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French Revolution, “Death of Marat” homework

1. Who was David?

Jacques-Louis David was a renowned French painter during the neoclassical period and was also a supporter of the French Revolution. Most of his paintings represented his vision of politics in favor of renewing France. After the revolution, he became more influential both in arts and politics. Of all his painting, the most famous and controversial one was “Death of Marat”, the painting of the death of his friend Marat—a dictator during the reign of terror. Due to his involvement in politics during the reign of terror, he was later imprisoned. When he was released, his interest about politics seemed to fade at first, however, it was later noticed that his political interest still persisted. At last, he was exiled from France and died in exile.

2. Who was Marat?

Jean-Paul Marat was a journalist and a politician most influential during the reign of terror. Marat was famous for the use of violence means against the anti-revolutionists. Marat had gone to the extent that he put many people to death based on just suspicion. Numerous people were murdered without proving that they were really guilty. At last, he was murdered by Charlotte Corday.

3. Why did Corday kill Marat?

As mentioned in 2, Marat had somewhat lost his conscience and sent numerous people to death without trial. Therefore, Charlotte Corday claimed that she killed Marat to save many more innocent lives threatened by Marat’s abuse of power.

4. Why does Simon Schama call *The Death of Marat* a "beautiful lie"? How is it beautiful? How is it a lie?

The Death of Marat is beautiful because of its meticulous composition which serves to depict Marat as an ideal man, or a hero. In the picture, the dead Marat holds the letter of Corday, saying how she was unhappy with Marat's benevolence. On the wooden box in front of the bathtub, there is a donation he was going to send to the widow whose husband died in the war. In his right hand, he still holds the quill implying that he was working until the last moment of his life. These all serve to glorify Marat. In addition, Marat's posture, his Jesus-like wound, the white sheet and the space in the upper half of the picture all help creating a sense of serenity and eternity. David designed the whole picture to achieve profound beauty that would convince people to believe its message.

However, this picture is simply a deliberate lie, an awful attempt to make a ruthless dictator a national hero. The most obvious lie in this picture is the letter that Marat's holds. The letter that he actually read was a list of traitors, but this was changed in the picture because holding the list of traitors would confirm Marat's cruelty and irrational action. In addition, the actual scene of Marat's death was not serene at all. There was a knife in his chest, a lot of blood coming out as the knife cut his artery, and his last words were the cry for help.

5. Describe your own aesthetic of beauty.

1. The art has to have a certain degree of symmetry—not too much.
2. The subject of the art should not be too gory.

3. The art should include adequate detail—neither plain nor excessive.
4. The art must be able to communicate ideas or messages.