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Denis Diderot: A Secular Hero

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HNR Senior Project
Dr. David Eick
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Denis Diderot: A Secular Hero

I. Diderot's Biography (A Children's Version)

Diderot was a philosopher who didn't believe in God.

He edited the Encyclopedia, and snuck in articles that challenged how people think. This was an important moment -- knowledge about the world could belong to everyone, it didn't only come from church or state control.

At first he thought he'd be a priest. He went to school to study the church. Then his parents threw him in jail at a monastery because they didn't like the woman he wanted to marry. He escaped and ran away.

He hid from his parents and kept hanging out with his intellectual friends at the coffee shops in Paris.

He edited and wrote 7000 articles for an encyclopedia that explained how the world worked, but also poked fun at religion and the church. The church was mad. They burned the books.

He invented art criticism and the "fourth wall" in theatre.
He wrote books and plays.
People were entertained.

Diderot was known to have many ideas, and to think quickly. He loved to talk and ask questions. He talked so much that he often didn't need others around, and would just write down his conversations with himself.

He kept his atheist ideas secret, but wrote about all of them. He was scared to go to jail again, or be killed for his ideas.

After he died, people found his ideas, and were very impressed.
Diderot did a lot of cool things during his life and is famous for helping people understand the world in a new way.

II. Song Lyrics

Diderot
A secular hero
Diderot
D-D-Diderot

Diderot
Born 300 years ago
Raised in rural France
He found his way to Paris with the riff raff

Abandoning the Catholic Church
To struggle as a translator
He tries to make ends meet
But everything keeps pointing to philosophy

Up he climbs, inside his mind
Up he climbs inside...

*Up in his attic room
He's chasing his thoughts, chasing him
Diderot's mind zooms
The manuscripts pile up, pile up*

Diderot realized
Knowledge should be publicized
Not owned by church or state
Truth belongs to everyone the same

It wasn't all fun and games
Living in the threat of chains
L'Encyclopédie
BAM! C'est revolutionary!

*Up in his attic room
He's chasing his thoughts, chasing him
Diderot's mind zooms
The manuscripts pile up, pile up
Up in his attic room
He's chasing his thoughts, chasing him
Diderot's mind zooms
The manuscripts pile up, pile up, yeah*

Diderot
D-D-Diderot

Diderot
D-D-Diderot

Writing was a playful way
For Diderot to question things
But the pope and king got mad
They burned his books, all crumpled up in ashes

And so he made a secret plan
To keep his new books hidden
And long after his death
His big ideas keep everyone impressed

*Up in his attic room
He's chasing his thoughts, chasing him
Diderot's mind zooms
The manuscripts pile up, pile up
Up in his attic room
He's chasing his thoughts, chasing him
Diderot's mind zooms
The manuscripts pile up, pile up, yeah*

D-D-Diderot
A secular hero
Diderot
D-D-Diderot

III. Unused Additional Verses

Denis Diderot
Born 300 years ago
Planned to be a priest
But left the church to write about ideas

His parents and the local monks
Try to lock him up for months
Just to keep their son
From marrying the girl he says he loves

Le philosophe among philosophers
Squabbles with his publishers
But Catherine the Great
Invites him up to Russia for a few days

They talk about the world at large

But the empress doesn't take to heart
Diderot's grand ideas
She pays him off to keep him in her ear

*Out in her parlor room
He's slapping her knee, laughing
And pleased to be listened to
Nothing he says makes enough sense
In her parlor room
He's slapping her knee, laughing
And pleased to be listened to
Nothing he says makes enough sense*

Voltaire and Rousseau
Were each a friend of Diderot –
Writers of great repute,
But neither did what Diderot could do

Then came the Enlightenment
It shook the pope and government
L'Encyclopédie
A brand new book that anyone could read

He edited the book and wrote
7000 articles
Proclaiming human rights
He challenged many norms of public life