The French Revolution

Pre-Revolution History
- France was an absolute monarchy - Louis XIV (1643 – 1715)
- On the eve of revolution all sections of French society had reason to be unhappy:
  - The nobles wanted power that was taken from them by the monarchy
  - The bourgeoisie resented the privileges of the nobles
  - The Bourgeoisie and the Peasants criticized the tax system

Causes of the French Revolution

The Background or Long Standing Causes
- Negative Features of the Ancien Regime (old order -> absolute monarchy)
  - The population was divided into three states, two privileged
    1) The Third Estate was made up of the bourgeoisie, wage earners and the peasantry
       - the majority of the population - the commoners.
    2) The Second Estate was for the nobility – 400,000, most of minor rank.
    3) The First Estate comprised the clergy. The Upper Clergy were very wealthy and powerful and therefore they related to the First Estate. The Lower Clergy related more to the Lower Estates. The First Estate numbered around 100,000.
- Financial Difficulties grew under Louis XIV and Louis XV - Due to over ambitious wars and extravagant spending on courts
- The peasants had many grievances - burdened with huge amounts of taxation that were nearly impossible for them to pay.
- Growth of Trade and Industry and of town life in general
  - Business expansion saw prices steadily rising. This did not help the privileged classes whose incomes were fixed. The Bourgeoisie largely profited from this rise and they became wealthier and more powerful.
- Age of Enlightenment: Revolutionary thinkers presented an idea of a liberal society that flourished with free commerce. This appealed especially to the businessman in the ranks of the Bourgeoisie. The thinkers also challenged the absolute right to rule and presented ideas of equal rights and the abolition of the class system.

The Intermediate Causes
- the Disorder in the Finances
- American Revolutionary Ideas
- The Character of King Louis XVI

The Immediate Causes
- 1788 a trying year for all
- Under pressure Louis agrees to summon the Estates General
- Bitter conflict over the form it should take (elections and voting)
- Revolutionary boldness; Third Estate called itself the National Assembly

Therefore Absolutism ended and Constitutional Monarchy began
- The Declaration of the Rights of Men
- The Development of Local Government and Departments
- Freedom of the Press
- Military Forces
- The Constitution 1791