


The French Revolution had a powerful impact on Europe and the rest of the world. Most European societies became more secular, or less focused on religion, and more nationalistic. The French Revolution encouraged democratic ideas in Europe, and in the colonies of the Americas. In addition, post-revolutionary France produced one of Europe's most notable leaders, Napoleon Bonaparte.

The Rise of Napoleon

Introduction



What events led to Napoleon's rise to power?

Using the arrows in the upper right hand corner or the timeline navigation, explore this activity to see how Napoleon Bonaparte became the Emperor of France.

Early Life Military Career

The image shows a digital interface for an educational activity. At the top, a dark grey header contains the title 'The Rise of Napoleon' with a small blue square icon on the right. Below this is a white window titled 'Introduction' with a close button and a play button in the top right corner. The main content area features a painting of Napoleon on a white horse, wearing a brown coat and a bicorne hat, set against a landscape background. To the right of the painting is a text box with a question and instructions. At the bottom, a horizontal timeline navigation bar is shown, with a green arrow pointing right and several blue circular markers. The labels 'Early Life' and 'Military Career' are positioned below the markers.

The Rise of Napoleon - Introduction

What events led to Napoleon's rise to power?


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The Rise of Napoleon

1769

Napoleon is born on the island of Corsica.

Corsica is a French island in the Mediterranean Sea and is located between France and Italy.



1769

Early Life

Military Career

Early Life - 1769

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The Rise of Napoleon

1779

Napoleon begins his military training in Paris.
He trains to become an artillery officer.

1779

Early Life Military Career

Early Life - 1779

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The Rise of Napoleon

1789

Napoleon fights in the French Revolution.

He quickly rises through the ranks as a young officer of France's republic during the French Revolution.

1789

Early Life Military Career

Military Career – 1789

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The Rise of Napoleon

1796

Napoleon is placed in charge of the French Army.

France's Directory places Napoleon in charge of the French Army. Under Napoleon's leadership, France defeats Austria and establishes a new, French-dominated republic in Italy.

1796

Early Life Military Career

A digital timeline interface titled "The Rise of Napoleon". The main window shows the year "1796" at the top left. Below it is a large, empty rectangular area with a magnifying glass icon at the bottom right, intended for an image. To the right of this area is a text box containing the heading "Napoleon is placed in charge of the French Army." and a paragraph: "France's Directory places Napoleon in charge of the French Army. Under Napoleon's leadership, France defeats Austria and establishes a new, French-dominated republic in Italy." At the bottom of the window is a horizontal timeline bar. It is divided into two sections: "Early Life" (green) and "Military Career" (blue). The "Military Career" section is active, with a white callout box above it displaying the year "1796". The timeline bar has several circular markers along its length.

Military Career – 1796

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France's Directory places Napoleon in charge of the French Army. Under Napoleon's leadership, France defeats Austria and establishes a new, French-dominated republic in Italy.

The Rise of Napoleon

1799

Napoleon seizes power through a coup d'état.

The French people had been upset with the weak Directory that ruled France. Napoleon uses this opportunity to seize control with his military power, as he had thousands of French soldiers who were loyal to him. He uses these soldiers to force out one house of the legislature, and the second house quickly elects him to be one of three consuls to rule France. This quick seizure of power is called a coup d'état.

1799

Early Life Military Career

Military Career – 1799

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The Rise of Napoleon

1804

Napoleon is crowned Emperor Napoleon I.

Napoleon leads France to more military victories and defends France against a coalition of countries, including England, Austria, and Russia. Napoleon's popularity in France soars. He uses this opportunity to make himself Emperor Napoleon I.

1804

Early Life Military Career

Military Career – 1804

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Napoleon's Rule and Legacy

Restored order to France

Improved the Economy

Mended the wounds of the revolution

Restored the Catholic Church

Napoleonic Code

Set of laws for all of France

- Equality for all classes
- Limited some gains by women



Although Napoleon was an emperor, he did not rule France in the way that kings had ruled before the French Revolution. In fact, he followed many of the ideas that came out of the revolution.

As emperor, Napoleon was able to decrease inflation, or rapidly rising prices, and stabilize France's economy. He also welcomed back the nobles who had fled France during the French Revolution; however, Napoleon did not allow these nobles to have the special privileges that they had enjoyed under the king's rule. Napoleon gave the Catholic Church a favored position in France, but still allowed people religious freedom.

One of Napoleon's most lasting contributions was the Napoleonic Code, which was a set of laws for all of France. This code gave equal rights to all classes; however, it also gave Napoleon the right to censor newspapers and limited the some of the rights women had gained during the French Revolution. Also, Napoleon openly declared that he was above the law.



Napoleon was not content with ruling just France. He wanted to bring all of Europe under his control. Through a series of wars, he conquered Austria, Italy, and Spain to build a French Empire across Europe. Napoleon's strategy for ruling these territories was to either directly control a country, or to install a new leader that was under Napoleon's control. By 1810, the only countries in Europe that weren't under Napoleon's influence were Britain, Sweden, Russia, and the territories ruled by the Ottoman Empire.



Aware of Britain's military power, Napoleon tried to damage the British economy instead. French ships set up a naval blockade of Britain in an attempt to stop Britain from shipping or receiving goods. Napoleon called this policy the “Continental System.” However, Britain’s navy was far superior to France's, and the blockade was ineffective. Britain responded by creating their own blockade to punish France.

After Napoleon tried to install his brother as the King of Spain, the Spaniards started a costly war against the occupying French army. The local people acted as guerilla forces and were difficult to defeat. These battles were referred to as the “Peninsula Wars,” since they took place on the Iberian Peninsula, made up of Spain and Portugal.

[The Battle of Trafalgar, as seen from the mizzenstarboard shrouds of the Victory by J. M. W. Turner (oil on canvas, 1806 to 1808).]

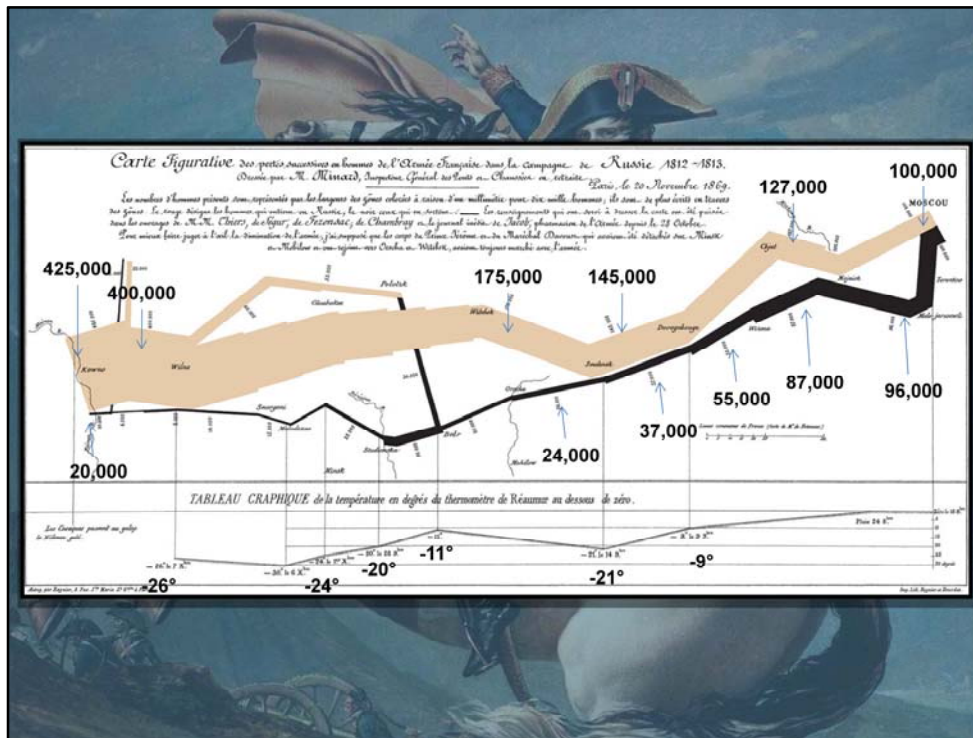


By 1812, Napoleon started having problems with Russia, one of France's allies. Russia refused to trade only with France and began to trade with Britain. Napoleon decided to invade Russia with an army of over 400,000 men. His plan was to capture Moscow quickly and force the Russians to surrender. This proved costly for French forces.

The Russians engaged in small battles with the French as they retreated deeper into the country. Along the way, the Russian soldiers burned or destroyed anything that the French army might be able to use. The French army was weakened by a lack of supplies, and many of the French soldiers deserted the army because of hunger.

When Napoleon entered Moscow in September of 1812, he found the city in flames and deserted. He waited weeks for a surrender from the Russian Tsar, but never received one. It was October, and the French army had no supplies. What would Napoleon do - keep on fighting with no supplies, or retreat back to France?

Napoleon decided to retreat, but the Russian winter came early and it made the retreat extremely difficult. To make matters worse, the French were constantly attacked by small forces of Russian soldiers as they fled. By mid-December, the French were gone from Russia, but only 20,000 of the original 400,000 troops remained.



This chart shows how the size of Napoleon’s army dwindled during the invasion of Russia and during the retreat. The numbers above the beige section show how many soldiers were present on the assault on Russia, and the numbers under the black section show how many were left on the retreat out of the country.

The numbers at the bottom of the chart show what the temperatures were on the retreat. Note that they are all below zero degrees Fahrenheit.



Napoleon's defeat in Russia provided a great opportunity for his enemies. Britain, Russia, Austria and Sweden formed a Grand Alliance to oppose him. In 1813, they defeated Napoleon in Germany, and in 1814, they marched their armies into Paris and forced Napoleon to surrender. He was exiled to Elba, an island off of the Italian coast.



In 1815, Napoleon escaped exile and returned to France to find that King Louis XVIII [the eighteenth], Louis XVI's [the sixteenth's] brother, was ruler. The French people welcomed Napoleon back and, with a volunteer army, Napoleon drove out the king. The Grand Alliance re-grouped its troops and prepared for battle with Napoleon.

In June of 1815, Napoleon met his enemies outside of the village of Waterloo, which was a part of The Netherlands at that time. England's Duke of Wellington commanded an army and held his ground after the French attacked. Later that day, a Prussian army joined the fight against the French. Napoleon was defeated for the final time and was exiled once again, this time to Saint Helena, a tiny island in the South Atlantic off the coast of Africa. Six years later, in 1821, he died of a stomach ailment.

Europe After the Congress of Vienna



After Napoleon's initial defeat in 1814, the major powers of Europe, Britain, Austria, Prussia, and Russia tried to restore order to the continent. They called a meeting known as the Congress of Vienna to discuss what the boundaries of Europe should be now that Napoleon was eliminated along with the French Empire. The leaders who met in Vienna wanted to make sure that one country would not try to dominate Europe as Napoleon had. The map shown here indicates the boundaries that were established at the Congress of Vienna. This settlement led to 40 years of peace among the major European powers.