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Queen Marie-Antoinette stands before the Revolutionary Tribunal during her “trial.” The illustration, from 1881, is included in Henri Gourdon de Genouillac's *Paris à travers les siècles* (“Paris Through the Centuries”), v. 4, Paris, F. Roy, 1881. The work was originally created by Hippolyte de la Charlerie, then engraved by Jacob Meyer-Heine for Blanc's *Histoire de la Revolution* (“History of the Revolution”) Her trial took place at the the Conciergerie on October 16, 1793.

Like her husband, Marie Antoinette believed that the revolutionary government would kill her. As she told Madame Campan:

... If the factions assassinate me ... it will be a fortunate event for me; they will deliver me from a most painful existence... I am his wife; I will not suffer him to incur the smallest risk without my sharing it.

After the Reign of Terror began, the queen was summoned for a trial. She was separated from her children and removed to the Conciergerie prison in Paris. Lodged in a room called the council chamber, “considered as the most unwholesome apartment in the Conciergerie on account of its dampness and the bad smells by which it was continually affected,” Marie Antoinette awaited her fate.

According to people who saw her:

In this melancholy abode Marie Antoinette had no other dress than an old black gown, stockings with holes, which she was forced to mend every day; and she was entirely destitute of shoes.

Unknown to the queen, the new government had decided to use her imprisoned son, the dauphin Louis-Charles, to give testimony against her. Holding the boy in the most horrible of circumstances, his keepers got him to say that his mother had behaved inappropriately with him:

Hebert [one of the dauphin's guards] conceived the infamous idea of wringing from this boy revelations to incriminate his unhappy mother. Whether this wretch imputed to the child false revelations, or abused his tender age and his condition to extort from him what admissions soever he pleased, he obtained a revolting deposition; and as the youth of the Prince did not admit of his being brought before the tribunal, Hebert appeared and detailed the infamous particulars which he had himself either dictated or invented....

On the 14th of October, 1793, the queen appeared before her judges. Rumors about her, from her earliest days in France as a young princess to the present day, were considered as facts:

It was necessary, however, to make some charges. Fouquier therefore collected the rumours current among the populace ever since the arrival of the Princess in France ... We here observe how, on the terrible day of long-deferred vengeance, when subjects at length break forth and strike such of their princes as have not deserved the blow, everything is distorted and converted into crime.

We see how the profusion and fondness for pleasure, so natural to a young princess, how her attachment to her native country, her influence over her husband, her regrets ... nay, even her bolder courage, appeared to their inflamed or malignant imaginations.

How did she react to the testimony about her son?

When the preposterous charges of inappropriate behavior with her son were leveled against her: The unhappy mother made no reply. Urged anew to explain herself, she said, with extraordinary emotion, "I thought that human nature would excuse me from answering such an imputation, but I appeal from it to the heart of every mother here present." This noble and simple reply affected all who heard it.

The verdict was never in doubt, nor was her sentence. Marie Antoinette would be executed, by guillotine, on the 16th of October.

At about 4:30 in the morning, on the day of her death, she wrote a final letter to her sister-in-law Elizabeth (who would soon be executed, too.) She was not allowed to see her two surviving children.

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

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Media Stream



Conciergerie Prison

Image online, courtesy museums-of-paris.com website.

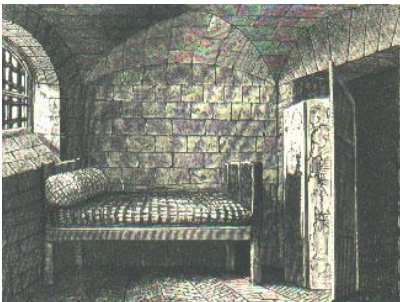
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The Conciergerie

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Marie Antoinette - Prison Cell

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Marie Antoinette - In Trial

Image online, courtesy the French-language website, histoire-des-femmes.com.

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Marie Antoinette - Before Her Judges

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Fouquier

Image online, courtesy the lepoint.fr website.

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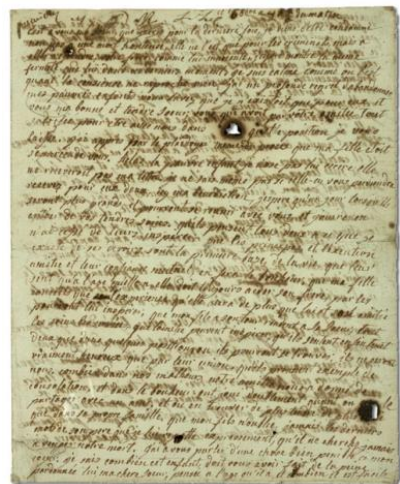


Marie Antoinette - To Be Executed

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Marie Antoinette - Her Final Letter

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