**Primary Source: The Court of the Sun King**

*One of the most complete records of life at the court of Louis XIV comes from the writings of Louis de Rouvroy, Duc de Saint-Simon (san-see-MoRN). As a French noble, Saint-Simon spent most of his time at Versailles and was often present at the elaborate ceremonies that were part of the king's routine. He wrote down in his memoirs all that he saw and felt about the reign of the Sun King. Read the passage below from his account. Answer the questions that follow.*

Not only did Louis XIV notice whether the highest nobility constantly attended him, but he kept track of the lesser nobles also. He looked to the right and to the left at the ceremonies surrounding his rising and his going to bed, at his meals, in walking through the palace, and in his gardens of Versailles. He saw and noticed everybody; no one escaped him. He marked down carefully the absences of any of those who were always at court. He found out the reasons for these absences, and he never lost an opportunity to treat these individuals according to what he had discovered. It was a mark against some, including all of the highest nobility, not to make the court at Versailles their home. For others it was held against them that they came only rarely; for those who never or scarcely ever came it was certain disgrace. When their names were mentioned or it was a matter of doing something for such a person, "I do not know them," was the king's proud reply. Such statements were final and were never reversed. Louis XIV took great pains to be well informed about everything that was going on in public and in private. He had an infinity of spies of every kind. Some were ignorant that their information went all the way to him, others knew it. The most cruel means by which the king was kept informed-for many years before anybody realized it-was by opening letters. It is impossible to appreciate how promptly and efficiently this was done. The king saw extracts from all the letters that the chiefs of the postal service judged should reach him. A word of criticism of the king or the government could ruin one forever.

1. At what times did the king check to see whether the nobles were attending him?

2. What did Louis XIV do when he noticed that someone he had expected to see was missing from court? How did he treat people after they had been absent from court?

3. Which people did Louis XIV claim to not know at all?

4. According to Saint-Simon, what were two other ways the king had of keeping informed about the people at his court? What was likely to happen to a person who had criticized Louis XIV in a letter?

5. How might Louis XIV have defended his seemingly cruel actions? Explain.

6. Is Saint-Simon’s information reliable? Why or why not?