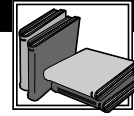


**Chapter 19 Biography Activity**

The French Revolution reached its peak of violence during the Reign of Terror (textbook pages 490–492), when no one felt safe from being arrested and sent to the guillotine to be beheaded. The man in charge of this bloody period was a dedicated revolutionary leader whose tactics finally were his own undoing. ♦ *As you read, think about the motives of those who lead radical political movements. Then, on a separate sheet of paper, answer the questions that follow.*

**Maximilien Robespierre (1758–1794)**

**A**lthough Robespierre led the bloody Reign of Terror, in the end he was also its victim. Many people admired him for strictly following his ideals of liberty and equality to make France a republic. Many later thought he was a monster.

Robespierre came from northern France and became a brilliant lawyer, who often defended the poor. He entered politics at the age of 30, when he was elected a deputy to the Estates General. He was not a great orator but was evidently a very persuasive speaker in small groups and soon became a leader of the Jacobin Club, which promoted the Revolution. Still, many people found his personality cold, vain, and distant. One said, “I have talked to Robespierre twice. He had something uncanny, never looked into my face, his eyes had a constant, unpleasant twinkle.”

In 1792 he became leader of the “Mountain party,” the Montagnards, the most radical group in the National Convention. He voted for the execution of the king and attacked more moderate policies like those of the Gironde. In 1793 he tried to overthrow the Girondists and, as riots broke out in Paris, the Reign of Terror began. As head of the Committee of

Public Safety, which was set up to keep the peace, he believed “one will” was needed to achieve the goals of equality. The Committee could accuse anyone it considered a “suspect” and send them to the guillotine. By 1794, with the power to get rid of anyone who opposed him, Robespierre was almost in control of the Revolution.



But things had gone too far for many. To stop the Terror—and to stop Robespierre—a group of his former allies who realized they were next to be eliminated conspired against him. One of them wrote, “He was but one step from becoming the absolute master of the revolution. . . and I had the honor of being on his deathlist.”

Violence broke out at a session of the Convention on 9th Thermidor (July 27, 1794). Robespierre angrily tried to regain control, calling those who opposed him scoundrels, but many members shouted, “Down with the tyrant!” The convention then ordered Robespierre’s arrest, crying “Long live the Republic!” As he resisted arrest, he was shot. His younger brother leaped out the window, trying to escape. Both brothers went to the guillotine the following day.

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**Questions to Think About**

1. What was the general impression, good and bad, of Robespierre’s personality?
2. What led to Robespierre’s death?
3. **Using Reasoned Judgment** Robespierre claimed that violence and dictatorship were necessary for the revolution to succeed. Was the violence of the Terror necessary?