

THE FRENCH REVOLUTION

1. Describe the storming of the prison Bastille in France.

- i. On the morning of 14 July 1789, the city of Paris was in a state of alarm. The king had commanded troops to move into the city. Rumours spread that he would soon order the army to open fire upon the citizens who rose in protest due to shortage of bread.
- ii. Some 7,000 men and women gathered in front of the town hall and decided to form a peoples. militia. They broke into a number of government buildings in search of arms. Finally, a group of several hundred people marched towards the eastern part of the city and stormed the fortress-prison, the Bastille, where they hoped to find hoarded ammunition.
- iii. In the armed fight that followed, the commander of the Bastille was killed and the prisoners released . though there were only seven of them. Yet the Bastille was hated by all, because it stood for the despotic power of the king. The fortress was demolished and its stone fragments were sold in the markets to all those who wished to keep a souvenir of its destruction.

2. Describe the political and economic condition of France during the 18th century.

- i. In 1774, Louis XVI of the Bourbon family of kings ascended the throne of France. He was 20 years old and married to the Austrian princess Marie Antoinette.
- ii. Upon his accession the new king found an empty treasury. Long years of war had drained the financial resources of France. The cost of maintaining an extravagant court at Versailles was very high.
- iii. Under Louis XVI, France helped the thirteen American colonies to gain their independence from the common enemy, Britain. The war added more than a billion *livres* (currency) to a debt that had already risen to more than 2 billion *livres*.
- iv. Lenders who gave the state credit, now began to charge 10 per cent interest on loans. So the French government was obliged to spend an increasing percentage of its budget on interest payments alone. To meet its regular expenses, such as the cost of maintaining an army, the court, running government offices or universities, the state was forced to increase taxes.

3. Describe the social condition of France during the 18th century. OR How was the French society organised?

- v. French society in the eighteenth century was divided into three estates, viz. The First Estate, Second Estate and the Third Estate. The First Estate consisted of the Clergy and the Second Estate consisted of Nobility.
- vi. The members of the first two estates, that is, the **clergy** and the nobility, enjoyed certain privileges by birth. The most important of these was exemption from paying taxes to the state. The nobles further enjoyed feudal privileges. These included feudal dues, which they extracted from the peasants.
- vii. The Third Estate consisted of three categories of people. Big businessmen, merchants, court officials, lawyers etc come in the top layer. Peasants and artisans come in the middle and small peasants, landless labourers and servants come under the lowest category of people.

- viii. Peasants made up of 90 per cent of the population. However, only a small number of them owned the land they cultivated. About 60 per cent of the land was owned by nobles, the Church and other richer members of the third estate.
- ix. Peasants were obliged to render services to the lord to work in his house and fields, to serve in the army or to participate in building roads. The burden of financing activities of the state through taxes was borne by the third estate alone.

4. What was the 'subsistence crisis' in France? How did it arise?

- i. The population of France rose from about 23 million in 1715 to 28 million in 1789. This led to a rapid increase in the demand for food grains. Production of grains could not keep pace with the demand. So the price of bread which was the staple diet of the majority rose rapidly.
- ii. Most workers were employed as labourers in workshops whose owner fixed their wages. But wages did not keep pace with the rise in prices. So the gap between the poor and the rich widened.
- iii. Things became worse whenever drought or hail reduced the harvest. Shortage of food grains led to price rise, riots and death. It is called **subsistence crisis**, something that occurred frequently in France during the Old Regime.

5. Who were the groups of people who protested rising taxes and food scarcity in France? What was the result? How did the emergence of the middle class help French society?

- i. In the past, peasants and workers had participated in revolts against increasing taxes and food scarcity. But they lacked the means and programmes to carry out full-scale measures that would bring about a change in the social and economic order. This was left to the middle class.
- ii. The middle class became prosperous and had access to education and new ideas. **The merchants** earned their wealth through an expanding overseas trade and from the manufacture of goods.
- iii. In addition to merchants and **manufacturers**, the third estate included **professionals** such as lawyers or administrative officials. All of these were educated and believed that no group in society should be privileged by birth. Rather, a person's social position must depend on his merit.
- iv. These were the groups of people who protested rising taxes and food scarcity in France. These ideas of a society based on freedom and equal laws and opportunities for all, were put forward by philosophers too.

6. What role did philosophers play in bringing about the French Revolution?

- i. These ideas of a society based on freedom and equal laws and opportunities for all, were put forward by philosophers such as John Locke and Jean Jacques Rousseau. In his *Two Treatises of Government*, Locke sought to disprove the doctrine of the divine and absolute right of the monarch.
- ii. Rousseau carried the idea forward, proposing a form of government based on a social contract between people and their representatives.
- iii. In *The Spirit of the Laws*, Montesquieu proposed a division of power within the government between the legislative, the executive and the judiciary. This model of government was put into force in the USA, after the thirteen colonies declared their independence from Britain.
- iv. The American constitution and its guarantee of individual rights influenced political

thinkers in France. The ideas of these philosophers were discussed intensively in salons and coffee-houses and spread among people through books and newspapers.

v. These were frequently read aloud in groups for the benefit of those who could not read and write. The news that Louis XVI planned to impose further taxes to be able to meet the expenses of the state generated anger and protest against the system of privileges.

7. Examine the factors that led to the French Revolution.

i. The war with Britain : France supported American colonies in their war with the Great Britain for their independence. This war led to an increasing debt on the French monarchy. This necessitated imposition of new taxes on the public.

ii. Privilege based on birth: French society in the eighteenth century was divided into three estates, viz. The First Estate, Second Estate and the Third Estate. The First Estate consisted of the Clergy and the Second Estate consisted of Nobility. The members of the first two estates, that is, the clergy and the nobility, enjoyed certain privileges by birth. The most important of these was exemption from paying taxes to the state.

iii. Subsistence Crisis: The high population led to a rapid increase in the demand for food grains. Production of grains could not keep pace with the demand. So the price of bread which was the staple diet of the majority rose rapidly. Wages did not keep pace with rising prices. It led to the subsistence crisis.

iv. Growing Middle Class: A new class emerged in France because of increased overseas trade. This class was wealthy not because of birth but because of its ability to utilize opportunities. People of the middle class started raising their voice for an end to privileges based on birth.

v. Role of philosophers: The ideas of a society based on freedom and equal laws and opportunities for all, were put forward by philosophers such as John Locke and Jean Jacques Rousseau. They spread awareness through various media. Some from the privileged classes also advocated a switch to democracy. So, finally there was revolution in France.

8. Examine the incidents preceding the outbreak of the French Revolution.

i. Louis XVI, the King of France had to increase taxes for many reasons. He called a meeting of the Estates General which would pass his proposals for new taxes.

ii. Voting in the Estates General in the past had been conducted according to the principle that each estate had one vote. But members of the third estate demanded that voting now be conducted by the assembly as a whole, where each member would have one vote.

iii. When the king rejected this proposal, members of the third estate walked out of the assembly in protest. On 20 June they assembled in the hall of an indoor tennis court in the grounds of Versailles. They declared themselves a National Assembly and swore not to disperse till they had drafted a constitution for France that would limit the powers of the monarch.

iv. While the National Assembly was busy at Versailles drafting a constitution, riot spread across the country. A severe winter had meant a bad harvest; the price of bread rose, often bakers exploited the situation and hoarded supplies.

v. After spending hours in long queues at the bakery, crowds of angry women stormed into the shops. At the same time, the king ordered troops to move into Paris. On 14 July, the agitated crowd stormed and destroyed the Bastille.

- vi. In the countryside rumours spread from village to village that the lords of the **manor** had hired bands of brigands who were on their way to destroy the ripe crops. Angry peasants in several districts seized hoes and pitchforks and attacked **chateaux** (residence of lords)
- vii. They looted hoarded grain and burnt down documents containing records of manorial dues. (**Continue the next answer**)

9. What were the immediate results of the outbreak of the French Revolution?

- i. A large number of nobles fled from their homes, many of them migrating to neighbouring countries.
- ii. Faced with the power of his revolting subjects, Louis XVI finally accorded recognition to the National Assembly and accepted the principle that his powers would from now on be checked by a constitution.
- iii. On the night of 4 August 1789, the Assembly passed a decree abolishing the feudal system of obligations and taxes. Members of the clergy too were forced to give up their privileges. Tithes (tax imposed by the Church) were abolished and lands owned by the Church were confiscated. As a result, the government acquired assets worth at least 2 billion livres.

10. Why did the Third Estate walk out from the Estate General called by the King Louis XVI in France?

- i. Voting in the Estates General in the past had been conducted according to the principle that each estate had one vote. This time too Louis XVI was determined to continue the same practice. But members of the third estate demanded that voting now be conducted by the assembly as a whole, where **each member would have one vote**. (This was one of the democratic principles put forward by philosophers like Rousseau in his book *The Social Contract*.)
- ii. When the king rejected this proposal, members of the third estate walked out of the assembly in protest. The representatives of the third estate viewed themselves as spokesmen for the whole French nation. (**Which demand of the third estate was rejected by the King?**)

11. How did France Become a Constitutional Monarchy?

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- iii. The National Assembly completed the draft of the Constitution in 1791. Its main object was to limit the powers of the monarch. These powers instead of being concentrated in the hands of one person, were now separated and assigned to different institutions, the legislature, executive and judiciary. This made France a constitutional monarchy.

12. Write a short note on the Constitution of 1791 in France.

- i. The Constitution of 1791 vested the power to make laws in the National Assembly, which was indirectly elected. That is, citizens voted for a group of electors, who in turn chose the Assembly.

- ii. Not all citizens, however, had the right to vote. Only men above 25 years of age who paid taxes equal to at least 3 days of a labourer's wage were given the status of active citizens, that is, they were entitled to vote.
- iii. The remaining men and all women were classed as passive citizens. To qualify as an elector and then as a member of the Assembly a man had to belong to the highest bracket of taxpayers.
- iv. The Constitution began with a Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen. Rights such as the right to life, freedom of speech, freedom of opinion, equality before law, were established as natural and inalienable rights, that is, they belonged to each human being by birth and could not be taken away. It was the duty of the state to protect each citizen's natural rights.

13. Why were the women disappointed by the Constitution of 1791 in France? What laws did the revolutionary government introduce to improve the lives of women?

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- iii. In the early years, the revolutionary government introduced laws that helped improve the lives of women. Together with the creation of state schools, schooling was made compulsory for all girls. Their fathers could no longer force them into marriage against their will. Marriage was made into a contract entered into freely and registered under civil law.
- iv. Divorce was made legal, and could be applied for by both women and men. Women could now train for jobs, could become artists or run small businesses. Women's struggle for equal political rights, however, continued.

14. Why is Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen regarded as a revolutionary document?

- i. Rights such as the right to life, freedom of speech, freedom of opinion, equality before law, were established as natural and inalienable rights, that is, they belonged to each human being by birth and could not be taken away. It was the duty of the state to protect each citizen's natural rights.
- ii. Now the Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen proclaimed freedom of speech and expression to be a natural right. Newspapers, pamphlets, books and printed pictures flooded the towns of France from where they travelled rapidly into the countryside. They all described and discussed the events and changes taking place in France.
- iii. Freedom of the press also meant that opposing views of events could be expressed. Each side sought to convince the others of its position through the medium of print. Plays, songs and festive processions attracted large numbers of people. This was one way they could grasp and identify with ideas such as liberty or justice that political philosophers wrote about at length in texts which only a handful of educated people could read.
- iv. In a country where people were classified and discriminated, where laws did not

protect the public, where the upper class enjoyed privileges, Rights of Man and Citizen regarded as a revolutionary document.

15. How did France become a Republic?

- i. Although Louis XVI had signed the Constitution, he entered into secret negotiations with the King of Prussia. Rulers of other neighbouring countries too were worried by the developments in France and made plans to send troops to put down the events that had been taking place there since the summer of 1789.
- ii. Before this could happen, the National Assembly voted in April 1792 to declare war against Prussia and Austria. Thousands of volunteers joined the army. They saw this as a war of the people against kings and aristocracies all over Europe.
- iii. Political clubs like the Jacobins became an important rallying point for people who wished to discuss government policies and plan their own forms of action. Their leader was Maximilian Robespierre.

16. Who were the Jacobins? What role did they play in making France a republic? OR Name the popular political club in France. Who was its leader?

- i. The Jacobins were the successful Political club that became an important rallying point for people in France who wished to discuss government policies and plan their own forms of action.
- ii. The members of the Jacobin club belonged mainly to the less prosperous sections of society. They included small shopkeepers, artisans such as shoemakers, pastry cooks, watch-makers, printers, as well as servants and daily-wage workers. Their leader was Maximilian Robespierre. **(Continue Previous Answer from point iv)**

17. What was the Reign of Terror in France? Or Why is the period from 1793 to 1794 referred to as 'reign of terror' in France?

- i. The period from 1793 to 1794 is referred to as the Reign of Terror because it was a period of severe control and punishment by Robespierre.
- ii. All those whom he saw as being enemies of the republic, ex-nobles and clergy, members of other political parties, even members of his own party who did not agree with his methods were arrested, imprisoned and then tried by a revolutionary tribunal.
- iii. If the court found them guilty they were guillotined.
- iv. The guillotine is a device consisting of two poles and a blade with which a person is beheaded. It was named after Dr Guillotine who invented it.

Q. What was the guillotine? Who invented it? (See last point above)

18. Name any two prominent persons killed by using guillotine.

The King of France Louis XVI and the queen Marie Antoinette were guillotined.

19. What were the measures taken by Robespierre's government in bringing equality in French society?

- i. Robespierre's government issued laws for placing a maximum limit on wages and prices. Meat and bread were rationed. Peasants were forced to transport their grain to the cities and sell it at prices fixed by the government.
- ii. The use of more expensive white flour was forbidden; all citizens were required to eat the *pain dégalité* (equality bread), a loaf made of whole wheat.

- iii. Equality was also sought to be practised through forms of speech and address. Instead of the traditional Monsieur (Sir) and Madame (Madam) all French men and women were henceforth Citoyen and Citoyenne (Citizen).
- iv. Churches were shut down and their buildings converted into barracks or offices. Robespierre pursued his policies so relentlessly that even his supporters began to demand moderation. Finally, he was convicted by a court in July 1794, arrested and on the next day sent to the guillotine.
- v. One of the most revolutionary social reforms of the Jacobin regime was the abolition of slavery in the French colonies.

20. Why was a Directory appointed to rule France? What was the result? Or Under what circumstances did Napoleon Bonaparte come to power in France?

- i. The fall of the Jacobin government allowed the wealthier middle classes to seize power. A new constitution was introduced which denied the vote to non-propertied sections of society. It provided for two elected legislative councils.
- ii. These councils then appointed a Directory, an executive made up of five members. This was meant as a safeguard against the concentration of power in a one-man executive as under the Jacobins.
- iii. However, the Directors often clashed with the legislative councils, who then sought to dismiss them. The political instability of the Directory paved the way for the rise of a military dictator, Napoleon Bonaparte.

21. What were the measures taken by the revolutionary government to improve the status of women in France?

- i. In the early years, the revolutionary government introduced laws that helped improve the lives of women. Together with the creation of state schools, schooling was made compulsory for all girls. Their fathers could no longer force them into marriage against their will. Marriage was made into a contract entered into freely and registered under civil law.
- ii. Divorce was made legal, and could be applied for by both women and men. Women could now train for jobs, could become artists or run small businesses. Women's struggle for equal political rights, however, continued.

22. What setback did women's movement face in France during the Reign of Terror?

During the Reign of Terror, the new government issued laws ordering closure of women's clubs and banning their political activities. Many prominent women were arrested and a number of them executed.

23. How and when did the women in France get right to vote?

- i. The Constitution of 1791 reduced the women to passive citizens in France and the right to vote is denied. They demanded the right to vote, to be elected to the Assembly and to hold political office.
- ii. In order to discuss and voice their interests women started their own political clubs and newspapers. About sixty women's clubs came up in different French cities. The Society of Revolutionary and Republican Women was the most famous of them.
- iii. Women's movements for voting rights and equal wages continued two hundred years in many countries of the world. The fight for the vote was carried out through an international suffrage movement during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

iv. The example of the political activities of French women during the revolutionary years was kept alive as an inspiring memory. It was finally in 1946 that women in France won the right to vote.

24. What role did women play during the revolutionary years in France?

i. From the very beginning women were active participants in the events which brought about so many important changes in French society. They hoped that their involvement would pressurise the revolutionary government to introduce measures to improve their lives.

ii. In order to discuss and voice their interests women started their own political clubs and newspapers. About sixty women's clubs came up in different French cities. The Society of Revolutionary and Republican Women was the most famous of them.

iii. One of their main demands was that women enjoy the same political rights as men. Women were disappointed that the Constitution of 1791 reduced them to passive citizens. They demanded the right to vote, to be elected to the Assembly and to hold political office. Only then, they felt, would their interests be represented in the new government.

iv. Women's struggle for equal political rights, however, continued. During the Reign of Terror, the new government issued laws ordering closure of women's clubs and banning their political activities. Many prominent women were arrested and a number of them executed.

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25. Write a short note on slavery in France. OR What was the position of France on slavery in the 18th and 19th centuries?

i. The colonies in the Caribbean . Martinique, Guadeloupe and San Domingo were important suppliers of commodities such as tobacco, indigo, sugar and coffee. But the reluctance of Europeans to go and work in distant and unfamiliar lands meant a shortage of labour on the plantations. So this was met by **a triangular slave trade** between Europe, Africa and the Americas.

ii. The slave trade began in the seventeenth century in Europe. French merchants sailed from the ports of Bordeaux or Nantes to the African coast, where they bought slaves from local chieftains. Branded and shackled, the slaves were packed tightly into ships for the three-month long voyage across the Atlantic to the Caribbean. There they were sold to plantation owners.

iii. Throughout the eighteenth century there was little criticism of slavery in France. The National Assembly did not pass any laws, fearing opposition from businessmen whose incomes depended on the slave trade.

iv. It was finally the Convention which in 1794 legislated to free all slaves in the French overseas possessions. This, however, turned out to be a short-term measure: ten years later, Napoleon reintroduced slavery.

v. Plantation owners understood their freedom as including the right to enslave African Negroes in pursuit of their economic interests. Slavery was finally abolished in French colonies in 1848.

vi. One of the most revolutionary social reforms of the Jacobin regime was the abolition of slavery in the French colonies.

26. What changes did the revolution of 1789 bring in the everyday life of the people in France?

- i. The years following the revolution of 1789 in France saw many changes in the lives of men, women and children. The revolutionary governments took it upon themselves to pass laws that would translate the ideals of liberty and equality into everyday practice.
- ii. One important law that came into effect soon after the storming of the Bastille in the summer of 1789 was the abolition of censorship. In the Old Regime all written material and cultural activities, books, newspapers, plays could be published or performed only after they had been approved by the censors of the king. Now the Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen proclaimed freedom of speech and expression to be a natural right.
- iii. Newspapers, pamphlets, books and printed pictures flooded the towns of France from where they travelled rapidly into the countryside. They all described and discussed the events and changes taking place in France.
- iv. Freedom of the press also meant that opposing views of events could be expressed. Each side sought to convince the others of its position through the medium of print. Plays, songs and festive processions attracted large numbers of people. This was one way they could grasp and identify with ideas such as liberty or justice that political philosophers wrote about at length in texts which only a handful of educated people could read.

How did the revolutionary government translate the ideals of liberty and equality to everyday practice? (Points 3 and 4 above)

27. Which groups of French society benefited from the revolution? Which groups were forced to relinquish power? Which sections of society would have been disappointed with the outcome of the revolution?

Peasants and artisans of French society benefited from the revolution. Clergy, nobles and church had to relinquish power. It is obvious that those who had to forego power and privileges would have been disappointed. People from the first and the second estate must have been a disappointed lot.

28. Describe the legacy of the French Revolution for the peoples of the world during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

- i. The ideas of liberty and democratic rights were the most important legacy of the French Revolution. These ideas spread from France to the rest of Europe during the nineteenth century, where feudal systems were abolished.
- ii. Further these ideas spread to different colonies of the European nations. The people of the colonies interpreted and moulded these ideas according to their needs. The principles of equality, liberty and fraternity helped to intensify the freedom movements in these countries.
- iii. By the mid of 20th century a major part of the world adopted democracy as the preferred mode of rule and the French Revolution can be termed as the starting point for this development.

29. Draw up a list of democratic rights we enjoy today whose origins could be traced to the French Revolution.

The following fundamental rights, given in the Indian constitution can be traced to the French Revolution:

- _ The right to equality
- _ The right to freedom of speech and expression
- _ The right to freedom from exploitation
- _ The right to constitutional remedies

30. Would you agree with the view that the message of universal rights was beset with contradictions? Explain.

The major contradiction in the message of universal rights as per the French Constitution of 1791 was the total ignorance of women. All rights were given to men. Apart from that the presence of huge number of people as passive citizens, without voting rights, was like not putting into practice what you preach. In other words it can be said that although the declaration of universal rights was a good starting point but it took decades to fulfill its real goal.

31. Explain the role of Napoleon as an emperor of France. What are his contributions?

- i. In 1804, Napoleon Bonaparte crowned himself Emperor of France. He set out to conquer neighbouring European countries, dispossessing dynasties and creating kingdoms where he placed members of his family.
- ii. Napoleon saw his role as a moderniser of Europe. He introduced many laws such as the protection of private property and a uniform system of weights and measures provided by the decimal system.
- iii. Initially, many saw Napoleon as a liberator who would bring freedom for the people. But soon the Napoleonic armies came to be viewed everywhere as an invading force. He was finally defeated at Waterloo in 1815.
- iv. Many of his measures that carried the revolutionary ideas of liberty and modern laws to other parts of Europe had an impact on people long after Napoleon had left.

Additional questions:

1. Why was the Jacobins of France called sans-culottes? They wore clothes without knee breeches
2. When did the French women get the right to vote ? 1946
3. Who was crowned as the French emperor in 1804 ? Napoleon Bonaparte
4. By whom was the Reign of Terror introduced in France between 1793 - 94 ? Robespierre
5. At which battle was Napoleon finally defeated ? Waterloo
6. On what charge was the Emperor Louis XVI sentenced to death ? Treason
7. Why was the Bastille hated by all in France? It stood for the despotic power of the King.
8. Which event led to the French Revolution in 1789 ? Protesting against the high price of bread.
9. Who was the French ruler who married the Austrian Princess Marie Antoinette? Louis XVI
10. What does the term Old Regime refers to in France? Society and institutions of France before 1789.
11. Who collected the tax called 'tithe' from the French peasants? The Church
12. Who proposed the Social Contract Theory ? Rousseau
13. Name the theory proposed by Montesquieu. Division of power within the government.

14. Name the political body representing the three estates of pre-revolutionary France. Estates General
15. What is the significance of the following: Scepter- Symbol of Royal power-- Broken chain. The act of becoming free Bundle of Todd or fasces. Unity is strength
16. Name the national anthem of France. Who composed it? How did it get its name? *Marseillaise*- Roget de L.Isle. (March of volunteers from *Marseillaise* to Paris)
17. What was the main objective of the Constitution drafted by the National Assembly in 1791? To limit the powers of the monarch
18. What was the minimum qualification to become an elector and as a member of the National Assembly in France? Highest bracket of taxpayers
19. Which were the natural and inalienable rights granted by the Declaration of Rights in France? Rights such as the right to life, freedom of speech, freedom of opinion, equality before law
20. What does the red cap of Sansculottes symbolize? Liberty
21. What was the main aim of the Society of Revolutionary and Republican Women'? enjoy equal rights with that of men.
22. What was the most revolutionary social reform of the Jacobin regime? The abolition of slavery in the French colonies.
23. Who wrote 'What is the Third Estate.?' Abbé Sieyès, originally a priest.
24. What was the convention in France? Newly elected Assembly (1792)
25. What was the greatest achievement of the National Assembly convened in France in 1789?
26. Give an estimate of Napoleon as the first Consulate of France.
27. How did the teaching of Rousseau lay the foundation of democracy in France?
28. While the national assembly was busy.....at turmoil'. Justify.
29. What role did Louis play in bringing about the French Revolution?
30. List the accomplishments of the National Assembly of France from 1789 to 1791.
31. Write a short note on the fall of Napoleon.
32. The ideas of liberty and democratic rights were the most important legacy of the French Revolution_. Justify the statement by giving its impact on the world.
33. "Social disparity was one of the major causes of French Revolution." Justify the statement by giving any five examples.