THE THREE ESTATES – Teacher notes

Introduction

▪ One of the causes of the French Revolution was social tensions.
▪ Society had been very strictly ordered in the Middle Ages in a “Feudal System”.
▪ But by 1789 this was coming under great strain as some social groups declined in influence, and others rose in importance.

Task

▪ Put students into pairs. They should then sit back to back.
▪ One student in each pair should be given the diagram (following page).
▪ He should describe the first diagram to their partner, who then has to draw it. The partner can ask questions.
▪ Repeat the process for the second diagram.
▪ He then shows his partner the master copy and they consider how well they communicated.

▪ They then discuss what the message of the two diagrams is, then there is a class discussion, then they write up a paragraph which expresses the information as words.

MIDDLE AGES

1789

The Estates (continued)

▪ The First and Second Estate paid no taxes. All of the taxes were paid by the peasantry!

The First Estate (The Church): They prayed for the King, so they were let off taxes. Their other responsibilities included the registration of births, marriages and deaths; they collected the tithe tax (10% of every peasants' produce); they censored books; operated schools and hospitals; and distributed charity to the poor.

The Second Estate (The Nobility): They fought for the King, so they were let off taxes. They also collected rent from the peasant population as well as customary dues [taxes] from the peasantry. There were dues on salt, cloth, bread and wine as well as on mills, granaries, presses and ovens.

Task: What is the message of this cartoon? (Tip: use the points listed above to help you answer!)

The First and Second Estates

"The young Duke of Sonfranc has just got out of bed. He is already rich and is heir to a fortune that would make a hundred families wealthy. His servant is putting his stockings on him; his butler is bringing a cup of chocolate, and his secretary is writing tender little notes to the many young women the bored duke is courting" - By an eighteenth century writer

"No less than 60% of the nobility lived in conditions where they found it hard to make ends meet. At the very bottom there were those who were too poor to possess a sword, a dog or a horse" - Historian Simon Schama

▪ How do these two sources differ in their description of what life was like for the First and Second Estates?

▪ Is it possible that both of them are telling the truth? Explain your answer.

The Third Estate

The Peasantry
"They live on bread made of barley and oats…the bread can sometimes be lifted by the straw sticking out of it. They also eat poor fruits and a few vegetables. They eat meat less than three times a year. Three quarters of them are dressed in half-rotting tattered linen. This hardship has its usual effects. It makes people weak and unhealthy, especially the children. The men become listless [idle] knowing that they would get nothing for their efforts" - Arthur Young, a British observer

"[In the Bearn district of Southern France] I could hardly believe my eyes…a succession of well-built, comfortable farming cottages, each with a little garden. To every house belongs a farm…with grass borders mown and neatly kept. They are all in the hands of small owners…an air of neatness, warmth and comfort breathes over the whole" - Arthur Young, a British observer

▪ How do these last two sources differ in their description of what life was like for the First and Second Estates?

▪ Is it possible that both of them are telling the truth? Explain your answer.

The Middle Classes
"The Middle Classes were a many sided group, ranging from bankers, shipowners, manufacturers, merchants and tradesmen down to shopkeepers and workshop masters. They were the professionals and officials too…but they had no power over how the country was run" - Historian, C. Labrousse

Task
▪ Complete this table.

	Ways their lives were good	**Ways their lives were bad**
Nobility / Clergy		
Peasantry		
Middle Classes		

▪ Outline 3 ways in which you think that the situation of the country could be improved.

1.

2.

3.