2024 VCE History: Revolutions external assessment report

General comments

The 2024 VCE History: Revolutions examination was based on the accredited [VCE History Study Design](https://www.vcaa.vic.edu.au/curriculum/vce/vce-study-designs/history/Pages/index.aspx). It contained two sections. Section A, a source analysis, contained four questions, of which students were only required to answer two. In Section B, students were required to write an essay in response to one of four questions. The total marks awarded for this examination was 70.

The vast majority of students were familiar with the format of the examination and completed the required number of sections. While most students chose two questions from Section A and one from Section B, a very small number of students chose to complete more than two questions from Section A, and in many of these cases, failed to attempt an essay from Section B. Typically, responses were fairly balanced between both sections of the examination. There was little to suggest that students were sacrificing time for one section over the other.

Students were familiar with explicitly specifying the revolution they were writing about, and they effectively utilised the designated writing spaces. The lines provided beneath each question serve as a guide, indicating the expected amount of writing. It is not obligatory to extend into the additional writing space. However, when students did use the extra space, there was a clear indication in the initial booklet, as well as clearly labelled responses in that space. Navigating the Question and Answer Book is a vital skill for all History: Revolutions students and, overall, this was done well in 2024.

Some general observations and suggestions for improved performance in the written examination are as follows:

* For lower-order questions requiring students to ‘identify’ features, own knowledge is not required. Therefore, students should aim to clearly transcribe all source material and explicitly use quotation marks to indicate when a written feature of a source has been used. Dot points are sufficient for a two-mark ‘identify’ question.
* Students should make note of the text surrounding the visual sources, as it provides valuable information that can be utilised when addressing the question. In 2024, much of this information could be used to respond to part a. and/or b. questions in Section A.
* For medium-order questions, with command terms such as ‘explain’ and ‘analyse’, students were expected to provide multiple on-topic arguments that combined source material with their own knowledge. Responses that only transposed the source material did not score well here, as own knowledge was explicitly required. Similarly, responses that failed to explicitly reference the source material did not score well.
* When using the sources, explicit references should be used, for example, ‘S11’, ‘Source 11’, ‘as seen in Source 11’.
* ‘Explain’ and ‘analyse’ questions typically focused on an individual or a group. Students were expected to contain their responses to that individual or group and not go beyond into discussing other figures/groups as their focal point of discussion.
* For higher-order extended response questions involving the ‘evaluate’ command term, a more comprehensive and structured response was necessary. According to the VCAA glossary of command terms, ‘evaluate’ requires students to provide a clear and reasoned judgment. The strongest responses demonstrated focus and precision, avoiding the temptation to merely recount historical details. Instead, these students crafted clear, relevant discussions that directly engaged with the specific requirements of the question.
* Essay questions demand thoughtful engagement with the prompt, requiring a thorough development of ideas supported by detailed own evidence. Direct reliance on source material from Section A is not appropriate in this context. While some students approached these questions successfully, overall performance varied. Many displayed extensive knowledge of the reasons for the outbreak of their revolutions, but many fell into the trap of narrating events in the post-revolutionary time period, rather than constructing on-topic analytical arguments.
* Each essay question began with a prompt that needed to be explicitly addressed. Some responses abandoned discussion of the essay prompt and provided pre-prepared responses focusing on other causes of revolution without any meaningful connection to the question. These responses typically did not score well.
* To excel in the essay portion of the examination, responses should focus on presenting multiple relevant ideas and substantiating all arguments with well-chosen evidence.
* The student’s ‘own voice’ should be apparent in the development of their arguments. The highest-scoring responses contained clear contentions relevant to the specific demands of the questions they were addressing. Responses that typified the mid and lower ranges heavily used either source material or historians as the basis for their arguments, lacking the clear unique contention that dominated the higher-scoring responses.
* Historical interpretations are not a mandatory element of providing evidence or own knowledge; however, they can add great depth and sophistication to a student’s writing when they have been adequately evaluated and contextualised.
* The use of quotations by historians may be used throughout the examination when own knowledge or evidence is requested. However, students should aim to be measured and precise when utilising historical interpretations.
* General/generic quotations such as ‘tensions flared’, as well as single word quotes such as ‘paralysed’, indicate a lack of critical understanding of historical opinion.
* In some instances, students cited historians associated with a different revolution or applied historical interpretations outside their appropriate context. Such errors reflect a misunderstanding of the material and should be avoided to ensure accuracy and relevance in responses.
* Higher-scoring responses were able to provide a combination of various forms of evidence and/or historical interpretations and weaved this material throughout the development of their arguments.
* The History Study Design clearly indicates the time period relevant to each revolution. Background information provided from outside these ranges are not acceptable forms of own knowledge and should be avoided. Examples include the arrival of British settlers to North America and the Qing dynasty’s rule in China.

Specific information

Note: Student responses reproduced in this report have not been corrected for grammar, spelling or factual information. This report provides sample answers or an indication of what answers may have included. Unless otherwise stated, these are not intended to be exemplary or complete responses. The statistics in this report may be subject to rounding, resulting in a total of more or less than 100 per cent.

Section A – Short-answer questions

Section A consisted of four questions, one for each revolution, divided into multiple parts. The Sources Book contained the stimulus material and, for each revolution, comprised a single visual representation, a single written primary source document and two written historical interpretations.

For each revolution, there were two ‘identify’ questions that required students to identify visual and written features of a visual source. As there was no explicit instruction to describe or expound on this information, students were able to simply identify the various features that corresponded to the prescribed questions. Dot points worked well here, although many students chose to explain in detail how their answers addressed the question, which was not required. Overall, most students demonstrated a high capacity to identify the various visual and written features of the sources.

Part c. and d. questions for all revolutions featured both an ‘explain’ question, which generally related to a revolutionary individual, and an ‘analyse’ question that required students to analyse the extent to which change occurred for a particular group. Students were required to adhere strictly to the time and topic constraints provided, maintaining focus on the assigned subject matter. Higher-scoring responses effectively integrated the question, their own perspectives, relevant source material and additional knowledge to substantiate their arguments. Conversely, lower-scoring responses often drifted into a narration of topics without clear alignment to the question’s requirements, strayed off topic by including information from outside the designated time period, or relied heavily on reproduction of source material.

Each revolution also featured an eight-mark ‘evaluate’ question, asking students to independently assess and justify their judgments with other evidence. This assessment also required students to use source material; thus, responses that failed to incorporate the required source could not receive high scores for this question. These questions were all based on Area of Study 2 for each revolution. Therefore, responses with expansive discussion of Area of Study 1 content without discussion of change that occurred fell short in delivering a comprehensive grasp of the subject matter.

Higher-scoring responses effectively spanned the entire time period relevant to the topic. The strongest responses demonstrated a comprehensive coverage of events, maintained a cohesive flow of ideas and supported their arguments with highly pertinent, carefully chosen evidence.

Lower-scoring responses typically paraphrased information from the source, failed to provide own evidence or engaged in lengthy narration of events rather than an evaluation of ideas, indicating a lack of understanding of the question or a deficiency of own knowledge.

Questions 1a., 1b., 2a., 2b., 3a., 3b., 4a. and 4b.

Questions 1a., 1b., 2a., 2b., 3a., 3b., 4a. and 4b. required students to identify the visual and written features of a visual source.

* Generally, these questions were handled very well by the vast majority of students. Very few students confused the written and visual features within the sources.
* Some students tended to overwrite these questions, and even began utilising the extra writing space in the back of the Question and Answer Book, which was not required.
* Most students either clearly signposted using terms such as ‘the first feature is …’ or simply used dot points to denote their responses, which were both equally valid.

Questions 1c., 2c., 3c. and 4c.

All part c. questions in Section A required students to explain a topic for five marks. America’s focus was on the ideas of Thomas Paine and how they challenged the existing order. France’s concern was on the actions of Marie Antoinette and how they weakened support for the monarchy. Russia’s question regarded Tsarina Alexandra and how she contributed to the February Revolution, and China required an explanation on why the Guomindang (Kuomintang) lost the Civil War.

Generally, most students were able to form meaningful arguments that specifically addressed the question, as well as utilise direct quotations from the source material and provide precise own knowledge to justify the claims made.

* Higher-scoring responses were able to weave a clear argument throughout, quoting the source material verbatim and explicitly detailing when doing so using quotation marks, as well as the use of brackets (‘Source 2’ / ‘S2’) or signposting (‘As seen in Source 2 …’). These responses also provided multiple pieces of relevant, well-chosen specific evidence to justify their claims.
* Lower-scoring responses typically did not go beyond the source material or provided a running narrative or basic description of events without any meaningful connection to the specific demands of the question.
* As this question was clearly focused on the topics mentioned above, responses that departed from discussion of these individuals/movements into peripheral figures or events did not score well.

Questions 1d., 2d., 3d. and 4d.

Part d. questions for all revolutions required an analysis of an element of change for each society. America focused on the conditions of Native Americans, France on the power of the monarchy, Russia on the lives of women and China on the lives of peasants.

The analysis questions required students to determine the consequences of the revolution and its impacts on these particular groups. Overall, students were able to construct relevant arguments, utilise the source material and bring in own knowledge to expand upon their claims.

* Lower-scoring responses clung close to the source material and failed to provide historical knowledge of any relevance or specificity, drifted into a narrative on the revolutionary period, or went off topic to other groups or ideas outside the specified time periods.
* Higher-scoring responses were able to remain on topic and utilised a host of resources, both within and outside of the source material to address their specific prompt.
* Responses that were able to extend beyond simple explanations and provide an element of analysis scored well.

Questions 1e., 2e., 3e. and 4e.

Part e. questions for all revolutions required students to evaluate a premise in an extended response for 10 marks. America’s focus was on the extent to which the Bill of Rights enabled leaders to achieve their ideals. France’s was on the extent to which Federalist and counter-revolutionary revolts challenged the survival of the new regime. The Russian question required an evaluation of Lenin’s leadership and the extent to which it enabled the survival of the new regime, while the Chinese question required an evaluation of the consequences of the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution (GPCR) on Chinese society. All extended response questions were attached to source material in 2024.

As a 10-mark question using the ‘evaluate’ command term, students needed to form a logical argument utilising supporting evidence and ultimately make a judgement for or against the premise of the question.

* Lower-scoring responses tended to narrate, clung closely to the source material and/or lacked specific evidence outside that which was already provided.
* Students generally kept to the time periods implied within the questions; however, some responses tended to drift outside these parameters, which weakened the response overall.
* Higher-scoring responses began with a clear thesis in an introductory sentence/paragraph that clearly stated their position. They utilised a range of relevant and well-chosen evidence to justify the assertions they made and utilised historical interpretations well to supplement their own knowledge.
* As detailed earlier, historical interpretations are not required for full marks. Responses that formed their contention solely around a historian’s interpretation of the revolution, or relied heavily on historical interpretations as the primary basis of their discussion, did not achieve as highly as those that developed their own theses and then utilised interpretations to enrich their own arguments.

Question 1 – The American Revolution

Question 1a.

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Marks | 0 | 1 | 2 | Average |
| % | 9 | 8 | 83 | 1.8 |

In Question 1a., many students correctly made reference to features such as Samuel Adams being flanked by important goddesses, the presence of the goddesses themselves and even the ornate nature of the representation of Samuel Adams.

Question 1b.

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Marks | 0 | 1 | 2 | Average |
| % | 10 | 4 | 86 | 1.8 |

For Question 1b., most students successfully detailed written features associated with the key revolutionary idea of liberty, including the Magna Charta and the Laws to Enslave America, as references to American freedoms. There were also some references to Paul Revere’s prominent signature, which was also a valid response to this question.

Question 1c.

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Marks | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | Average |
| % | 10 | 2 | 14 | 47 | 24 | 4 | 2.8 |

High-scoring responses to Question 1c. were able to form meaningful links between the source and how the existing order was challenged. These responses made direct connections to documents such as Common Sense and other Enlightenment ideas such as Natural Rights. These responses explored exactly how the traditional order was challenged and how Paine’s ideas progressed the colonists towards the development of a revolutionary situation and the eventual conception of possible independence.

Specific, well-chosen evidence featured in the higher-scoring responses, while Lower-scoring responses tended to cling to the material provided in the sources and typically did not provide any own knowledge.

The following is part of an extract from a high-scoring response to Question 1c.:

Thomas Paine transported the Enlightenment ideas of a republican government and liberty to a wider colonial audience, propelling the Revolution. Source 2 depicts how through ‘Common Sense’ (10 January 1776) Paine argued ‘A government of their own was their natural right’, evidencing how this pamphlet challenged existing notions of connection with Britain, as exemplified by the olive branch petition (5 July 1775). Thus, Paine was a key impetus in spreading further for a Republic, to escape the tyrannical encroachments of the British monarchy. Moreover, source to conveys pains argument that Britain acted as ‘brutus’ in making war upon the colonists. This exemplifies how liberty, and freedom from tyrannical overreach echoed through his pamphlet, necessitating a disruption to the colonists’ connection with Great Britain. Furthermore, ‘Common Sense’ emphasises how Paine’s ideas challenged the existing order. 100 copies were sold in a fortnight, and 100,000 in a year, as the ideas of republicanism and liberty were dispensed throughout the lower colonial classes. Hence, Thomas Paine’s ideas on a decisive separation from British monarchy and the uplift of liberty furthered the revolutionary cause, underpinning the Declaration of Independence (6 July 1776).

Question 1d.

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Marks | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | Average |
| % | 11 | 3 | 14 | 38 | 22 | 10 | 2 | 3.0 |

Question 1d. was handled with mixed success overall. Most students were able to utilise the source effectively, discussing how the settlers pushed ever increasingly westward, and many students were able to accurately detail the position of Native Americans prior to the revolution.

However, some students lacked the specificity of own knowledge to detail how the experiences of Native Americans were changed by the revolution. Lower-scoring responses clung to the source, most often simply transcribing the source material, or detailing the experience of Native Americans with more of a focus on their position prior to the revolution, while ignoring any real analysis on how this changed following the revolution up to 1789.

Higher-scoring responses detailed ideas such as how Native Americans were left unprotected and how they were increasingly seen by many as a conquered people (as many sided with the British) and therefore their land was deemed conquered territory after the war. These responses provided a baseline reading for the status of Native Americans, then made a clear analytical statement on how this position changed. These responses that were able to cover the entire time period and provide a higher level of specificity to their evidence scored well here.

The following is an example of a high-scoring response to Question 1d.:

The experiences of Native Americans before and after the revolution was hallmarked by fluctuations in conflict and power. Source 3 argues how Native Americans were impacted as ‘numerous British American settlers pushed westward’ after the Proclamation Act (7 October 1763). 175,000 Native Americans were impacted by these encroachments of their land, provoking a period of conflict in Pontiacs rebellion (1763-66). This shifted during the war as ‘Native Americans found themselves in a position of relative power’, as their allegiances with the British afforded them protection. Yet, this would change again after the colonial victory, as the Treaty of Paris (10 February 1783) and the Northwest Ordinance (13 July 1787) sanctioned colonial expansion into Native American territory. Hence the Native Americans experienced unstable positions of power and weaknesses during the revolution, as their authority in their land changed.

Question 1e.

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Marks | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 | Average |
| % | 15 | 3 | 7 | 15 | 16 | 15 | 13 | 10 | 4 | 2 | 1 | 4.0 |

Most responses demonstrated a solid understanding of the Bill of Rights; however, only the higher-scoring responses made a clear connection as to how it enabled the revolutionary leaders to achieve their ideals.

Lower-scoring responses focused their discussion on the ratification process that led to the Bill of Rights, without addressing the second portion of the prompt. Others provided an extended narration of the time period and ended with the ratification of the Bill, without any real evaluation as to whether or not it achieved any of the revolutionary leaders’ aims. These responses highlighted little understanding of ideas such as how the Bill of Rights would act as the compromise that would save the Constitution.

Higher-scoring responses were able to explicitly detail the aims of the revolutionary leaders and typically contended that the Bill was in itself a compromise of the aims of many of these individuals. Students typically knew the first few amendments well (many were contained in the source material). However, the higher-level responses were able to move beyond this to include specific own evidence, such as the 10th Amendment to the Constitution relating to State’s Rights, which was utilised well to justify their arguments. Some of the more successful responses also recognised that the Bill of Rights only protected the liberties of a privileged section of the population, and that the rights of many living in the new Republic remained unprotected.

The following is an extract from a high-scoring response to Question 1e.:

Whilst the Bill of Rights (16 December 1791) cemented key individual rights, its practical nature and exclusion of minorities acted as limitations on its achievement of revolutionary goals.

The Bill of Rights directly safeguarded the Americans from infringements on natural rights undertaken by the British, successfully achieving the ideal of securing individual liberty. As Source 4 captures, ‘antipathy towards a strong central government was only one concern’, as ‘many … feared it did not protect individual rights’. Amendment 4 of the bill, however, directly addresses the Writes of Assistance that had provoked leaders to pursue revolution, with the ‘right of the people to be secure … against unreasonable searches and seizures … shall not be violated’. What James Otis claimed the ‘most destructive of English liberty’ was directly prohibited by the Bill, confirming Bailyn’s view that it was the ‘apotheosis of the revolution’. Similarly, Amendment 7 maintained ‘in all criminal trials, the accused shall have access to an impartial jury’ directly ensuring that the Administration of Justice Act (20 May 1774) could not be repeated. Alongside Amendment 1, preserving the freedom of speech, press, religion’ (Source 4), it’s clear that the bill ensured British tyranny could not occur again.

Question 2 – The French Revolution

Question 2a.

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Marks | 0 | 1 | 2 | Average |
| % | 4 | 4 | 92 | 1.9 |

Question 2a. required reference to two visual features from Source 5 that detailed inequality. Most students correctly detailed features such as the tired or old depiction of the peasantry, the rested and healthy depiction of the First and Second Estates, and the fact that the peasant is carrying the burden of the other parties.

Question 2b.

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Marks | 0 | 1 | 2 | Average |
| % | 5 | 3 | 92 | 1.9 |

Question 2b. was completed successfully, with written features such as ‘wet with tears’, ‘tallies’, ‘tithes’ and ‘corvee’ making up the bulk of responses evidencing the hardships experienced by members of the Third Estate.

Question 2c.

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Marks | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | Average |
| % | 4 | 1 | 11 | 46 | 31 | 6 | 3.2 |

Most students responded well to Question 2c. on Marie Antoinette, referencing source material effectively and bringing in their own knowledge pertaining to her weakening of support for the monarchy, typically in the context of difficult financial and economic circumstances. Most students referred to examples of her perceived excess in spending and gambling, the embarrassing Affair of the Diamond Necklace, and/or her lavish garden at Versailles.

Higher-scoring responses used the source as a springboard for their own ideas, and matched its themes with the inclusion of relevant contextual knowledge of events and actions that caused damage to the monarchy.

Lower-scoring responses clung to the source and/or provided general evidence with no real connection as to how the monarchy was weakened.

The following is an example of a high-scoring response to Question 2c.:

The actions of “Madam deficit”, (S6) Marie Antoinette, seriously damaged the image of the old regime and angered the ‘menu pueple’. S6 outlines the Queen’s “headless extravagance in difficult times” (S6), such as the 2 million livres price tag of the 1783 renovations of the Petit Trianon whilst “poverty was France's most visible social problem” (Doyle). People resented the financial “privileges of the monarchy” (S6) and sought to address it’s corruption. Importantly, Marie Antoinette’s undermining of Calonne in 1787 and empowerment of Brienne in 1780 with “gifts, offices and money” (S6) characterised the monarchy as a corrupt functionless consumer of wealth, a stark juxtaposition to the economic suffering of ordinary people. Whilst not directly attributable to the Queen’s actions, her rumoured sexual promiscuity delegitimized the idea of divine right monarchy as Louis XVI’s heirs may not be his after all. This resulted in a flurry of crude political pamphlets as the Queens extravagance generated discontent with the monarchy and offended its traditional supporters before 1789.

Question 2d.

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Marks | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | Average |
| % | 5 | 2 | 12 | 35 | 29 | 14 | 3 | 3.4 |

Students generally handled this question well, providing a detailed analysis of the changes of the power of the monarchy between 1789 and 1791. Lower-scoring responses tended to narrate or over-relied on the source material and lacked specific own knowledge. They also tended to fixate on the powers of the King without detailing how they changed between 1789 and 1791. A small number of responses misinterpreted elements of The Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen as the Constitution, declaring them the same document, which indicated a lack of understanding.

Higer-scoring responses were able to clearly articulate the weakening power of the monarchy with the move from absolute to constitutional monarchy, and utilised evidence such as the 1791 Constitution and the influence/control of the mob in events such as the Bastille and October days in 1789 to great effect.

The following is an example of a high-scoring response to Question 2d.:

The power of French monarchy was greatly curtailed from 1789-1791. Having “inherited a power too contested to remain an absolute monarch”, (Furet) Louis XVI Conceded to the National Assembly on 15 July 1789 and committed the monarchy to the fate of “constitutional” restrictions and “veto” (S7). The survival of divine-right hereditary absolutism was attacked in the “destruction of the old social order” (S7) of privileges. On 5-6 October 1789, the women’s March on Versailles brought the monarchy to the Tuileries Palace, effectively prisoners of the revolution, having “surrendered … his power to a mob” (S7). However, Louis sought to avenge absolutism with the 20-25 June 1791 “flight to Varennes” (S7) when he failed to escape the revolution and encouraged republicanism. This undermined the 1791 constitution which granted the former despot a mere suspensive veto as the monarchy was merely symbolic and became a reminder of France’s plutocracy. Absolute monarchy no longer had a role in France by 1791 as Louis’ missteps and the National Constituent Assemblies persecution of symbols of long-term hardship condemned the monarchy to the dustbin of history for the time being.

Question 2e.

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Marks | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 | Average |
| % | 12 | 4 | 9 | 14 | 14 | 13 | 13 | 11 | 7 | 3 | 1 | 4.3 |

The survival of the new regime was generally addressed well, although many students tended to over-rely on the source material for their discussion.

Many concluded that the National Convention feared counter-revolution in the Vendée due to factors such as the war, the execution and treatment of King Louis XVI, and the changes imposed on the Church. However, most responses did not provide a secondary example or delve deeply into the Federalist revolts in Lyon or Nantes. These revolts reflected grievances about the centralisation of power in Paris, which prompted the revolutionary government to respond with terror as a means of suppressing the challenge. Responses that provided a more thorough exploration of ideas and detailed own knowledge tended to score highly.

Many responses also brought in references to external threats, such as the war with Austria and Prussia and how it impacted the survival of the new regime, which elevated them above the middle band. Most students were able to accurately distinguish between Federalist and counter-revolutionary revolts; however, many conflated the two, which limited their responses.

The higher-scoring responses were able to utilise the source effectively as a springboard, then bring in a host of own knowledge to justify their position relating to the challenges posed to the new regime. Some of these responses emphasised the division in the direction of the revolution these revolts highlighted, such as the declaration of the emergency government and eventual introduction of the Terror. They also emphasised how the revolts were serious enough for troops to be diverted from fighting the International War as key factors in the declaration of the emergency government.

The following is an extract from a high-scoring response to Question 2e.:

The federalist revolts and counter revolution in the Vendee proved a serious yet surmountable challenge to the survival of the new regime. The revolts of Lyon, Bordeaux and Marseilles were significant in their opposition to the National Convention’s seemingly arbitrary rule and Paris’ radicalism. Likewise the Vendee rebellion of 1793-1794 undermined the newly established order of France as “the convention is weak because it has been abandoned”, raising a 40,000 strong army to repudiate the gains of the revolution. The opposition within France caused economic problems with hoarding of grain, sugar, candles, coffee and soap due to regional discontent, which in turn generated urban instability such as the 4-5 September 1793 day of the Enrages. By 1793, the assignattiad dropped 51% of the face value and wages were stagnant.

However, whilst a signal of instability, the revolts were eventually crushed through the application of Terror. Having “revitalised justice in a republican style” (S8) the convention established the machinery of state-sanctioned violence. Marseilles, a “vile and rebellios city” (S8) was dealt with “swift and terrible mass shootings” (S8), as Nante’s in the Vendee Witnessed mass drownings that killed up to 4800. “The Death of the scoundrels” (S8) was endorsed by national government to “replace the supreme tribunal of the peoples vengeance” (Danton) with the Revolutionary Tribunal. Over 70% of deaths in the Terror occurred in the Vendee and Federalist regions an “none played a greater role in terrorising the nations than the representatives on mission” (Borsher). In this sense, internal dissidents posed a military and political threat to the new regime, however the Convention was well equipped with amoral deputies and the means to “organise the despotism of liberty” (Robespierre) to subdue these threats and ensure the survival of revolutionary gains.

Question 3 – The Russian Revolution

Question 3a.

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Marks | 0 | 1 | 2 | Average |
| % | 3 | 6 | 91 | 1.9 |

Students mostly responded well to Question 3a., with clear references made to the visual features of Nicholas displaying fear. Most students referred to features such as the clutching of royal garments/robe, the holding down of the crown, the presence of the fire extinguisher by his side and the startled expression of Nicholas, which were all valid answers. Lower-scoring responses attempted to explain the reasons why Nicholas was fearful, which was not the focus of this question.

Question 3b.

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Marks | 0 | 1 | 2 | Average |
| % | 1 | 2 | 97 | 2.0 |

The written features required for Question 3b. were correctly identified by most students. Most answers referenced words such as ‘hate’, ‘discontent’, ‘tyranny’, ‘royal extinguisher’ and ‘despotism’. There was a misrepresentation of the word ‘Aristocracy’ on the steps to the throne as ‘Autocracy’ in the text below the image. Therefore, both terms were acceptable responses for this question and students were not penalised for their inclusion.

Question 3c.

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Marks | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | Average |
| % | 2 | 2 | 13 | 44 | 32 | 8 | 3.3 |

Many students responded well to Question 1c., which required an examination of how Tsarina Alexandra contributed to the outbreak of the February Revolution. Most students referenced the ways in which Alexandra sought to influence her husband to remain firm and unrelenting, and nearly all students made reference to her relationship with Rasputin.

Higher-scoring responses provided relevant and specific evidence to expand upon their claims, utilising evidence such as the ministerial changes made to the Russian government under Alexandra, as well as the dismissal of protests for bread that led to the development of revolutionary tensions.

Lower-scoring responses failed to provide this level of specificity to their own evidence, merely paraphrasing the source material, or omitting it completely.

The following is an example of a high-scoring response to Question 3c.:

Alexandra’s poor leadership following Tsar Nicholas is taking control of the war effort (22 August 1915) contributed significantly to the outbreak of the February Revolution (22-27 February 1917). Indeed, her continuance of tsarist autocratic role, as exemplified in her exhortation to “be firm to the end” (source 10), manifested itself in “ministerial leapfrogging” (Figes) whereby 4 prime ministers were elected during her rule September (1915-February 1917). This bred discontent within the 4th Duma, who formed a liberal progressive block in opposition to the Tsarina. The progressive blocks opposition to the Tsarina was also derived from their, as well as the general public’s distrust of the Tsarina’s relationship with Grigori Rasputin, as evidenced by [Grigory Rasputin] “said so and I absolutely believe it” (S10). As such, the Tsarina’s incompetent leadership and alleged affair with Rasputin sealed her unpopularity with the Russian people, contributing to the development of liberal opposition in the Duma, such as the incendiary “stupidity or treason” speech by Milyukov made in November 1917. Thus, this contributed to the outbreak of the February revolution.

Question 3d.

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Marks | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | Average |
| % | 2 | 1 | 9 | 43 | 28 | 13 | 3 | 3.5 |

Overall, students had quite a lot to say in response to Question 3d. Most students clearly contended that the lives of women changed considerably as a result of the October Revolution. The source was utilised extensively in most responses, with references to the code of marriage, the improved legal status of women and divorce becoming increasingly available as the focal point of discussions.

Lower-scoring responses tended to paraphrase or narrate their way through the source material without extending analytical discussion with any meaningful conclusions or including specific own evidence.

Higher-scoring responses were able to include specific details such as Kollontai’s contribution to the betterment of the lives of women, the establishment of the Zhenotdel, laws pertaining to abortion and even the impact of the revolution on the literacy rates of women, which were foundationally lower than that of men. The highest-scoring responses provided a clear conclusion that summarised their position well and were well evidenced throughout.

The following is an example of a high-scoring response to Question 3d.:

Initially, the Bolsheviks “radical program for the liberation of women” (S11) promised an improvement in women’s’ rights after their coming to power (26 Oct 1917). First, their establishment of the Zhentodel (Dec 1917) demonstrated the Bolsheviks’ prioritization of women’s liberties under the new regime. Further, “[the] Code on Marriage … [and] Family … in October 1918 … equalized women’s legal status with men’s”, such as offering rights like no fault divorce. Russia became the first European country to legalize abortion for women in November 1920, exemplifying the positive changes made to women’s lives after the October revolution.

However, the state rebuilding New Economic Policy (6 March 1921-1927) ended up reversing some of these gains as other areas of economic importance, like electrification, was prioritized. The “closure of public dining halls, creches and communal laundries” (Source 11) that had previously liberated women now reverted their lives back to pre-revolutionary patriarchal roles. As such, Lenin and the Bolsheviks vision for feminist liberation “was never fully actualized”, meaning that by 1927, women were left once again responsible for looking after children” (Source 11) and traditional feminine gender roles.

Question 3e.

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Marks | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 | Average |
| % | 4 | 2 | 4 | 10 | 15 | 18 | 17 | 16 | 9 | 4 | 1 | 5.2 |

Students typically responded well to this question, evaluating the extent to which Lenin’s leadership enabled the survival of the new regime. Most students were able to use the source and provide a detailed discussion of the different ways Lenin contributed to the regime’s survival, describing efforts such as the dissolution of the Constituent Assembly, the support of Red Terror and the New Economic Policy (NEP).

Lower-scoring responses typically reframed the source material to suit their discussion. These overly descriptive responses tended to list or discuss anything associated with Lenin that may have been better known. However, they failed to provide any real evaluation of Lenin’s leadership or any discussion/evaluation as to how it did or did not benefit the regime’s survival. Lower-scoring responses also tended to provide too much description of Lenin’s return to Russia in April 1917 and the provision of his April Thesis, which was outside the scope of the question.

Higher-scoring responses were able to thoroughly examine the impact of Lenin and offered a strong evaluation of a range of his leadership decisions. A minority of these responses focused their discussion on Lenin alone, with some referencing the gradual decline in his importance from 1921 onwards due to illness, thus limiting his effectiveness in enabling the regime’s success. Many high-scoring responses also brought in other key figures who assisted the survival of the regime, including Trotsky, Dzerzhinsky and Kollontai. No matter what approach was taken here, the evaluation was clear, concise and well-evidenced, leading to responses falling in the higher mark bands.

The following is an extract from a high-scoring response to Question 3e.:

Lenin’s leadership both destabilised and consolidated the Sovnarkom’s regime. Through the policies of war communism May (1918-8 March 1921) threatened the stability of the communist regime, he is rectification of this with the new economic policy (8 March 1921-1927) enabled the regime survival.

Firstly, Lenin’s dismissal of the constituent assembly on the 6th of January 1918 was a way in which he consolidated the power of the new regime. The lack of Bolshevik majority, only 175 seats gained of the total 707, threatened the legitimacy of the regime. Compared to the socialist revolutionaries gaining 370 seats, it was only “logical and consistent” (Protasev) that Lenin dismissed the assembly to crush opposition before it arose. This not only showed Lenin’s ability as a leader to enable survival of the Bolshevik regime at any cost, but his reversion to “dictatorship and terror” (Source 12) in the face of opposition. This strategy would continue with the creation of the CHEKA (17 December 1917) who carried out 140,000 executions and a further 120,000 casualties whilst suppressing peasant rebellions during the Red Terror of September 1918-1921. For Lenin, “the machine gun had become for them the principle instrument of political persuasion” (Service), this was a necessary tactic to ensure the survival of the communist state.

However, the policies of War Communism instated by Lenin, though initially intended to assist the survival of the new regime, actually threatened communist power. The immense unpopularity of grain requisitioning led to over 15,000 grain requisition agents murdered. The largest of these rebellions, the Tambov revolt – with 40,000 partisan peasants troops – threatened the new regime immensely. Though the policies of War Communism arguably allowed Lenin to “win the civil war” (Source 12) as grain requisitioning allowed them to literally starve their opponents, it also led to the horrifying death of 5 million (Figes) in the 1921 famine. This polarised the former “reddest of the red” (Trotsky) at Kronstadt, against Lenin’s regime, leading to the Rebellion of March 1921. Thus, Lenin’s policy of War Communism, created mass discontent and “a partly organised chaos” (Nove) that rather than consolidating the power of his regime, directly threatened it.

Question 4 – The Chinese Revolution

Question 4a.

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Marks | 0 | 1 | 2 | Average |
| % | 11 | 3 | 86 | 1.8 |

Most students who attempted Question 4a. correctly cited the title and provided a variation of it in their responses, such as ‘Love the Common People’, ‘Help the Common People’ and/or ‘Protect the Common People’. However, references to the source of the image (‘Produced by the Political Department of the High Command of the Fourth Military Region’) did not adequately address the question as to how the Red Army soldiers were instructed to treat the people.

Question 4b.

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Marks | 0 | 1 | 2 | Average |
| % | 9 | 2 | 89 | 1.8 |

Students who attempted Question 4b. correctly cited visual features such as the soldier bandaging the peasant, the soldier assisting with planting in the background and/or the gun being placed against the tree, indicating the soldier was not a threat to the people. Responses that made references to the written features did not receive any marks.

Question 4c.

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Marks | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | Average |
| % | 9 | 1 | 11 | 46 | 26 | 6 | 3.0 |

Question 4c. provided scope for students to explain why the Guomindang (Kuomintang) lost the Civil War. Lower-scoring responses tended to narrate the history of the GMD across the time period without making direct links as to how particular events or actions of leaders led to their later loss of the civil war.

More successful responses discussed ideas such as the failure of strategy of the GMD compared to the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) as a cause of their loss, connecting it to the source material explicitly and citing military events, or various economic and social policies, to justify their claims.

There were a number of responses that incorrectly interpreted the ‘bloody scenes’ in Shanghai in 1948 referenced in the source as the Shanghai Massacre of 1927, limiting the overall response.

The following is an example of a higher-scoring response to Question 4c.:

The GMD lost the Chinese Civil War (July 1941-October 1949) due to poor military strategy and a low morale amongst soldiers.

Firstly, the GMD remained trapped in towns and cities while the People’s Liberation army were much more mobile. This caused them to be constantly under siege, failing “to achieve a single major victory between 1947 and 1949” (Source 14). In addition to this, GMD forces often abandoned arms and supplies while fleeing the PLA, causing them to lose the advantage of better resources. Overall, the GMD suffered from significant strategic disadvantages in the Civil War, allowing the PLA to chip away at them until they achieved victory.

Secondly, morale amongst the GMD troops was a significant issue, aptly described by the three don’t cares, “don’t care about myself, don’t care about my comrades, don’t care about my country”. Stilwell describes nationals morale as “practically zero”, illustrating the dire circumstances inside nationalist camps. Furthermore, this low morale caused many GMD soldiers to switch sides, meaning “Jiang could never wholly rely on his supported supporters” (Source 15). Mao jokingly called Jiang his “supply officer”, illustrating the significance of GMD desertions in their loss. Overall, the low morale in GMD troops is a major factor in their loss in the civil war, preventing soldiers from putting in the required effort and often driving them to desertion.

Question 4d.

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Marks | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | Average |
| % | 11 | 2 | 15 | 35 | 23 | 11 | 2 | 3.0 |

There were a considerable number of students who made reference to the Great Leap Forward (GLF) and the Three Bad Years, which were outside the scope of this question. By far, this was the question that produced the most errors in student responses Very few students referenced only the pre-revolutionary period without detailing how the revolution impacted the lives of the people of this group. Most students were able to accurately detail the changes to the lives of the peasants and used evidence such as the Agrarian Reform Law and the Fanshen that followed to justify their arguments.

Lower-scoring responses touched upon the plight of landlords (without connection to how this meaningfully impacted peasants), or the GLF/Three Bad Years, which were both outside the scope of this question. Similarly to other questions, overrepresentation of source material was the standard here for middle to low responses.

Higher-scoring responses were able to stay within the timeframe and provided clear evidence to substantiate their claims on how peasants’ lives changed. Some of these responses challenged the premise and detailed that overall, life for many peasants was not substantially different following the revolution, due to the ever-increasing control imposed by the Chinese government until 1957.

The following is an example of a higher-scoring response to Question 4d.:

Up to 1957, the lives of peasants had not improved dramatically in a social sense, however they had gained more ownership around land. Before the revolution, despite being more than 85% of the population, peasants were deeply impoverished, lacked literacy and many did not have the ownership of the land they worked. However, after the revolution, peasants’ lives changed, especially with the Agrarian Land reform Law and mass campaign of Fanshen, which involved overturning ownership of the land, as well as the soil to reap great benefit. This saw landlords held in front of 10,000+ crowds of angry peasants who could air their grievances. It also saw the seizure of land from landlords, who by 1957, were essentially eradicated as a class.

Despite gaining this autonomy, peasants still lacked social reform. Peasants, under the first five-year plan (1953-57), were forced into cooperatives of more than 100 families in some cases, where land was collectivised, and resources became shared. This saw some peasants have their recently claimed land taken, most of these proto-communes were also highly disorganised, with a little social improvement being made. For example, it was still difficult for peasants to go see a doctor, and infrastructure had been largely neglected in these communities. Overall, while peasants did gain ownership of land, they lacked social change in most other areas.

Question 4e.

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Marks | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 | Average |
| % | 13 | 1 | 4 | 11 | 15 | 17 | 15 | 12 | 7 | 3 | 1 | 4.6 |

Most responses were able to accurately evaluate the consequences of the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution. Many responses held closely to the ideas of the source, focusing discussion on the Red Guards, attacks on Rightists and the general impact on the culture of Chinese society. Responses were typically structured to discuss social, cultural and political consequences, or they were across topics such as the Red Guards, Cult of Personality and the Four Olds. Either structure was appropriate for this question.

Lower-scoring responses clung to the source material and had little to add of their own knowledge. They either devolved into narration of the Cultural Revolution or a description of the violence perpetrated by the Red Guards.

Very few students fell into the trap of discussing the causes and course of the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution (GPCR) in extended detail, which was pleasing to see.

Higher-scoring responses did briefly contextualise the Cultural Revolution, but focused the brunt of their discussion on the overall consequences the GPCR had on Chinese society. Most made references to the political, social and cultural impact it had on society through the actions of the Red Guards and the marginalisation of political targets such as Liu Shaoqi. A small number of responses chose to focus on the damage the GPCR caused the industrial sector and production, as well as how the ‘Up to the Mountains’ program affected China’s peasantry, which were also valid arguments to make.

The following is an example of a high-scoring response to Question 4e.:

The great proletarian cultural revolution had significant consequences on Chinese society, cementing Mao’s power and severely limiting freedom of expression.

The Cultural Revolution portrayed Mao as a Godlike figure to the Chinese people through violence, and various staged events. Mao launched the culture revolution with the intent of re-establishing his power after stepping down from leadership, utilising hero worship through the red guards to both increase the respect of young people for his leadership and kill those who had opposed him. He chose students for his “first instrument of terror” (Chang), consequently resulting in immense violence and fearful respect throughout China, with teachers and authority figures “tortured and in extreme cases murdered” (Source 16). This illustrates Mao’s willingness to co-opt social groups for the sake of his own power and harm a significant portion of his own population to cement his position as a God-like figure who was “worshipped by the people” (Tong Lin). Mao also utilised staged events, such as his ‘good swim’ to create a perception of him as superhuman. He claimed to have swum at 9 metres per second, illustrating him to be a “paragon of athleticism, capable of superhuman feats” (Fairbank). Ultimately, the culture revolution caused an increase of level of respect for Mao and his power, though largely out of fear.

Secondly, the Cultural Revolution severely limited freedom of expression in China. According to source 16, only 124 novels were published during its duration. Any artistic expression had to be “approved by Jiang Ching” (Source 16) and any thoughts or word against Mao was blasphemy, with Lin Biao arguing that “the thoughts of chairman Mao are always correct”. Play scripts seemingly against Mao’s ideology such as ‘Hai Rui dismissed from office’, would be cracked down upon with severity and strict investigation. Beyond this, personal expression such as clothing based off western designs “was out of bounds” (Source 16). The limitations on personal freedom and expression as a result of the Cultural Revolution demonstrated Mao’s fear and desperation for support and his lack of belief in the Chinese people to support his ideals and government without the threat of violence and death. Overall, the suppression of freedom of expression was a major consequence of the Cultural Revolution for Chinese society, forcing citizens into supporting Mao and his ideas under the threat of execution.

Section B

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Marks | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 |
| % | 3 | 1 | 2 | 2 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 4 | 5 | 5 | 8 |

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Marks | 11 | 12 | 13 | 14 | 15 | 16 | 17 | 18 | 19 | 20 | Average |
| % | 9 | 14 | 9 | 10 | 7 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 | 0.5 | 10.6 |

In Section B, students chose an essay topic from four revolutionary contexts. The VCAA website outlines the assessment criteria and descriptors for holistic essay marking. Students, familiar with the expectations, confidently tackled this part of the exam. The criteria included constructing an argument, demonstrating historical knowledge, applying historical thinking concepts and using evidence to support a historical argument.

All essay questions in 2024 focused on the contribution of one factor that made the outbreak of revolution certain. Thus, the basis for all essay questions was in the pre-revolutionary periods. The American section question focused on the contribution of popular movements; the French on the spread of Enlightenment ideas; the Russian on the influence of liberal ideas and reforms; and the Chinese required discussion of the influence of Mao Zedong Thought.

The distribution of essay topic choices was as follows.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Essay topic** | **Distribution** |
| The American Revolution | 14% |
| The French Revolution | 31% |
| The Russian Revolution | 39% |
| The Chinese Revolution | 14% |
| No selection | 1% |

* Most responses provided a clear introduction that articulated their position, as well as three separate discernible paragraphs and a short conclusion.
* Responses that were able to provide a clear understanding of the question and ensured that relevant discussion was provided on the stated premise generally scored quite well.
* Due to the nature of the questions, responses were allowed to focus on other factors that made the outbreak of revolution certain, as long as the topic itself was not ignored and was still adequately addressed.
* Responses that omitted discussion of the specific topic detailed in the question did not score well.
* In some cases, responses challenged the premise that the topic in question led to the certainty of revolution (especially in the case of the Russian essay topic) and provided a clear justification for such. These responses were relevant and a completely acceptable strategy for students to employ.
* Unfortunately, some responses misread the topics chosen and chose to write exclusively on the post-revolutionary period. These responses did not score well as they did not address the specific demands of the question.
* Responses that abandoned the topic in question and provided pre-prepared essays solely on other factors that led to the outbreak of revolution were generally less successful.
* As essays require the ‘construction of coherent and relevant historical argument’ (page 28 of the 2024 Question and Answer Book), responses that provided a lengthy description/narration of their revolutionary time period did not score as well as those who were able to develop a clear and relevant contention.
* Very few responses utilised Section A document knowledge as own knowledge here, which was pleasing to witness.
* For the most part, evidence including various policies, dates, laws, events and formations of movements was used effectively to justify claims made.
* Many responses also utilised historical interpretations effectively to provide a greater level of analysis to their discussions; however (as discussed previously), this was not required for the top mark bands.
* Those responses that utilised historical interpretations to supplement their own discussion and conclusions scored better than responses that used historians’ quotations as the focal point of their discussion.
* Some responses unfortunately attributed quotes to the wrong historian (in some cases, a historian who does not write on the revolution in question). Such inaccuracies detracted from the value of the response.
* Higher-scoring essays developed original arguments directly relevant to the topic, substantiated their claims with specific knowledge, and crafted evaluative judgments that culminated in a clear conclusion tailored to the question’s requirements. These essays maintained a cohesive thread of relevance from start to finish, skilfully employing signposting to ensure continuous alignment with the prompt, rather than merely bookending paragraphs with restatements of the question.

Question 1 – The American Revolution

The topic for the American Revolution required students to discuss the contribution of popular movements in making the outbreak of revolution certain.

* Many responses were able to correctly identify and provide an understanding of what a popular movement was; however, this was not always the case.
* Some responses conflated popular movements with events such as the Boston Tea Party or Boston Massacre, without reference to the Sons of Liberty, which highlighted a lack of understanding.
* Lower-scoring responses did not reveal a comprehensive understanding of popular movements and tended to describe the movements themselves and their history, rather than focusing on providing any analytical discussion on their contribution to the revolution.
* Some Lower-scoring responses did not adequately identify what popular movements existed. These tended to trend towards narration of the time period rather than providing an argument as to the causes of the revolution.
* Higher-scoring responses were able to clearly articulate what popular movements existed, such as the Sons and Daughters of Liberty, Committees of Correspondence, Provincial Committees and so on, and clearly defined their contribution to making the revolution a certainty.
* In addition to popular movements, most responses chose to consider the impact of other factors in the provision of revolution. Most responses made reference to British taxation policies such as the Sugar and Stamp Acts, as well as more forceful policies such as the Coercive/Intolerable Acts.

The following is a paragraph from a high-scoring response to Question 1:

Moreover, the committees of correspondence and provincial congresses unified the colonies, initiating increasing revolutionary fervour through the defiance of British legislation. The Massachusetts committee of correspondence (12 November 1772) facilitated communication amongst the colonies, spurring a movement that would spread across the colonies. Gordon wood contends that without the committees, “the revolution would have been disorganised and likely unsuccessful”, emphasising the importance of these groups in the outbreak of revolution. Moreover, the committees of inspection would ensure a homogeneous approach to colonial opposition to Great Britain, considered “beacons that steady our revolution” by Thomas Paine. It would be the committees of correspondence that would alert 1200 militiamen to Lexington and Concord (19-20 April 1775), underpinning their importance in facilitating revolutionary action. Furthermore, the provincial congresses acted in open defiance to the Massachusetts government act of 20 May 1774, which prohibited the colony to 1 meeting per year. This allowed the colonist to “continue their revolutionary actions and organisation” (Nash), and thus the provincial congresses were vital in continuing revolutionary sentiment until the outbreak of revolution itself. Thus, the committees of correspondence and the provincial congresses were key popular movements that organised colonial resistance, resulting in the outbreak of revolution.

Question 2 – The French Revolution

The topic for the French Revolution required students to discuss the spread of Enlightenment ideas in making the outbreak of revolution certain.

* Many responses were able to correctly identify and provide an understanding of Enlightenment ideas; however, this was not always the case.
* Lower-scoring responses had trouble at times articulating the ideas present as part of the Enlightenment, and typically narrated the course of events towards revolution. This was to be avoided as it indicated a failure to understand and thus address the specific demands of the question.
* The majority of responses outlined the ideas presented by Enlightenment thinkers and linked these to significant events leading up to and including August 1789.
* A few responses took a more chronological approach and wove the Enlightenment ideas throughout, which was also acceptable.
* Some responses challenged the prompt, arguing that the spread of Enlightenment ideas was less critical to the revolution, and citing more pressing concerns such as the political and financial crises. Those responses that critically assessed Enlightenment ideas and utilised specific evidence to justify their various contentions scored well, while those that simply abandoned the prompt and launched into more pre-prepared responses as to the cause of revolution were not as successful.
* Many responses made reference to the term ‘American Spirit’; however, not all responses that included this idea were able to expand on it and its impact on France.
* Some high-scoring responses were able to weave the ideas of Enlightenment throughout, which led to some rich discussion and analysis; however, this was not required for full marks. Students were equally successful addressing the spread of Enlightenment ideas, while also evaluating other factors, such as the financial crisis France faced pre-1789.
* Higher-scoring responses demonstrated a specific understanding of the Enlightenment ideas and/or criticisms of the old regime, and linked these ideas directly to causes of revolutionary sentiment. They were justified with well-chosen and specific evidence and/or historical interpretations, leading to an evaluative conclusion.

The following is a paragraph from a high-scoring response from Question 2:

The Enlightenment occurred a generation before the French Revolution, yet was engrained in the psyche of the liberal nobility and wealthy bourgeoisie. Notably, the return of 8000 soldiers from the American war of independence “brought with them the seeds of independence” (Madame Campan) proving that an enlightenment inspired society could be achieved. Even before the monarchy of Louis XVI gave signs of weakness, the desire for knowledge infected France and imbued hope in the nobility and bourgeoisie for a government where they had formal influence. On 20 August 1786 when Calonne approached the king with 112 million livres deficit and plans for fiscal reform, it provided these ambitious groups ample opportunity to weaken absolutism and advance themselves to power. First, the assembly of Notables was held from 25 February to 22 May 1787. Doyle explains the mistake of calling the assembly as “the regime had implicitly admitted that it needed some show of popular support to sustain its credit”. The assembly undermined royal prerogatives, refusing to approve new taxes unless “we know the returns of the economy” (Lafayette) despite the accumulating debt and high interest loans. “The Notables where the first revolutionaries” (Schama) as they entered the fight against taxation reform and the abolition of privilege with a focus on the Enlightenment. In accordance with Rousseau, the Notables claimed they ‘did not represent the general will’ nor the ‘true representatives of the nation’ as mostly members of the second estate. This exposed the ultimate plutocracy of the ancient regime’s power was centralised in an incompetent king. Thus, on the basis of the ideas of the Enlightenment, the nobility challenged the status quo which was under threat of financial collapse.

Question 3 – The Russian Revolution

The topic for the Russian Revolution required students to discuss liberal ideas and reforms in Tsarist Russia that made the outbreak of revolution certain.

* Many responses were able to identify the liberal ideas that existed in Tsarist Russia, as well as the reforms attempted by the regime that contributed to revolution.
* The 1905 revolution featured heavily as part of these discussions, although reference to the Dumas was omitted almost as often as it was included.
* Unfortunately, many responses failed to move beyond the time period 1905–1907 in identifying causes of the February revolution, omitting significant events such as how the Russian state fared from 1908 to 1917 from their discussion. As liberal ideas and reforms also existed post-1907 in Russia, these responses therefore lacked detailed discussion that could have led to higher scores.
* Lower-scoring responses sometimes conflated ‘liberal ideas and reforms’ to mean Bolshevism, Marxism, Leninism and/or Socialism. These responses typically devolved into a general description of ideology rather than a sophisticated discussion of what made the outbreak of revolution certain. In some cases, responses referred to the Bolsheviks as Russia’s liberal opposition, which is incorrect.
* Responses that abandoned the prompt to provide pre-prepared responses, which did not include mention of liberal ideas and reforms in Tsarist Russia, failed to adequately address the question and did not score well.
* Due to the nature of this question, students could choose to write about just the February revolution, or both the February and October revolutions. The majority of responses tended to favour the former; however, this did not affect their final result, as both alternatives were equally valid.
* Very few responses unnecessarily delved into the post-revolutionary period after October 1917.
* Higher-scoring responses were able to clearly address the prompt with relevant evidence, and in some cases were able to weave in the failures of reform with other events that catalysed revolution, such as the impact of the war on Russia’s political theatre.
* The top responses also contained an evaluation when discussing their chosen ideas. Rather than simply detailing three factors that made revolution seem certain, they provided a hierarchy or formed a judgement as to which was the most and which was the least critical. These more sophisticated analytical and evaluative responses generally scored well.

The following is a paragraph from a high-scoring response to Question 3:

… Finally, it is worth noting, however, that the creation of the Dumas and Tsar Nicholas subsequent limiting of their powers made the failings of the Tsarist regime all the clearer, thus contributing to the eventual outbreak of revolution. The Duma was established following the 1905 revolution and the October manifesto (17 Oct 1905), creating a parliamentary body to advise Nicholas, despite his distaste for the notion. Despite Nicholas’s best attempts to limit the power of the Duma through the Fundamental Laws of 23 April 1906, the 1st Duma offered nearly 400 criticisms during its 73 day term. Three more Dumas followed with Nicholas dissolving and re-electing them as he pleased using his article 105 powers, demonstrating to the Russian people the true lack of change created by the 1905 Revolution, and Nicholas’ stranglehold over power. While the third Duma, which Stolypin described as “comprised of responsible and statesman like people”, the events of the Lena Massacre of 1912 proved that the governments strict control of society was only there to benefit Nicholas, and not the people. The failing of the Dumas to make any real change to Russian society made it increasingly clear to the Russian people that “meaningful change could not occur as long as the Tsarist regime remained in any capacity” (Medarda), contributing to the inevitability of revolution. Overall, liberal reforms and Tsar Nicholas’ subsequent limitations on them clearly illustrate the impossible nature of a fair society under Tsarist rule, highlighting the need for revolution.

Question 4 – The Chinese Revolution

The topic for the Chinese Revolution required students to discuss the influence of Mao Zedong Thought (Maoism) in making the outbreak of revolution certain.

* Overall, most students understood the nature of this question and were able to address the influence of Mao Zedong Thought in influencing the certainty of revolution.
* There was some confusion present in many responses; they very quickly sidetracked and ignored Mao’s ideas pre-1949, choosing to focus instead on general events in the post-revolutionary period. These responses did not score as well as those that recognised that this question sat in the pre-1949 period.
* Lower-scoring responses also conflated Maoism with Mao himself. These tended to provide ongoing narratives about the life of Mao and the general actions Mao took during the revolution. These responses tended to drift in relevance to the specific demands of the question, and typically found themselves in the low to middle bands.
* Many responses showcased knowledge of key events in Chinese history, especially that of the Long March; however, they failed to adequately connect them to the specific demands of the question. Responses that were able to utilise such events as evidence of the influence of Maoism on the determination of the revolution tended to score higher than those that simply provided a description of events.
* Higher-scoring responses were able to unpack what Mao Zedong Thought was into clear distinct ideas, such as peasant-based revolution, or the concept of the Mass Line and the Yanan Way. These responses tended to score more successfully in the higher bands.
* The open nature of this question allowed students to highlight other factors that assisted in making the outbreak of revolution certain, such as the failures of Chiang and the GMD, as well as the impact of external pressures such as the role of Japan and the Sino-Japanese war. Most students included such factors as relevant causes of revolution.
* The most successful responses were able to interweave these other factors with the topic of the influence of Maoism. Such sophistication of argument placed these responses above the average.

The following is a paragraph from a high-scoring response to Question 4:

… Moreover, the success of Mao Zedong Thought in building a formidable and disciplined Red Army allowed for the communist’s to win the civil war (1946-1949). First developed at Jiangganhshan and then at Jiangxi, Maoist principles such as “do not take even a needle a single piece of thread from the masses” (Mao) enabled the Red Army to flourish as an ideologically united force. Maoism further infused the Red Army at Yanan with emphasis on principles such as self-efficiency leading to the Red Army to grow 40% of their own food. Not only did these Maoist principles engender the development of the Red Army as one that won the support of the masses, but also instilled a sense of discipline and fierce loyalty within them. Renamed the People's Liberation army (August 1946), the core principles of Maoism essentially propelled the communists into victory in the Chinese civil war. Yet, once again, the revolution could not have occurred without the simultaneous failures of the GMD regime. The nationalist army was rampant with corruption and had been devastated by the loss of 3,000,000 troops in the Second Sino-Japanese war of 1937 to 1945 just prior. As such, although Mao Zedong Thought underlay the success of the Red Army and the outbreak of the revolution, so did the nationalist army’s failures also allow for the Red Army victory.