**Marie Antoinette**



Born in Vienna, Austria in 1755, the Archduchess Maria

Antonia was the youngest daughter of the Emperor of the

Holy Roman Empire in Central Europe. By age 15, she was

married to the crown prince of France, who became King

Louis XVI only four years later. As a teenager, Marie

Antoinette assumed the title of Queen of France and

became one of the most controversial figures in history.

Like many arranged royal marriages, hers was neither

loving nor happy. She was chosen to be the king’s wife because of politics and had little desire to be the most famous woman in France. She comforted herself by taking part in fancy balls, betting on cards and horse racing, planning expensive parties, and putting on lavish plays and musical performances. She spent untold amounts of money on clothes, shoes, makeup, and jewelry with the blessing of her husband, so she

would outshine all the other ladies at Versailles. Her spending, however, made

her more and more unpopular with the French people, especially as economic

crises plagued the country. In short, she became a symbol for royal

overspending and lack of concern for the problems of the common people.

Some of her poor reputation was not deserved. The saying most commonly

associated with her is “Let them eat cake.” This was reportedly her response to a

courtier who told her that peasants were revolting outside the palace. Though

there has never been any proof that she said these words, the fact that people

were so willing to believe the story speaks volumes about her image. She was

accused of everything from trying to influence the King to benefit her native

country Austria, a longtime enemy to France, to plotting against the royal

jewelers to get a diamond necklace.

Nevertheless, the last years of her life were very difficult. During the French

Revolution, she was taken prisoner along with Louis XVI and her four children.

After her husband was executed, she was separated from her children and

treated cruelly by her guards. Despite her reputation for being shallow and

uncaring, accounts of the time portray her as courageous until the end when she

was sent to her death on October 16, 1793. On her way to the execution site, she

said “Courage! I have shown it for years; think you I shall lose it at the moment

when my sufferings are to end?” It is said that her last words were an apology to

the executioner when she accidently stepped on his foot.

1. List several adjectives you think would apply to Marie Antoinette.
2. Why do you think Marie Antoinette’s spending and lavish lifestyle angered the  
    French?