



0. THE YOUNG ANTOINETTE - Story Preface

1. A ROYAL CHILDHOOD

2. THE YOUNG ANTOINETTE

3. WEDDING at the PALACE of VERSAILLES

4. DEATH of LOUIS XV

5. A GROWING RESENTMENT

6. CHILDREN of MARIE ANTOINETTE

7. THE DIAMOND NECKLACE AFFAIR

8. THE FRENCH REVOLUTION

9. EXECUTION of LOUIS XVI

10. THE GUILLOTINE

11. TRIAL of MARIE ANTOINETTE

12. MARIE ANTOINETTE and the GUILLOTINE

13. Louis XVII - CHILD PRISONER

14. DNA EVIDENCE and LOUIS XVII

Joseph Ducreux (1735–1802) painted this portrait of Archduchess Maria Antonia of Austria when she was 13 years old. The pastel-on-parchment was sent to the Dauphin of France (who would become her husband and future Louis XVI) so that he could “meet” his future wife and queen. At the time, even girls powdered their hair gray. Today this portrait is part of the Collection at the Palace of Versailles.

When she was young, the future Queen Consort of France did not like to study. As noted by Antonia Fraser, in *Marie Antoinette, The Journey*:

The trouble was that this affable little creature had managed, it seemed, to avoid more or less the unpleasant experience of education, other than in the arts where her skill in dancing and her taste for music added to her general aura of grace. (Fraser, page 31.)

Writing slowly, and reading as infrequently as possible, the young archduchess had trouble concentrating, leading to future difficulties in France:

The real betrayal in Marie Antoinette’s education was that she was never encouraged to concentrate. This ability, comparatively easy to inculcate in childhood, was generally held to be lacking in Marie Antoinette the adult, even by her admirers; her conversation tended to be disjointed “like a grasshopper,” wrote a member of her intimate circle. Madame Campan, the First Lady of the Bedchamber, who knew her so well, was eager to point out that the problem was not actually lack of intelligence. What Marie Antoinette knew, she knew - or rather what she had been properly taught. (Fraser, page 33.)

Although her hair was often powdered gray - the custom of the time - it was actually light ash when she was young. Pictures from her youth survive:

- The youngest daughter of the empress, as an infant.
- Madame Antoine, growing up in the imperial household.
- Drawn by her sister on a Christmas morning, she liked to play with dolls.

The Habsburgs, who occupied various thrones of Europe for centuries, had a genetically transmitted condition visibly affecting the lower lip of many family members. Marie Antoinette was one of them.

Charles II of Spain (1661-1700) likely had the worst form of “dropped lip,” but it is also visible in the portraits of Maximilian I (1459-1519), Charles V (1500-1558), and Philip IV of Spain (1606-1665), among others.

Artists who painted Marie Antoinette’s portraits often seemed to ignore - or minimize - the condition (largely by

avoiding her profile). Sculptors created a more accurate likeness, as did Madame Tussaud in her death mask of the queen.

By the time Antoinette was old enough for her mother to arrange a marriage with the future Louis XVI, Antoinette's father had been dead for several years. (He had died suddenly - on the 18th of August, in 1765 - while returning home from the opera in Innsbruck.)

Perhaps he might have cautioned against the match, but who could have predicted that a member of the Habsburg imperial family would lose her head in France?

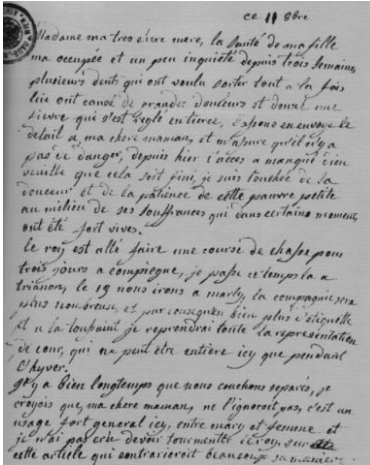
See [Alignments to State and Common Core standards for this story online at:](#)

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/AcademicAlignment/THE-YOUNG-ANTOINETTE-Marie-Antoinette>

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Media Stream



Marie Antoinette - Letter

Image of Marie Antoinette letter online, courtesy LadyReading.net

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Marie Antoinette in 1773 - Hair Powdered Grey

Image online, courtesy Wikimedia Commons.

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Marie Antoinette - An Infant

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Madame Antoine

Image online, courtesy Lady Ship.Blogspot.

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Madame Antoine - Playing with Dolls

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Marie Antoinette - Portrait

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Charles II of Spain - With A Dropped Lip

Image, described above, online courtesy Web Gallery of Art.

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Maximilian I

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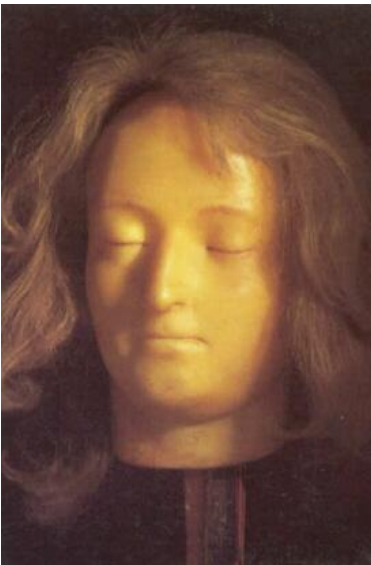


Charles V

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Marie Antoinette - Death Mask

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Marie Antoinette - Sculpture

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Philip IV

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