Name: _____ Date: _____

MARIE ANTOINETTE



Read the biographical passage about Marie Antoinette and answer the questions.

Marie Antoinette, born in 1755 in Vienna, Austria, became the queen of France at a young age, marrying the future King Louis XVI. Her life at the French court was marked by opulence and luxury, which, combined with her Austrian heritage, made her unpopular among the French populace. Her spending habits and involvement in controversial court affairs only fueled public resentment, which was exacerbated by the economic crisis France faced in the late 18th century. Despite her efforts to adapt to French customs and politics, Marie Antoinette was often scapegoated for the kingdom's financial problems and the widespread hunger and discontent among the common people.

The phrase "Let them eat cake" is famously attributed to Marie Antoinette in response to learning that the French peasants had no bread to eat. However, there is no historical evidence to support that she ever uttered these words. This misattribution has become a symbol of the perceived insensitivity of the French monarchy to the plight of the poor and the extravagant lifestyle led by the nobility while the country was on the brink of financial ruin.

Marie Antoinette's reign saw the beginnings of the French Revolution in 1789, a turning point that led to the decline of the monarchy. The royal family's attempts to flee France in 1791 failed, resulting in their arrest and confinement. In 1793, following the execution of her husband, Marie Antoinette was tried by the revolutionary tribunal, convicted of high treason, and guillotined. Her life and death symbolize the excesses of the monarchy that led to its downfall and the rise of the Republic.

The story of "Let them eat cake" contributes to the complex legacy of Marie Antoinette, painting her as a villain in the narrative of the French Revolution. Her life story serves as a cautionary tale about the dangers of miscommunication and the power of propaganda in shaping public opinion against individuals or institutions.

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1 Discuss the impact of Marie Antoinette's lifestyle on the public perception of the monarchy during a period of economic crisis.

2 How did the French Revolution change the course of Marie Antoinette's life and the monarchy in France?

3 Reflect on the historical interpretation of Marie Antoinette: How has her image changed over time, and why do you think she continues to fascinate people today?

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