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Louise Élisabeth Vigée Le Brun (also known as Madame LeBrun) was the most-famous female painter of the 18th century. So impressed was Marie Antoinette with Vigée Le Brun's work that she had the artist create more than thirty portraits of the Queen and her family. This image, now maintained at the Palace of Versailles, is one of those paintings.

Marie Antoinette and Louis XVI had four children. They could not have been born at a more problematic time for the French royal family.

Marie-Thérèse-Charlotte was the only child to reach adulthood. Eleven years old when the revolution erupted, in 1789, she was particularly close to her father.

Louis-Joseph, the first son, was spared the pains of revolution. He died of tuberculosis, at age seven, on the 4th of June, 1789. By all accounts a sweet child, the prince's death added immeasurable grief to the lives of his parents the month before the revolution began.

After the death of his older brother, Louis-Charles (born in 1785 and sometimes referred to as Louis XVII), became dauphin. Subjected to the most cruel treatment by revolutionaries (see chapter 14), the young prince was likely ten years old at his death.

Sophie-Beatrix was the family's youngest child. Born in July of 1786, she died the following year - age eleven months - also of tuberculosis.

Trying to instill compassion for others in her two older children, Marie Antoinette instructed Madame Campan to perform an errand on New Year's Eve, 1783:

Wishing to give her children yet another lesson of beneficence [during the long and severe winter of 1783-84], she desired me on New Year's eve to get from Paris, as in other years, all the fashionable playthings, and have them spread out in her closet. Then taking her children by the hand, she showed them all the dolls and mechanical toys which were ranged there, and told them that she had intended to give them some handsome New Year's gifts, but that the cold made the poor so wretched that all her money was spent in blankets and clothes to protect them from the rigour of the season, and in supplying them with bread; so that this year they would only have the pleasure of looking at the new playthings.

When she returned with her children into her sitting-room, she said there was still an unavoidable expense to be incurred; that assuredly many mothers would at that season think as she did, - that the toyman must lose by it; and therefore she gave him fifty Louis to repay him for the cost of his journey, and console him for having sold nothing.

Despite the queen's efforts to do the right thing, for her family and her country, she made many mistakes. After her children were born, frugality and maternal instincts replaced extravagance and party-going, but the public's feelings toward her had long since soured.

After the birth of her second son, for example, she made the traditional journey to Paris. The population insulted her with utter silence, contempt replacing jubilation. Bewildered by the hostility, she returned to Versailles, wondering aloud:

What have I done to them?

One event, which centered around the queen, pushed the country closer to revolution. Antoinette was actually free of all responsibility for the “necklace affair,” but it did not appear that way to the public.

See Alignments to State and Common Core standards for this story online at:

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/AcademicAlignment/CHILDREN-of-MARIE-ANTOINETTE-Marie-Antoinette>

See Learning Tasks for this story online at:

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/AcademicActivities/CHILDREN-of-MARIE-ANTOINETTE-Marie-Antoinette>

Media Stream



Marie-Theresa-Charlotte

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Madame Royale - Daughter of Louis XVI

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Louis-Joseph

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Louis-Joseph, First Son of Louis XVI

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Louis-Charles

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Louis-Charles - Young Prince

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Sophie-Beatrix

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Sophie-Beatrix - Youngest Child

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Madame Campan

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