**The Sun King 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)
3. ANSWER the questions at the end of the reading.

Talk Back Below!

In 1643, Louis XIV, a child of five, became king of France. For the next 72 years, Louis XIV was at the center of Europe, its wars, its life. In fact, this period has been called the Age of Louis XIV. He was the greatest of the absolute monarchs (absolute monarchs had total control of their countries’ affairs). Louis was called the Sun King. He loved praise and flattery and was very fond of pictures and statues of himself. He believed he was the greatest of all rulers – a king of kings.

Louis insisted on moving the French court ten miles from Paris to Versailles. Louis disliked Paris. He hated the narrow streets and was afraid of the crowds of people. At Versailles, he built a palace worthy of a sun king. It was the finest palace in the world. It took over 30 years to build, and as many as 35,000 people worked on it at one time. No one knows how much Versailles cost. Louis made sure that he destroyed the records of expenses before he died.

In this story, two young nobles meet at Versailles.We can see how everything revolves around the thoughts and actions of the king as they discuss palace life. Ask yourself why most of the nobles of France were at the court of Versailles. Why was Louis called the Sun King? Did he deserve the title?

**“Count Chaumont!” called Count Rideau as he recognized a familiar face in the crowd that filled the great Hall of Mirrors. “I see that Louis finally forced you to come here. How do you like it?”**

“It’s good to see you again, Rideau,” said Chaumont as they greeted each other. “It’s been three years since you left our province of Normandy to come live here at Versailles. I’ve been here only three days, and already I wish I were back home!”

**“Chaumont, now you realize that everything they say about Versailles is true. You can be happy here only if you can learn to do exactly as you are told.”**

“Tell me, do you see the king very often? Are you at all close to him now? Will he talk to me?” asked Chaumont.

**Rideau answered, “Only the most powerful nobles are close to the king. That doesn’t include people like you and me. I haven’t even reached the high position of handing the king his shirt or pants. The best I’ve been able to do so far is watch him wash his face a few times. Oh, and once I saw him put on his wig. Only his favorites may actually hand him his food. I have never gotten that close.”**

“I’m sorry,” said Chaumont, “but I must confess that I just don’t understand what you’re talking about. Who wants to watch the king eat or bring him food? We’re not servants, we’re nobles! How ridiculous!”

**“Chaumont, you have to understand that Louis isn’t just the king of France. He is the sun and the moon and the stars! He is at the center of everything in our world. We nobles are here to honor him, to do everything to make him happy.”**

“Does being waited on by his nobles make him happy?” asked Chaumont.

**“You’ll find out,” answered Rideau. “There is a set way of doing everything at court. These things please the king. He likes doing exactly the same thing at the same time each day. This is his life. You’ll see. Someday you’ll be happy to do things you now think are so silly. Who knows, someday he may even talk to you! But don’t expect it; he’s very busy. He tries to do too much. He fired his prime minister so he could run everything by himself. He wants to know everything, to sign everything in his own hand.”**

“But with all of the parties and games going on, when does the king find time to govern?”

**“He does loves parties, but he spends many hours a day running the country,” said Rideau.**

“But isn’t he afraid of making mistakes?” asked Chaumont.

**“My dear Chaumont, the king makes no mistakes. He is the all powerful ruler. He is the image of God on earth. That’s why he took the sun as an emblem – our King Louis XIV is the source of our light and life!”**

“Well, I just got here and I can tell you that the rest of France isn’t so in love with our king. Taxes are very high to support his lavish lifestyle. People say that the money goes in and out of the royal treasury faster than you can say ‘Sun King’! And let’s not forget his wars. It’s hard to think of a time when France, or should I say Louis, was not at war! He is bleeding our country to death!”

**“Louis fights for the glory of France,” replied Rideau. “We will not let any nation push us around. Why should we?”**

“Yes, but does he have to fight the whole world?” responded Chaumont. “Doesn’t France have enough land of its own? Don’t we have enough problems?”

**“Just wait. The king will soon become the center of your world. You will accept whatever he does and whatever happens here.”**

“But what will happen to France after Louis dies? Who will pay for his waste, his extravagance?” asked Chaumont.

**Rideau thought for a moment. “In the end, we will all pay, I suppose.”**

Louis XIV’s wasteful spending and 50 years of war emptied the French treasury. Louis spent far more than his government took in taxes. As a result, he had to borrow money and raise taxes. It was said that 50% of the people were starving. By 1708, many farmers did not have the money to buy seed to plant their crops. In 1709, a severe winter added to their suffering. As a result, many food riots broke out in the cities where starving mobs broke into bakeries to loot for food.

**Understanding the Story: CIRCLE actions below that represent the beliefs/actions of King Louis XIV.**

1. **Louis XIV always asked peasants for advice.**
2. **Louis liked being called the Sun King.**
3. **Louis was frugal, he saved his money whenever possible.**
4. **Louis forced his nobles to live at the Palace of Versailles.**
5. **Louis believed in a democratic government.**
6. **Louis felt he was the image of God on earth.**
7. **Louis felt he made no mistakes.**

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

1. Why was Louis XIV called the “Sun King”? Do you think he deserved the title? Why or why not?
2. What was life like for the nobles at the palace of Versailles?
3. How did the people of France feel about King Louis XIV?
4. Imagine that you are Chaumont. Write a letter to a friend. Describe how you feel about your new life at the palace of Versailles.
5. Now pretend you are Rideau. You have found Chaumont’s letter. You know that the king sees all mail before it is sent from the palace. Go back and EDIT the letter, mark or scratch out parts that would anger the King. Add parts that would please him.