

Curriculum subject: History

Key Stage: 3

Theme: Legacy

Topic: Magna Carta and the English Civil War

Rationale

This activity aims to examine the relationship between Magna Carta and the English Civil War through primary source evaluation and 17th century invocations of Magna Carta. It will aim to develop an emerging understanding of Magna Carta as a concept or ideal rather than a medieval peace treaty. This activity assumes prior learning about both Magna Carta and the English Civil War period and might be best used towards the end of a study unit on this topic. This activity is aimed at upper Key Stage 3.

Content:

Historical sources:

- [Letter of King Charles I ordering that Edward Coke's papers be confiscated \(1634\)](#)
- [Portrait of Sir Edward Coke by an unknown artist \(17th century\)](#)
- ['The Royal Oake of Brittainye' in The Compleat History of Independency \(1661\)](#)
- [The Embleme of Englands distractions, 1658](#)
- [The Embleme of Englands distractions, 1690](#)
- [Sketches of regimental banners from the English Civil Wars \(17th century\)](#)
- [The Petition of Right \(1628\)](#)
- [Magna Carta, 1215](#)

Recommended reading (short articles):

[Timeline of Magna Carta and its legacy](#)

[Magna Carta and jury trial](#) by Geoffrey Robertson

Film:

- [From legal document to public myth: Magna Carta in the 17th century](#)

Key questions

- What kind of king was Charles I?
- Who was Edward Coke and why might Charles I have wanted to seize his writings?

- Why might Magna Carta, a document that was by this time over 400 years old, have appealed to people who supported Parliament?
- What can invocations of Magna Carta from parliamentary supporters tell us about the changing nature of support for Cromwell's cause?

Activities

Several teaching ideas are suggested below. These could be condensed into one lesson or may also work well across 2-3 lessons if time permitted. Furthermore, together the activities could be used as an extended writing or research project.

- 1) Recap Charles I with pupils. What kind of ruler was he? What did he believe in? What were his main challenges in the period 1625-30?
- 2) What demands did Charles make and how did Parliament react?
- 3) Introduce Edward Coke to pupils. Ask them to look at Magna Carta and the Petition of Right and the letter from Charles I about Edward Coke. Why might Charles have been interested in silencing Edward Coke? Why might Magna Carta have been significant for parliamentarians?
- 4) Look at the parliamentary banner belonging to Charles Hooker. Why might Parliament have put this on their banners during the Civil War? How did it help their cause? What does this suggest about how the meaning of Magna Carta had changed by the 17th century? Allow pupils to explore the key clauses of Magna Carta. Using their knowledge of the causes of the English Civil War, can they design their own banners invoking Magna Carta to promote their cause?
- 5) Both King Charles and Bradshaw for Parliament cited Magna Carta at the King's trial. Charles argued that Magna Carta indicates that a person must be tried by a lawful judgment of peers, and Bradshaw cited that Magna Carta indicates that there must be no delay to justice, which, by refusing to recognise the court, Charles was. How far does Magna Carta help explain why war broke out and the eventual execution of the King? Split the class into two opposing groups for a debate. Allow them to use their knowledge of both the causes and course of the English Civil War and Magna Carta to prepare their arguments.
- 6) Look at the two engravings in which Oliver Cromwell is depicted alongside reference to Magna Carta; The Royal Oak of Britain and The Embleme of Englands distractions. Allow pupils in pairs or groups to examine and discuss the images in depth. Where can they find references to Magna Carta? What information about each source can they find? For example, the date it was produced or its purpose. What message does each image give and how do the sources reference Magna Carta? These images are both

MAGNA CARTA

www.bl.uk/magna-carta

TEACHERS' NOTES

produced by sympathisers of the parliamentary cause, yet they provide somewhat different opinions of Cromwell and his actions. Why might this be? Based upon knowledge of Cromwell's rule, which image do pupils agree with most?

Extension activities

- Allow pupils to delve more deeply into interpretations of Oliver Cromwell, both contemporary and historical. Does he deserve his statue outside the Houses of Parliament? Did he defend Magna Carta? How well did he uphold Magna Carta during the Protectorate?