MFL Sunderland Primary French Podcasts

intercultural understanding

Bastille Day

Welcome to the MFL Sunderland Primary French podcast. Intercultural Understanding – Bastille Day

In this lesson you'll find out how and why France celebrates Bastille Day every 14th of July.

The 14th July has been celebrated as the National Day of France since 1880. It commemorates 14th July 1789, a very important date in French history. In English we call it Bastille Day, while in France it is commonly known as "Le quatorze juillet".

Le quatorze juillet — *the 14th of July*

La Fête Nationale — *The French National Holiday*

The Storming of the Bastille

In 1789, France was almost bankrupt. King Louis XVI, his young Austrian wife Marie Antoinette and their family and court had squandered a huge amount of money on a luxurious lifestyle. France had also been involved in expensive wars overseas, including the American War of Independence. To fund his lifestyle and the army, Louis XVI increased taxes. Ordinary people ended up paying a large percentage of their income in taxes while members of the Church and the nobility paid no tax at all. To further complicate matters, bad weather had ruined the harvest and there was not enough food to go round. This gave rise to the phrase "Let them eat cake" which is claimed to have been said by Marie Antoinette when she was told that the people had no bread to eat, and which shows how little she understood life outside the palace of Versailles and the nature of the famine by which France was gripped.

In July the situation had reached a critical point. The French Parliament and the nobility wanted a share of the king's absolute power. The lower orders of the Church wanted more money. The middle classes – the bourgeoisie – wanted the right to own land and the right to vote. The lower classes were hostile towards everyone. On 11th July the king dismissed Jacques Necker, his finance minister, who was seen by many as the saviour of France. This led to many riots in Paris, and on 14th July 1789, hundreds of people stormed the Bastille to capture its weapons and gunpowder. The Bastille was a fortress-prison in Paris, and was a symbol of the absolute power of the monarchy, who could imprison people there without trial for as long as they liked. The capture of this symbolic building showed that power was held not by the king or by God, but by the people. This marked the start of the French Revolution, the end of the monarchy in France and the beginning of the French Republic.

Louis XVI and Marie Antoinette were imprisoned in the Conciergerie in Paris and were executed by guillotine in 1793. The Bastille was demolished, and many of its stones are now in the Pont de la Concorde over the River Seine in Paris. The Bastille's position is marked in Paris by the Place de la Bastille.

La prise de la Bastille — *the storming of the Bastille*

La Révolution Française — *The French Revolution*

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Celebrations	*On the 14th of July, shops and public buildings like museums close. There are solemn military parades on the Champs-Elysées in Paris, where the forces march past the President. Planes similar to the Red Arrows fly over the Arc de Triomphe, trailing blue, white and red smoke. On the night of the 14th of July, bonfires are lit and there are firework displays all over the country. The fireworks recreate the noise of the gunfire and the explosions of the cannons at the storming of the Bastille in 1789. There are street parties, parades and people dress up in the blue, white and red of the Tricolore, the French flag.* *It's a day to celebrate freedom. As the motto of France says, "Liberté, Egalité, Fraternité" – Liberty, Equality and Fraternity.* *Why not celebrate Bastille Day in school ?*

That's the end of this podcast. If you think you need a bit more practice, go back to the beginning and listen again.

Au revoir !

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