The Palace at Versailles, Versailles, France

Louis Le Vau and Jules Hardouin-Mansart (architects). Begun 1669 C.E. Masonry, stone, wood, iron, and gold leaf (architecture): marble and bronze (sculpture): gardens (5 images)

- Chateau
- article at Khan Academy
- center of political power 1682-1689, Louis XIV forced to return to Paris before the French Revolution
  - famous not only as a building, but as a symbol of the system of absolute monarchy of the Ancien Régime
- begun as a hunting lodge by Louis XIII
  - expanded by Louis XIV
    - Charles Le Brun designed and supervised the elaborate interior decoration, and André Le Nôtre landscaped the extensive Gardens of Versailles
- 1833 converted to a museum for French history by Louis-Philippe
- The palace (while serving as a museum) still serves political functions (ceremonial)
- Not long after expansion – records were kept of the costs (of everything)
  - To counter the costs of Versailles during the early years of Louis XIV's personal reign, Colbert decided that Versailles should be the "showcase" of France. Accordingly, all materials that went into the construction and decoration of Versailles were manufactured in France
- Mirrors: Even the mirrors used in the decoration of the Hall of Mirrors were made in France. While Venice in the 17th century had the monopoly on the manufacture of mirrors, Colbert succeeded in enticing a number of artisans from Venice to make the mirrors for Versailles. However, owing to Venetian proprietary claims on the technology of mirror manufacture, the Venetian government ordered the assassination of the artisans to keep the secrets proprietary to the Venetian Republic
- Silver furniture and other costly furnishings were extravagant, but also showcased the best that France had to offer
- Versailles became the home of the French nobility and the location of the royal court—thus becoming the centre of French government
  - All the power of France emanated from this centre: there were government offices here; as well as the homes of thousands of courtiers, their retinues and all the attendant functionaries of court. By requiring that nobles of a certain rank and position spend time each year at Versailles, Louis prevented them from developing their own
regional power at the expense of his own, and kept them from countering his efforts to centralize the French government in an absolute monarchy.

- Life at Versailles was intrinsically determined by position, favour and above all one's birth (called “court”)  
  - Rank and status dictated everything in Versailles; not least among that list was one's lodgings  
    - Louis XIV envisaged Versailles as a seat for all the Bourbons, as well as his troublesome nobles  
    - Rooms at Versailles were immensely useful for an ambitious courtier as they allowed palace residents easy and constant access to the monarch, essential to their ambitions, and gave them constant access to the latest gossip and news