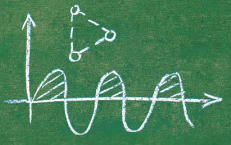
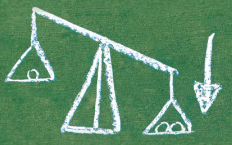


# Opening The Windows Of Curiosity

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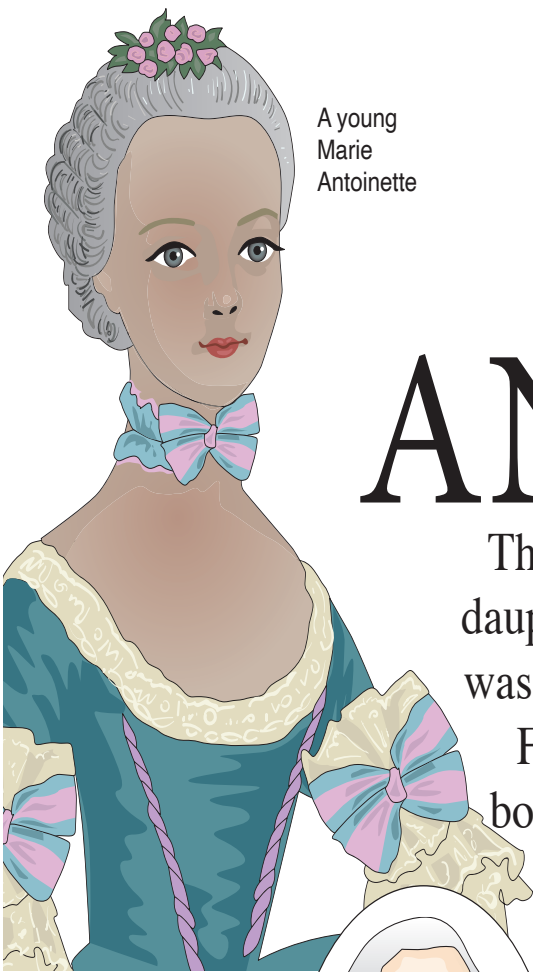
## WORLD OF WONDER

Exploring the realms of history, science, nature and technology

# MARIE ANTOINETTE

A young Marie Antoinette

Marie Antoinette at age 20



This Austrian princess married Louis-Auguste, the dauphin and future king of France, in 1770, when she was just 14 years old. Four years later, Marie became France's last queen. Young, naive and probably bored with her few official duties, she struggled to adapt to the French court and her husband.

### Early days

Marie Antoinette was born in 1755, the youngest daughter (and 15th child) of Maria Theresa and Francis I, empress and emperor of the **Holy Roman Empire**.

Marie Antoinette grew up in great luxury and wealth, moving between the family's three palaces. The young archduchess is said to have been a social child with many friends. She loved playing the harp, harpsichord and flute, as well as singing and dancing.

Unfortunately, her limited education was designed to prepare her for a royal marriage, not to enlighten. She was not even taught how to read and write properly.

At the age of 11, her parents decided she should marry the **dauphin** (crown prince) of France. Special tutors were hired to teach her the French language, French history and customs, and the subtle rules of the French court. The princess left for France in 1770.

### Marriage

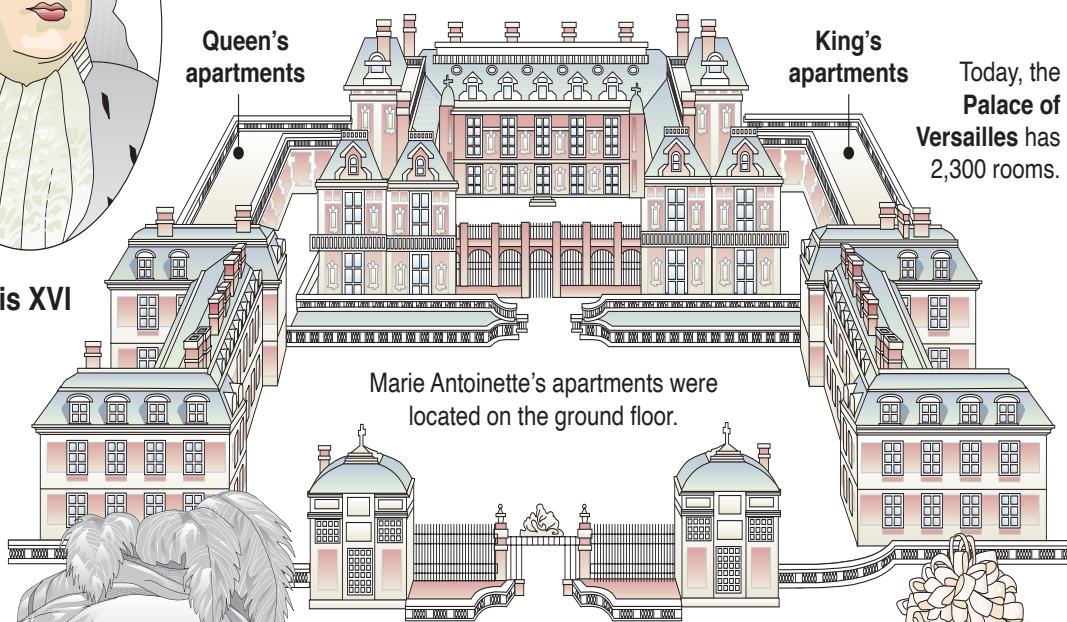
The wedding was a grand and exhausting affair. The groom wore a suit of silver, and Marie wore a lilac dress dripping with diamonds and pearls. More than 5,000 guests attended.

The young couple did not seem to have much in common. Louis was well educated, but Marie was not. Louis enjoyed solitary pursuits, while his wife loved parties, dancing and gambling. It took seven years before the couple was able to conceive a child. They eventually had four children, but only one would live to adulthood.



Louis XVI

The **Palace of Versailles** was built by Louis XIV in the 1670s. It was designed to be symmetrical, each wing mirroring the other. Marie Antoinette had a set of rooms overlooking two inner courtyards. The queen's apartments were guarded by 12 guards day and night.



Today, the **Palace of Versailles** has 2,300 rooms.



Marie Antoinette loved flowers and chocolates.

### Let them eat cake

There is no evidence that Marie Antoinette ever said "let them eat cake" in response to hearing that the peasants were starving and had no bread. This rumor was probably spread by her political enemies.

### Hair fashion

**Monsieur Léonard** was Marie Antoinette's hairdresser. He created amazing and complex hairstyles, complete with feathers and accessories, some reaching up to 4 feet high.



### The sad tale of four children

Marie Antoinette was said to be an attentive and loving mother. Her first child was **Marie Thérèse**, followed by **Louis Joseph**, **Louis Charles** and **Sophie Beatrix**. Sophie died as an infant, and Louis Joseph died of tuberculosis at age 7.

After his parents' execution, Louis Charles, dauphin of France, was imprisoned. Beaten and neglected, he died at the age of 10 after nearly four years in solitary confinement.

Marie Thérèse managed to survive the revolution and lived in exile for most of her life. She died at age 72.



French hairdresser **Léonard Autié** at work.

—The National Library of France

### Being queen

On May 10, 1774, **King Louis XV** died. When young Louis and Marie heard of his death, they fell to their knees and cried, "O God, guide us, protect us! We are too young to reign."

Marie Antoinette was not a wise queen. She made many mistakes that damaged her reputation and tarnished the public's opinion of her. Her role in the politics of the day seem to have been limited to granting favors to friends.

She was an extravagant queen, spending huge sums on balls, parties and gambling. She built a farm on the palace grounds where she and her court ladies could pretend to be milkmaids and shepherdesses. She had expensive tastes in fashion and spent lavishly on her gowns and sculpted wigs. It is estimated that she commissioned more than 200 dresses a year.

### The revolution

While the **French Revolution** was not Marie Antoinette's fault, her political blunders did make it fashionable to blame her.

France was heavily in debt, and ordinary people hated the fact that the church (the first estate) and the nobility (the second estate) did not pay taxes. Peasants, farmers and merchants (the third estate) resented the royal family's spending.

The king and queen's consistent rejection of reform provoked violent unrest, and the revolution gained momentum. The monarchy was abolished by the revolutionary government in 1792.

The royal family was imprisoned in Paris. They tried to flee the country but were captured. Louis XVI was **guillotined** in 1793 for treason. Marie Antoinette followed a similar fate nine months later.

SOURCES: World Book Encyclopedia, World Book Inc.; <https://www.britannica.com>; <https://en.wikipedia.org>; <https://en.chateauversailles.fr>; <https://www.biography.com>; The History Channel

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