**The Reign of Terror Name:**

**Date: Block:**

**Directions:**

1. READ the introduction and the story.
2. ANNOTATE while you read the introduction AND the story (circle unknown words, underline important phrases, “talk back” by writing your thoughts)

Talk Back Below!

1. ANSWER the questions at the end of the reading.

The French Revolution was well on its way. Which path would it take? Could Louis XVI live through the changes it would bring? Could the revolutionists live with the British solution, to have both a Parliament and a king?

At first it seemed that Louis would be able to keep his crown. Louis believed that he could stay in power if he accepted, or pretended to accept, the great changes taking place. He said that he accepted the revolutionists’ Declaration of the Rights of Man, inspired by the United States Declaration of Independence. It declared that all men and women were considered to be equal. The social classes of the Three Estates were to be erased. The constitution in 1792 ruled that the king would stay on his throne. But the real power was to be in hands of a legislature – a body or group that would be making the laws.

Those were the great days in the lives of French people. The surprise was that so much had been done with so little bloodshed. The Revolution seemed a great success. Then in 1792, the scene changed. France was thrown into a war with two great powers – Austria and Prussia. King Louis’ power was weak and the new French government was in deep trouble. It was overthrown by the more radical (extreme) group called the Jacobins. Louis was found guilty of treason – plotting with the enemies of France – and beheaded.

The new Jacobin government was in a very dangerous situation. It was fighting a war against powerful enemies. At the same time, it was fighting its enemies within France. It felt surrounded. It trusted no one – including its own members. The Jacobins’ answer was to start the Reign of Terror. Over 500,000 French people were accused of being traitors. They were put into overcrowded jails. Thousands were executed at the guillotine. Others were shot to death or were drowned on boats that were sunk in the Loire River. What were their crimes? They were suspected of not being completely loyal to the revolutionary government of the Jacobins.

In this story, it is five years after the fall of the Bastille. We meet Robespierre, who planned the Reign of Terror. Now he himself has been sentenced to die by the same blade that had killed so many other “enemies” of France. He writes in his diary of his days of glory. He recalls the people he worked with and against whom he plotted.

Ask yourself why Robespierre he felt the Reign of Terror was necessary. Did the leaders of the Terror destroy themselves? Could there have been a French Revolution without terror?

**What a ridiculous way for me, Maximilien Robespierre, to end his life! A few days ago I was the leader of the revolutionary government. I was the head of the Committee of Public Safety. Now the “head” will lose his head! And for what? My enemies never understood what I was trying to do. They insisted that I wanted nothing but power. They even had the nerve to say that I wanted to become a dictator. What nonsense! They forget that in the National Assembly, I was the champion of democracy. I was the one who worked to win the vote for all French people!**

**My dream was to make France a republic that would be fair, honest, and just. But I found that people had to die so that France could live. Life is sacred to me.**

**It hurt me to send people to the guillotine. But I had to do it! France had to be cleansed and purified of all those who stood in the way of fair government! All the people who were not with us were against us! They were suspects; they were the guilty ones! It was the only way I knew to make the Revolution live. Yes, people had to die for a better life for the good of France.**

**Can it be that I, the great Robespierre, am afraid? How will I act when I climb those stairs to the guillotine? I remember how King Louis behaved. Here was a man who never looked or acted like a king during his lifetime. He was always afraid, he never made a decision on his own. I thought they would have to carry him to the scaffold, but no! This was his greatest moment! Imagine the guillotine bringing out the best in our King Louis!**

**Soon I will join those who gave their lives for the cause. I wonder whether Marat would have defended me. No, he was the most bloodthirsty of all – I remember when he called for 270,000 heads! He wanted to solve all of our problems by killing. Too bad he never met the guillotine, he was stabbed to death while taking a bath – what a poor way to die!**

**Danton was the best speaker I have ever heard. He could turn an audience upside down and he tried to help the poor. But oh, how the Revolution changed him. He challenged me. I was afraid of losing my job so I sent him to the chopper before he could get to me. I accused him of making secret deals with the nobles. I wonder if he really did those things… But oh how I was shaken when he shouted, “Robespierre will be next!”**

**How right he was. That was only four months ago! I, Maximilien Robespierre, was called “apostle of terror” by the people who should have known better. I, who hated and feared death, became a killer. Now I am about to die by the same instrument I used to save France.**

**Somewhere I have read, “Those who live by the sword will die by the sword.” Now I understand the truth of these words.**

After the guillotine had done its work, Robespierre’s head was held up high for all to witness. The crowd roared in delight. However, the people of France had enough of the slaughter. Trials and executions continued, but in decreasing numbers.

**Understanding the Story: Write T for each True statement and F for each False statement.**

1. \_\_\_\_\_ The Reign of Terror was a time of peace.
2. \_\_\_\_\_ Louis XVI died by the guillotine.
3. \_\_\_\_\_ Robespierre sent many people to die by the guillotine.
4. \_\_\_\_\_ Marat was stabbed to death in his bathtub.
5. \_\_\_\_\_ Danton was a poor speaker.

**Questions for Review: Answer the following on a separate sheet of paper.**

1. What changed did the Declaration of the Rights of Man bring to France?
2. Who overthrew King Louis XVI? What happened to him?
3. Describe the Reign of Terror.
4. How did Robespierre justify/defend his decision to slaughter many French people?
5. Explain “those who live by the sword die by the sword” in your own words.
6. Do you think Robespierre was proud of his actions or wished he had done things differently? Why?