

Curriculum subject: History
Key Stage: 2 and 3

Theme: Medieval context

Topic: Introduction to Magna Carta: why was it created?

Rationale

To understand the significance of Magna Carta, students first need to know about the circumstances in which it was created. This introductory activity will explore the events leading up to Magna Carta. It is aimed at upper Key Stage 2 although it could also be used with pupils in Key Stage 3.

Content

Historical sources:

- [Portrait of King John from Matthew Paris's Historia Anglorum \(13th century\)](#)
- [Great Seal of King John \(1203\)](#)
- [Illustration of King John delivering Magna Carta to the Barons \(1783\)](#)
- [Portrait of King John hunting \(14th century\)](#)
- [The poisoning of King John and coronation of King Henry III \(13th century\)](#)
- [Teeth of King John](#)

Recommended reading (short articles):

[Magna Carta: an introduction](#) by Claire Breay and Julian Harrison

[Magna Carta: people](#)

Film:

- [Animation: What is Magna Carta?](#)
- [Animation: 800 years of Magna Carta](#)
- [King John and the origins of Magna Carta](#)

External links:

Set of Sources on King John for Exemplar Lessons:

<http://cw.routledge.com/textbooks/9780415370240/resources/10sources.asp> This resource was originally produced for secondary pupils but could be used in a primary setting with some differentiation.

Key questions

- Who was King John and what kind of king was he?
- What events led to the sealing of Magna Carta?

Activities

- 1) Who was King John? Place him in a royal family tree and timeline.
- 2) Give the students all of the sources listed above about King John. Students should use the sources of information to build up a character profile of him. Use them, along with sources featured [here](#) and additional research, to produce a song, rap or poem about him. Do the available sources reveal any differences of opinion? Why might this be? Which do pupils agree with most? Do any sources say the same things about King John? This should feed into their choices about what information to include in their pieces.

The following websites might offer a starting point for additional research:

http://www.historylearningsite.co.uk/king_john.htm

<http://www.britroyals.com/kings.asp?id=john>

http://www.bbc.co.uk/history/historic_figures/john.shtml

Ask students to perform their pieces and talk about how they made their choices about what to include and why they think there might be differences between choices.

- 3) Introduce the situation John faced when he became king and some of the key characters and issues involved in his reign. Who was the Archbishop of Canterbury? Why was he important? Who were the barons and why were they important? Why was England's relationship with France an important issue?
- 4) Arrange pupils into teams and play a King John decision-making game. Explain that they will act as the king in order to learn about the problems that King John faced, i.e. the events that led to the barons' rebellion against him and his agreement to a peace treaty that accepted their terms, which became known as Magna Carta in 1215. The game could include: a) a board game including different choices and ups and downs of fortune b) a 'Top Trumps' style game that you have devised yourself c) a multiple choice quiz with teams pitted against each other. [Here is one example](#). Alternatively, you could give students the issues and choices and allow them to devise their own games for one another.
- 5) Feedback and discussion: what have students learned about the events that led to Magna Carta? What was the biggest mistake John made?