

Name:

Absolutism in a nut shell...

1. Define 'absolute monarchy' in your own words:

During the next few centuries, European monarchs will claim the authority to rule without limits. These rulers will become absolute monarchs: kings and queens who believe all the power within their state's boundaries rests in their hands. Their goal was the control of every aspect of society. Absolute monarchs believed in divine right- the idea that God created the monarchy and that the monarchy acted as God's representative on earth. An absolute monarch answered only to God, not to his or her subjects.

2. Define 'divine right' in your own words:

3. How would you feel about an absolute monarch if you were a member of the middle class?

As Europe emerged from the Middle Ages, monarchs grew increasingly powerful. The decline of feudalism, the rise of cities, expansion through exploration, and the growth of national kingdoms all helped to centralize authority (put all the power in one person's hands). In addition, the growing middle class usually backed monarchs because they promised a peaceful, supportive climate for business. Monarchs used the wealth of colonies to pay for their ambitions. Church authority also continued to break down (as it had started to during the Middle Ages and during the Reformation). This opened the way for monarchs to assume even greater control.

4. Why were colonies important to absolute monarchs?

5. Explain Jean Bodin's first sentence in your own words.

In 1576, Jean Bodin, an influential French writer, defined absolute rule: "The first characteristic of the sovereign [powerful] prince is the power to make general and special laws, but- and this qualification is important- without the consent of superiors, equals, or inferiors. If the prince requires the consent of superiors, then he is a subject himself; if [he consults] equals, he shares his authority with others; if [he consults] subjects, senate, or people; he is not sovereign."

6. What makes a ruler 'sovereign'?

7. Why was Europe engaged in constant warfare? Explain using your prior knowledge.

The 17th century, the Age of Absolutism, was a period of great upheaval in Europe. Religious and territorial conflicts between states led to almost continuous warfare. This caused governments to build huge armies and to levy even heavier taxes on an already suffering population. These pressures in turn would bring on widespread unrest. Sometimes peasants revolted. In response to these crises, monarchs tried to impose order by increasing their own power. As absolute rulers, they regulated everything from religious worship to social gatherings. To seem more powerful, they increased the size of their courts (nobility). They created new government bureaucracies to control the countries economic life. Their goal was to free themselves from the limitations imposed by the nobility and by representative bodies such as their Parliament. Only with such freedom could they rule absolutely.

8. How would you feel about an absolute monarch if you were a member of the lower class?

10. Why would church authority [power] decline during the Age of Absolutism?

9. How would you feel about an absolute monarch if you were a member of the nobility?

11. Prediction: What problems may arise because of the 'divine right' of absolute rulers?