



Marie Antoinette was born in Austria, a daughter of Francis I, Holy Roman Emperor, and Austrian Empress Maria Theresa. She was born on the same day as the famous earthquake of Lisbon, November 2, 1755.

As with most royal daughters, Marie Antoinette was promised in marriage in order to build a diplomatic alliance between her birth family and the family of her husband. Marie Antoinette married the French dauphin, Louis, grandson of Louis XV of France, in 1770. He ascended the throne in 1774 as Louis XVI.

Marie Antoinette was welcomed in France at first. Her frivolity contrasted with the withdrawn personality of her husband. After her mother died in 1780, she became more extravagant and this led to growing resentment. The French were suspicious of her ties to Austria and her influence on the King in attempting to foster policies friendly to Austria.

Marie Antoinette, formerly welcomed, now was vilified for her spending habits and opposition to reforms. The 1785-86 Affair of the Diamond Necklace, a scandal in which she was accused of having an affair with a cardinal in order to obtain a costly diamond necklace, further discredited her and reflected on the monarchy.

After an initial slow start at the expected role of child bearer -- her husband apparently had to be coached in his role in this -- Marie Antoinette gave birth to her first child, a daughter, in 1778, and sons in 1781 and 1785. By most accounts she was a devoted mother.

Marie Antoinette and the French Revolution:

After the Bastille was stormed on July 14, 1789, the queen urged the king to resist the Assembly's reforms, making her even more unpopular, and leading to the attribution to her of the remark, "Qu'ils mangent de la brioche!" -- "Let them eat cake!" In October, 1789, the royal couple were forced to move to Paris.

Reportedly planned by Marie Antoinette, the escape of the royal couple from Paris was stopped at Varennes on October 21, 1791. Imprisoned with the king, Marie Antoinette continued to plot. She hoped for foreign intervention to end the revolution and free the royal family. She urged her brother, the Holy Roman Emperor Leopold II, to intervene, and supported a declaration of war against Austria in April, 1792, which she hoped would result in the defeat of France.

Her unpopularity helped lead to the overthrow of the monarchy when Parisiennes stormed the Tuileries palace on Aug. 10, 1792, followed by the establishment of the First French Republic in September. The family was imprisoned in the Temple on August 13, 1792, and moved to the Conciergie on August 1, 1793. There were several attempts to escape, but all failed.

Louis XVI was executed in January 1793, and Marie Antoinette was executed by the guillotine on October 16 of that year. She was charged with aiding the enemy and inciting civil war.

Multiple Choice (Select the best or most correct answer.)

- _____ 1. How old was Marie Antoinette when she married?
- a) 15
 - b) 13
 - c) 18
 - d) 25
- _____ 2. How many children did Marie Antoinette have?
- a) 5
 - b) 3
 - c) 2
 - d) none
- _____ 3. The French disliked Marie Antoinette because ...?
- a) she was a foreigner
 - b) she was very extravagant
 - c) she was opposed to reforms
 - d) all of the above
- _____ 4. Marie Antoinette and her husband ...?
- a) escaped from France
 - b) were locked up in the Bastille
 - c) were a very happy couple
 - d) lived in Varenne
- _____ 5. Marie Antoinette is most famous for saying...?
- a) show me the money
 - b) let them starve
 - c) I really like diamonds
 - d) let them eat cake
- _____ 6. Marie Antoinette was executed by...?
- a) guillotine
 - b) hanging
 - c) firing squad
 - d) none of the above