**Storming the Bastille**

The Bastille was an infamous building in France. King Charles V built it in 1371 as a castle. Later this stronghold was used as a prison. After 1670 it became a jail for people of wealth and high rank who had fallen out of favor with the king. For more than a century, it symbolized the ruthless power of the king and the wealthy. The structure was a fortress whose walls were 10 feet thick. It was surrounded by a moat. Cannons pointed down from its highest towers.

In the late 1780s, France had a very rigid, unfair social structure. The common people were desperately poor and had little or no chance of bettering their position. Meanwhile, the royal family, aristocrats, and church officials were rich. They were also arrogant. They believed that they had the right to live in luxury while the masses suffered.

The times were ripe for revolution. The Enlightenment was sweeping Europe. This philosophy taught that all people had the basic right to life, liberty, and equality. Because of these beliefs, the American colonies had revolted against British rule. The colonists won their freedom. The French people acted on these same beliefs. In 1789 the French Revolution began with the storming of the Bastille.

In July of 1789, citizens in Paris were alarmed. A rumor had spread that troops were being sent to disband the people's National Assembly. An angry mob wanted to stop them. On July 14, a group of citizens marched through Paris. Their target was the Bastille—the hated symbol of power and injustice. The crowd shouted, "Down with the Bastille." They attracted more followers as they swept through the city. When they reached the Bastille, some guards joined them. They managed to cut the chains on a drawbridge, which was then lowered over the moat. The mob poured into the prison. Despite some loss of life, the citizens fought bravely. They battled to gain access to the interior of the jail. After an intense battle, the prison guards surrendered. The crowd ran through the jail, releasing all of its prisoners.

The Bastille contained a supply of arms. The victorious citizens seized these weapons. The weapons would prove useful in fighting the revolution they had just begun.

According to legend, when King Louis XVI heard that Parisians had stormed the Bastille, he exclaimed, "This is a revolt." A duke replied, "No, sire, it is a revolution!"

**Main Idea**

\_\_\_\_\_ 1. The main idea of this passage is:

a. The people stormed the Bastille as a

symbol of the hatred they had for

the King and his government.

b. Some time after it was built, the  
 Bastille was used as a prison.

c. The common people of France at this

time were extremely poor.

**Subject Matter**

\_\_\_\_\_ 2. The author would most likely agree

that the French citizens:

a. were right to fight for their

liberty.

b. should have had more respect

for the King.

c. should not have battled the

guards to storm the Bastille.

d. were very violent in their methods.

**Supporting Details**

\_\_\_\_\_ 3. For the people of France, the

Bastille was a symbol of:

a. the church.

b. freedom.

c. foreign power.

d. injustice.

**Conclusion**

\_\_\_\_\_ 4. From the king's comment about the  
 storming of the Bastille, "This is

a revolt," one can infer that he:

a. had little understanding of the

people's hardship and anger.

b. was not prepared to call on troops

to fight the people.

c. sympathized with the angry mob.

d. was ready for all-out war.

**Clarifying Devices**

\_\_\_\_\_ 5. The Enlightenment is believed to have been one cause of the French  
 Revolution because it taught that:  
 a. wealth was an evil.

b. kings should be elected to office.

c. all people deserve liberty and

justice.

d. might makes right.

**Vocabulary in Context**

\_\_\_\_\_ 6. In this passage, arrogant means:  
 a. humble.

b. modest.

c. flashy.

d. bigheaded.