

Math History for Precalculus

Pierre-Simon de Laplace

1. When did Pierre-Simon de Laplace (luh PLAHS) live? *1749-1827*
2. Where was he from? *France (Beaumont-en-Auge)*
3. What was his greatest work and how many volumes was it? *Mécanique céleste, 5 vols.*
4. When was it published? *In parts, 1799-1825*
5. What previous masterpiece did Laplace build upon? *Newton's Principia*
6. Was Laplace a Christian? *No*

Your conclusion to question 6 is supported by the following.

7. Describe Laplace's relation to Napoleon. Was he loyal? *Napoleon favored him and appointed him to the Ministry of the Interior, but Laplace switched loyalty.*
8. How did Napoleon confront Laplace about his astronomical work? *Napoleon said, "They tell me your treatise on the universe never once mentions the Creator."*
9. How did Laplace reply? *"I do not need that hypothesis."*
10. Laplace's writings drew from many sources. Did he usually give credit to the sources from which he drew? *No. He almost never acknowledged any except Newton (who was too famous to conceal).*

Although Laplace wrote on astronomy, he introduced and developed many mathematical methods in the process. One of these, the Laplace transform, is named for him. These transformations and their inverses are important in solving some calculus problems. The use of the inverse Laplace transform in calculus shows the importance of inverse processes in mathematics.