GUIDED READING The Reign of Louis XIV

A. Clarifying As you read about the French monarchy, write notes to answer the questions.

### Wars between the Huguenots and Catholics create chaos in France.

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<td>1. How did Henry of Navarre end the crisis and restore order?</td>
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<td>2. How did Cardinal Richelieu strengthen the French monarchy?</td>
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<td>3. What effect did the religious wars have on French intellectuals?</td>
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### Louis XIV became the most powerful monarch of his time.

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<td>4. What steps did Jean Baptiste Colbert take to turn France into an economic power?</td>
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<td>5. In what ways did Louis XIV support the arts?</td>
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<td>6. Why did Louis fail in his attempts to expand the French Empire?</td>
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<td>7. What was the legacy of Louis XIV?</td>
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B. Summarizing On the back of this paper, define the terms skepticism and intendant.
I commanded the four secretaries of state not to sign anything at all any longer without discussing it with me, the superintendent likewise, and for nothing to be transacted at the finances without being registered in a little book that was to remain with me, where I could always see at a glance, briefly summarized, the current balance and the expenditures made or pending.

The Chancellor received a similar order, that is, not to seal anything without my command, except for letters of justice. . . .

I announced that all requests for graces of any type had to be made directly to me, and I granted to all my subjects without distinction the privilege of appealing to me at any time, in person or by petitions. The petitions were initially very numerous, which did not discourage me, however. The disorder into which my affairs had fallen produced many of them, the idle or unjustified hopes which were raised by this novelty hardly stimulated a lesser number. . . . But even in these apparently useless things I discovered much that was useful. I learned thereby many details about the condition of my people. They saw that I was concerned about them, and nothing did so much to win me their hearts. . . .

As to the persons who were to support me in my work, I resolved above all not to have a prime minister, and if you and all your successors take my advice, my son, the name will forever be abolished in France, there being nothing more shameful than to see on the one hand all the functions and on the other the mere title of king.

For this purpose, it was absolutely necessary to divide my confidence and the execution of my orders without entirely entrusting it to anyone, assigning these various persons to various functions in keeping with their various talents, which is perhaps the first and foremost talent of princes.

In order to concentrate the entire authority of a master more fully in myself—even though there are all sorts of details into which our occupations and our very dignity do not usually permit us to go, I resolved to enter into these with each of the ministers whom I would choose, and when he would least expect it, so that he would realize that I might do the same on other subjects and at any time. . . .

It is not so easy for me to tell you, my son, how to go about the choice of the various ministers. Fortune always plays, in spite of us, at least as much of a part in it as wisdom; and in the part that wisdom plays, intelligence can do far more than counsel. Neither of us, my son, is going to seek for these sorts of positions those whom distance and obscurity remove from our view, whatever qualifications they may have. It is necessary to decide from a small number which chance presents to us, that is, those already in office or whom birth and inclination have attached to our personal service.

And as for this art of knowing men, which will be so important to you not merely on this but also on every other occasion of your life, I shall tell you, my son, that it can be learned but that it can not be taught.


Activity Options

1. **Recognizing Point of View**  With a partner, role-play a conversation between Louis XIV and his son in which the king advises how to rule absolutely.

2. **Writing for a Specific Purpose**  List the steps that Louis XIV took to consolidate his power as king of France after the death of Cardinal Mazarin. Then share your list with classmates and compare Louis XIV’s approach to governing with that of his father, Louis XIII.
LITERATURE SELECTION from *The Cat and the King* by Louis Auchincloss

The Cat and the King is a work of historical fiction about Louis XIV. The novel’s narrator—Louis de Rouvroy, the second duc de Saint-Simon—is based on a real-life French noble who observed life at the court of Louis XIV and recorded in his memoirs all that he saw and felt about the reign of the Sun King. The following excerpt, which is drawn from an incident that actually happened, takes place shortly after Saint-Simon has married Gabrielle. What impressions of Louis XIV and life at Versailles does this passage convey?

Gabrielle’s first substantial contribution to my career at court was in the affair of the alms bag. It was the custom after mass for the young duchesse de Bourgogne, the king’s grand-daughter-in-law, who, as we had lost both queen and dauphine, was the first lady of France, to ask a duchess to pass a velvet purse for contributions to the church. The “Lorrainers,” members of the House of Guise, who should have ranked with us as peers, were always claiming a higher position as “foreign princes,” based on silly titles bestowed on them by the Holy Roman Emperor because of scraps of land held along the border. I now learned the latest outrage: that their ladies were claiming exemption from the almsbag duty. There was nothing for me to do but organize the dukes to make a similar claim.

“But who will pass the alms bag?” Gabrielle asked me.

“How should I know? Perhaps some simple gentlewoman.”

“But if the duchess asks me?”

“If she asks you, of course, you must. But she can’t ask you if you’re not there. What I’m saying is that the duchesses should abstain from mass.”

“Won’t it anger the king?”

“I can’t help that, my dear. It’s the Lorrainers he should be mad at. They’ve been an infernal nuisance ever since the days of the League. Why a monarch who’s so sensitive to treason should put up with them, I can’t conceive.”

Gabrielle, I had to admit, was correct about the king’s reaction. After the first day, when half the duchesses at court absented themselves from mass, the duc de Beaufouiller sent for me, and Gabrielle and I went at once to his apartment in the north wing. The duke, who, as I have indicated, was the only peer in the king’s council, was an old friend of my parents and had been my guide and mentor ever since I first came to court. I admired him without reserve and had even once offered to marry any one of his eight daughters. Fortunately for me and Gabrielle, the oldest had wished to take holy orders, the second had been a cripple and the rest too young.

“I think you ought to know,” Beaufouiller told me, “that the king spoke of you this morning at the end of the council. He said that ever since you had resigned your commission, you have been obsessed with petty questions of rank and precedence.”

“Oh, he remembered about my commission?”

I had left the army, two years before, to devote myself to the court.

“The king remembers everything.”

“Then I wish he would remember the countless disloyalties of the Lorrainers!”

“If he doesn’t appear to, you can be sure he has a reason. In any case, he wishes me to convey to you his desire that the duchesse de Saint-Simon should pass the alms bag on Monday.”

I hesitated. “Is that an order, sir?”

“If he doesn’t appear to, you can be sure he has a reason. In any case, he wishes me to convey to you his desire that the duchesse de Saint-Simon should pass the alms bag on Monday.”

“I hesitated. “Is that an order, sir?”

“Very well. But surely I need not be present. He will not require me to assist at my own humiliation?”

“That is up to you.”

“Ah, but, my dear, may I make a suggestion?”

I turned to Gabrielle in mild surprise. It was not like her to intervene in my conversation with an older person. “Certainly.”

“Request an audience with the king! Tell him you raised the issue of the alms bag only because you thought it was one in which he was not concerned. But now that you know he wants me to carry the bag, you are not only proud but honored!”

I looked into her anxious eyes with even greater surprise. Then I turned to the old duke.

“Do it, Saint-Simon!” he exclaimed with a laugh. “And be thankful for a smart little wife.”

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“And then ask the king for an apartment in the palace!” Gabrielle hurriedly added.

“Speak to him at his dinner,” Beauvillier advised me. “Request an audience for tomorrow. I’ll put in a word for you at the coucher [bed time].” He glanced at his watch. “It’s almost one now. Hurry up if you want a spot near his table!”

The king liked to sup with members of his family, but he was inclined to dine alone, that is, alone at table. There was always a group of courtiers standing by the small table at which he was served, silently regarding him. He ate, as he did everything else, with remarkable solemnity, dignity and grace. He would rise a chicken bone to his lips, take an incisive, effective bite and then chew slowly, his dark, glazed eyes focused in an opaque stare. When he turned his head to survey the room or the watching crowd, this stare might be softened to encompass not an acknowledgment, certainly not a greeting, but simply a recognition. Somehow you always knew that he knew you. And he not only knew who was present; he knew who was not.

There was something hypnotic about the effect of one man exercising a natural function while his audience remained motionless. It was like watching a priest take communion. The huge, high-piled black perruque [wig] moved rhythmically with the royal mastications; the high, arched brows twitched; the great aquiline nose snorted after the thick lips had sipped wine. His most ordinary acts were majestical. . . .

It was permissible for those standing closest to the table to address the king when he was not actually swallowing or masticating. Waiting until his gaze took me in, I stepped forward and bowed.

“May I be permitted a word, sire, on the question of the alms bag?”

The dark eyes emitted a faint glitter. “There is no question, sir. The matter has been regulated.”

“But, sire, I humbly suggest there has been a misapprehension of my attitude. I wish only to make explicit my utter loyalty and devotion.”

“Very well, then. When you wish.”

He turned to his goblet, and I stepped quickly back. So far, so good. After dinner Beauvillier told me exactly what to do next. I should stand in the front row of the courtiers waiting outside the council chamber the following morning and step immediately forward when the king came out. He would then appoint a time for an audience, perhaps immediately. It was all simple enough, but nonetheless I hardly closed my eyes that night, and Gabrielle made me drink two glasses of wine with breakfast.

At noon, outside the council chamber, I did as I had been told. The king paused to give me one of his glacial stares, a mixture of surprise and faint irritation. Then he must have recollected what Beauvillier had told him at the coucher, for, beckoning me to follow him, he stepped into the embrasure [opening in a thick wall] of a window, where he folded his arms and waited for me to speak.

I began with what I had intended to be the very briefest summary of the alms-bag controversy, but he interrupted me testily.

“I have no time, sir, for such nit-picking. You spend your life fussing over imagined slights. You had far better have stayed in the army, where you were of some use.”

I saw at once that the situation was desperate. I even dared now to raise my voice.

“I had no intention, sire, of bringing up the issue of ducal rights. I only wish to tell you that, as a duke, my sole aim is to be of service to you. Had the duchesse de Saint-Simon and I known in the beginning that it was your desire that she should pass the alms bag, she would have passed it joyfully, and with my total blessing, among the humblest in the land, in the most fetid of hospitals, in the darkest of dungeons!”

The king’s countenance at last relaxed. “Now that’s talking,” he said in a milder tone.

I went on, carried away by my excitement, to declaim on my loyalty and that of my ancestors; to tell him that we were second to none in our zeal for the royal service. The king let me continue in this way for what must have been several minutes before interrupting me at last by raising his hand.
And then, to my astonishment, it was to answer me in a tone that was almost benign!

At first, I hardly took in what he was saying. His effect on me was hypnotic. I kept my gaze so firmly fixed upon his lips, not presuming to look him in the eye, that soon I began to feel a bit dizzy. His opening and closing orifice conjured up in my fantasy the mouth of a cave in the middle of a desert of infinite range and emptiness. It was as if no life could be contained in the parching dryness; that only in the darkness behind that agitated adit [entrance to a mine] could there exist sustenance and support. But how could one make the passage past those teeth with any hope of safety? I was hearing the king, a voice kept saying to me! I was actually hearing the king!

And then the purport of his words began again to come through to me. His tone was almost avuncular [like an uncle].

“I had not thought, sir, that you had a proper excuse for quitting the army. However, if you truly wish to be of service here at court, there will always be occasion. But let me give a piece of advice. You must watch that tongue of yours! It is too inclined to be free. If you take care of that, I shall take care of you. I do not forget that my father loved yours.”

This reference to my beloved progenitor completely undid me. The tears, I am not ashamed to admit, started to my eyes, and I proceeded to pour forth my gratitude. I do not recall everything I said, but I know that I must have expressed with passion my desire to serve him in all matters. I ended by begging to be considered for any rooms in the château that might be available so that I should have more ample opportunity to pay my court. The reader, in another era, may smile, but he will not be able to imagine the effect of Louis XIV on his subjects when he chose to be gracious.

He spoke again. “I shall keep your request in mind.” That measured tone always convinced the petitioner that his plea had been securely filed. “One never knows when a vacancy may occur.”

And then, with that brief though definite, courteous though irrevocable nod, he moved on to the great gallery. I could feel in the very air of the chamber around me the soaring of my reputation.

Gabrielle met me in the antechamber with the round window known as the Oeil de Boeuf and took in at a glance the success of my audience. When she heard about the apartment, she clapped her hands.

“That means we’re sure to get one!”

Indeed, she was right, for we were granted an apartment of three tiny rooms the very next day. They were hardly comfortable, yet they were more coveted than the greatest mansion. For only by living in Versailles could one fully appreciate the delights of the court. The palace at night had its peculiar pleasures and opportunities. The public was evicted, and the royal family retired behind closed doors, guarded by sleepy Swiss sentries. Something almost like informality prevailed.

It was a time for small, intimate suppers or conversations, for passionate post mortems of the day’s events: who was in, who out, who had said what to Madame de Maintenon [Louis XIV’s wife], who had been alone with the king. It was a time to call on the ministers and perhaps catch them, relaxed, in indiscretions. Oh, yes, an apartment was a great boon, and I was properly grateful to my wife.

“Now you’ve got everything you need!” she exclaimed proudly when we at last surveyed our redecorated reception chamber. I had even hung my father’s portrait of the beloved Louis XIII over the little marble mantel.

“Need for what?”

“For whatever you want.”

“And what do I want?”

“Ah, my dear, you must provide the answer to that!”

Discussion Questions

Clarifying

1. Who was involved in the so-called affair of the alms bag?

2. What was the outcome of Saint-Simon’s audience with Louis XIV?

3. Making Inferences Based on your reading of this excerpt, how would you characterize the king’s relationship with nobles such as Saint-Simon?
RETEACHING ACTIVITY  The Reign of Louis XIV

Reading Comprehension  Find the name or term in the second column that best matches the description in the first column. Then write the letter of your answer in the blank.

___ 1. First king of the Bourbon dynasty in France
A. Louis XIV

___ 2. Declaration of religious toleration that allowed Huguenots to live in peace in France
B. skepticism

___ 3. Minister under Louis XIII who got France involved in the Thirty Years’ War
C. Molière

___ 4. Belief that nothing can be known for certain that caused some French thinkers to question the Church
D. asiento

___ 5. Most powerful ruler in French history who weakened the power of the nobility
E. Edict of Nantes

___ 6. Government agents who collected taxes and administered justice under Louis XIV
F. France

___ 7. Minister of finance under Louis XIV who strengthened French commerce
G. Jean Baptiste Colbert

___ 8. Splendid palace in which Louis XIV reigned
H. Britain

___ 9. Writer of French comedies, one of which mocked religious hypocrisy
I. Versailles

___ 10. Struggle that ensued when England, Austria, the Dutch republic, Portugal, and others joined together to prevent the union of the French and Spanish thrones
J. Cardinal Richelieu

___ 11. Agreement giving Britain permission to send enslaved Africans to Spain’s American colonies
K. War of the Spanish Succession

___ 12. Country considered the military leader of France in the early 1700s
L. intendants

M. Henry of Navarre

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