**Storming of the Bastille**

Introduction:

By the summer of 1789, discontent among the lower classes of Paris had started to rise to a fever pitch. Food had been in short supply the entire year, sparking hundreds of small riots in the city. Meanwhile, debate in the Estates General (a meeting of the Three Estates) had also heated up, as delegates fiercely debated political reforms. King Louis XVI feared that this social and political turmoil might break out into full-blown conflict and consequently in July he ordered French troops into the city--ostensibly to maintain order, but in reality to launch a preemptive strike and prevent any uprising from taking place. Ironically, this action provided the spark that led a determined band of citizens to rise up and search for weapons. On July 14th, they headed for the Bastille. In addition to serving as the royal armory, it was also an infamous prison. Their storming and capture of the Bastille is widely considered to be the beginning of the French Revolution. While the storming of the Bastille didn't really accomplish a great deal militarily, it was of great symbolic importance to the common people of France. This lesson will allow you to learn more about events which took place at the Bastille.

On July 14, 1789, Parisian crowds m search of weapons attacked and captured the royal armory known as the Bastille. It had also been a state prison, and its fall marked the triumph of "liberty" over despotism. This intervention of the Parisian populace saved the Third Estate from Louis XVI's attempted counterrevolution.

First, the people tried to enter this fortress by the Rue St.-Antoine, this fortress, which no one has ever penetrated against the wishes of this frightful despotism and where the monster still resided. The treacherous governor had put out a flag of peace. So a confident advance was made; a detachment of French Guards, with perhaps five to six thousand armed bourgeois, penetrated the Bastille's outer courtyards, but as soon as some six hundred persons had passed over the first drawbridge, the bridge was raised and artillery fire mowed down several French Guards and some soldiers; the cannon fired on the town, and the people took fright; a large number of individuals were killed or wounded; but then they rallied and took shelter from the fire; ... meanwhile, they tried to locate some cannon; they attacked from the water's edge through the gardens of the arsenal, and from there made an orderly siege; they advanced from various directions, beneath a ceaseless round of fire. It was a terrible scene.... The fighting grew steadily more intense; the citizens had become hardened to the fire, from all directions they clambered onto the roofs or broke into the rooms; as soon as an enemy appeared among the turrets on the tower, he was fixed in the sights of a hundred guns and mown down in an instant; meanwhile cannon fire was hurriedly directed against the second drawbridge, which it pierced, breaking the chains; in vain did the cannon on the tower reply, for most people were sheltered from it; the fury was at its height; people bravely faced death and every danger; women, in their eagerness, helped us to the utmost; even the children, after the discharge of fire from the fortress, ran here and there picking up the bullets and shot; [and so the Bastille fell and the governor, De Launey, was captured].... Serene and blessed liberty, for the first time, has at last been introduced into this abode of horrors, this frightful refuge of monstrous despotism and its crimes.

Meanwhile, they get ready to march; they leave amidst an enormous crowd; the applause, the outbursts of joy, the insults, the oaths hurled at the treacherous prisoners of war; everything is confused; cries of vengeance and of pleasure issue from every heart; the conquerors, glorious and covered in honor, carry their arms and the spoils of the conquered, the flags of victory, the militia mingling with the soldiers of the fatherland, the victory laurels offered them from every side, all this created a frightening and splendid spectacle. On arriving at the square, the people, anxious to avenge themselves, allowed neither De Launey nor the other officers to reach the place of trial; they seized them from the hands of their conquerors, and trampled them underfoot one after the other. De Launey was struck by a thousand blows, his head was cut off and hoisted on the end of a pike with blood streaming down all sides.... This glorious day must amaze our enemies, and finally usher in for us the triumph of justice and liberty. In the evening, there were celebrations.

1. Why was this event important to the common people of France?
2. Why do you think the governor and some of his officers were killed by the citizens instead of being put on trial?
3. What is the meaning of the following sentence, found near the end of the article: "This glorious day must amaze our enemies, and finally usher in for us the triumph of justice and liberty."
4. Do you consider the actions of the citizens who stormed the Bastille as heroic, or do you think they simply gave in to a mob mentality? Explain.