Born (1553–1610), king of France (1589–1610), who restored stability after the religious wars of the 16th century. He was the first of the Bourbon kings of France and also, as Henry III, king of Navarre (1572–1610).

Henry was born at Pau in Navarre on Dec. 13, 1553. His father, Antoine de Bourbon (1518–62), duc de Vendôme, was descended in the ninth generation from the 13th-century king of France, Louis IX. His mother, Jeanne d’Albret (1528–72), was queen of Navarre and niece of King Francis I of France.

The Wars of Religion.

Although baptized a Roman Catholic, Henry was brought up as a Calvinist by his strong-minded mother, a leader of the French Protestant (Huguenot) movement, which during the 1560s became involved in a series of civil wars with the Catholics. Henry’s wedding in 1572 to Margaret of Valois, sister of the reigning monarch, Charles IX, was followed by the massacre of thousands of Huguenots. Henry saved his own life by converting to Roman Catholicism, but he remained a prisoner at court until 1576. After his escape he repudiated his conversion and assumed the leadership of the Huguenot movement.

Military Leader.

Henry’s storming of the fortress town of Cahors in 1580 launched his career as an intrepid military leader. In many subsequent battles his white plume was to be found wherever the fighting was fiercest. He won another brilliant victory at Coutras in 1587 in the war known as the War of the Three Henrys, and two years later formed an alliance with Henry III (the last French king from the Valois dynasty), against the Holy League, dominated by the Guise family. When the Valois king was murdered by a league fanatic in 1589, Henry became king of France as Henry IV.

Backed by Spain and the pope, however, the league refused to acknowledge a Protestant as king of France, and many Catholic nobles who had served Henry III against the league deserted the royal army. Henry won victories over the league at Arques and Ivry and besieged the league stronghold, Paris, which was eventually relieved by a Spanish
army from the Netherlands. Henry skillfully exploited divisions among the leaguers, and in 1593 he disarmed his opponents by announcing his reconversion to Catholicism. A year later he bribed the league commander of the capital to admit his army. One by one, he defeated or bought over the magnates of the house of Guise who continued to resist. In 1595, when he officially declared war on Spain, the pope granted him absolution. He could no longer rely on the Huguenots, who drove a hard bargain to secure a new edict of toleration. This was granted at Nantes in 1598, and it was followed by a peace treaty with Spain. After that, serious resistance to his rule ended.

**Henry as King.**

In 1599 Henry secured papal annulment of his first marriage, and the year after he married Marie de Médicis, a distant cousin of the mother of the last Valois kings. His leading minister, Maximilien de Béthune, duc de Sully, reorganized the finances and promoted the economic recovery of France after decades of civil war. Agriculture, manufacturing, and commerce were encouraged, the burden of taxation upon the peasantry reduced, and the nobility relieved from the pressure of debt by declaring a moratorium. The system by which officials in finance and the judiciary purchased their offices from the Crown was formalized in 1604 by a tax on office known as the *paulette*. At the same time Sully pursued a policy of substituting royal officers for those employed by local representative bodies. Until 1609 these measures were accompanied by an external policy of peace. In that year Henry began preparations to intervene in Germany against the Catholic Habsburg dynasty, a move that was opposed by some French Catholics. The king was about to join his army when he was assassinated by a Catholic extremist on May 14, 1610, in the Rue Saint-Honoré in Paris.

Henry IV's genial informality, bravery, gallantry, perseverance in adversity, and readiness to bend religious principle to political advantage have earned him a special place in French history. Not only did he restore order and prosperity to his ruined kingdom but he also ensured that the monarchy would be Catholic and absolutist.
1. What was Henry IV’s religious background?

2. What happened soon after Henry got married?

3. What happened to Henry in 1589?

4. How did Spain and the Pope react to him becoming King?

5. What did Henry do in 1593?

6. What did the Pope give Henry in 1599?

7. What was a paulette?

8. Who did Henry want to attack in 1609?

9. What happened to Henry on May 14, 1610?

10. What two things did Henry ensure about the French Monarchy?