - moi - could have pulled the rope!
Louis was a tyrant, just like his ancestors. The Bourbon monarchs were corrupt, arrogant, extravagant, and wicked.

It was justice that the fate of the king never went to the people. An appeal would have needlessly delayed the trial.

The king got a fair trial in the convention. He heard the charges against him, had his attorney defend him, and even had a chance to respond to charges. After his day in court, the deputies found him guilty.

The Republic will now reap benefits from Louis's death. It can move on to more important issues.

As time went on, new taxes were piled on top of already crushing taxes. It seems the reason for many new taxes was to pay for the increasingly luxurious lifestyles of the king and his nobles—jewels, lavish balls, hunting, gambling, and banquets. And this was in addition to the centuries of warfare the taxes had to pay for.

The taxes were hated by the common people. The most famous taxes were:

- **Gabelle** A tax on salt. Only the government was allowed to produce and sell salt. And everyone had to buy it and pay taxes on it.
- **Taille** A tax on land and each peasant who owned land had to pay a certain part of the land's value. Usually this tax was excessive.
- **Capitation** A tax on income, or a poll tax, levied on city dwellers.
- **Tithe** An amount of money levied by the church, usually 10%.
- **Corvée** The enforced and unpaid labor on the king's roads and other "public works." Later, a tax replaced the work or labor.

In summary, the tax system France accepted eventually caused anger, frustration, and it sparked generations of Frenchmen and women who would be ready to follow a new path, even if that path would be strewn with the blood of patriots and kings. In Louis' case, he could have avoided his fate by being a reformer, which he chose characteristically not to be. Someone had to pay the price of the ill feelings. It was King Louis XVI.
The king is not guilty of all these "crimes" he is accused of, and the convention was wrong, even barbaric in the way it reached the decisions it did.

The king is an unfair symbol of all that ails France. No truly civilized nation would dare murder its monarch for his ancestors' greed and neglect.

This trial was unfair. The king was basically denied his rights that any other Frenchman has. He was, in fact, an alien and an enemy... in his own country, according to the deputies.

The king was punished when in fact he started the "revolution" by calling for the advice of the Estates-General in 1789. Was he not hailed by the people as the restorer of French liberty?

Once Louis abdicated his throne and royal power, he accepted the Constitution of 1791. For his acceptance and willingness to cooperate, he is found guilty and beheaded!

Louis was an example of strength, honesty, economy, and liberty throughout his reign. He is not guilty of bloodshed and treason! What this convention has done to a fine monarch is a blot on French history.

In one fell swoop, the convention has destroyed tradition, upset our society, and released radicalism onto the continent of Europe. I wonder... What do other Europeans think of France now?

Louis was executed by dangerous men because he symbolized the old regime of which he was not a part.

The king was merely a sideshow during his trial. The rivalry between the Gironde and the Montagnards ("Mountains") was the real battle and focus.

Louis's guilt or innocence became the issue only as the two parties vied for power to influence the course of revolution. The Girondins represented moderation; the Mountain represented radicalism, chaos, destruction.

Evidence was either fabricated or circumstantial. The Mountain wanted the king to die before the trial even began.

The radical Mountain, Robespierre, Marat, and Danton, have now taken control of the revolution. With the Girondins having no say,
CHARACTER: PLAIN SPEAKER

POSITION: I, like most of the people in France, am not sure of my position on what should be done with King Louis XVI. Both the Jacobins and the Girondins make good points, but we have not yet made up our minds. This trial will convince us one way or the other. The following points need to be addressed by each side.

SPECIFIC POINTS:

1. The king has oppressed the people and worked against the Revolution as the Jacobins say he has, but does he deserve to die?

2. Will this trial hurt France more than it will help it? Won’t putting our own king on trial make us look bad to the rest of the world?

3. Is King Louis being treated fairly, as any other French citizen would be treated if charged with a crime?

4. What specifically has King Louis done to deserve being put on trial? Is there proof of his guilt?

5. What punishment (banishment, imprisonment, or death) does King Louis deserve and why?

6. Has the Revolution already gone far enough? King Louis has been removed from power and we now have a democratic French government. And yet the king has conspired against that government behind the scenes with other monarchs in an attempt to win back his power. Has the Revolution not yet gone far enough? Is the execution of our king a necessary step toward a lasting democracy?

7. We, the Plain, are like a large block of undecided voters. We must be convinced by either the Jacobins or the Girondins and our decision, once made, will determine King Louis’ fate because we make up most of the population of France and neither side will be able to carry out its will without our support.

PROCEDURE: 1. Assume the character of a member of the Plain Faction.
2. Prepare at least a one-page speech that in your own words supports your position. Include the specific points as described above in your speech.
3. Come up with a persona that makes you represent an undecided concerned French citizen. Plead with the Jacobins and Girondins to make their cases to you so that you can make up your mind about what should be done with King Louis.