

Curriculum subject: Citizenship

Key Stage: 3 and 4

Theme: Legacy

Topic: Magna Carta, parliament and representation of the people

Rationale

Magna Carta was born out of a struggle between a group of barons and a tyrannical King. The barons had become increasingly frustrated by the way King John imposed arbitrary taxes and seized property to pay for his expensive wars. The charter set detailed limits on the power of the monarch and established that everyone, including the king, must abide by the law.

Magna Carta and the development of the rights and freedoms we enjoy today are closely related. However, the struggles for democracy and representation continue today, with many feeling that parliament and those in government are still not representative of the people.

This activity introduces pupils to the relationship between Magna Carta and the development of parliament. Pupils find out about some of the key historical events, radical people and protests, examining how these have changed and improved representation and parliamentary democracy. Pupils will benefit from having some prior knowledge of key terms and concepts including: parliament, parliamentary democracy, representation.

Content

Historical sources:

- [Magna Carta, 1215](#)
- [The Petition of Right \(1628\)](#)
- [Sketches of regimental banners from the English Civil Wars \(17th century\)](#)
- [A Perfect Narrative of the Whole Proceedings of the High Court of Justice in the Tryall of the King in Westminster Hall \(1649\)](#)
- [Image of the House of Commons, from True Platforme and Manner of the Sitting in the Lower House of Parliament \(1625\)](#)
- [The Embleme of Englands distractions, 1658](#)
- [The Embleme of Englands distractions, 1690](#)
- [The Bill of Rights \(1689\)](#)
- [The Great Charter of 1832](#)
- [The People's Charter \(estimated 1838\)](#)

- [Illustration of Procession Attending the Great National Petition to the House of Commons \(1842\)](#)
- [Cartoon captioned 'Magna Carta' in publication Votes for women \(1911\)](#)
- [Human Rights Act \(1998\)](#)

Recommended reading (short articles):

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

[Radicalism and suffrage](#) by Alex Lock

External Links:

For activity 4: Types of representation

http://www.southampton.ac.uk/citizened/activities/gendering_citizenship/typesofrep.html

Key questions

- How are Magna Carta and the development of parliament related?
- What is representation, how did it emerge and how has it changed over time?
- How representative of the people is parliament today?

Activities

- 1) Revisit the key terms and concepts of parliament, parliamentary democracy and representation and ensure pupils understand what they mean. A 'draw then write' activity or a mind map can be used for this purpose. Explain that they will be finding out how parliament and democracy have developed and changed over time, what parliament is like today and how protest has been key to improving representation of the people.
- 2) Establish what pupils already know from their history classes about the historical development of parliament and representative democracy. To revisit the topic and/or deepen their understanding get pupils to create a class wall chart and timeline to show the key points and people involved. To do this, pupils work in small groups to undertake research using British Library sources, supplemented by other sources such as the Parliament website. Each group creates a 'poster presentation' to show:
 - What happened?
 - Who was involved?
 - Was there a protest/campaign on the issue?
 - Why do they think this was significant in the development of parliament and representative democracy?

The posters can be displayed chronologically around the classroom and pupils present their findings in turn to the rest of the class. At the end of the activity summarise the key types of changes, for example parliament has become more representative of the people, power has shifted from the Lords to the Commons and the idea that parliament and representative democracy are not static but change over time and continue to change.

The key points and people could include:

Key events	Protest/campaign
1215 Magna Carta and 1265 Simon De Montfort's Parliament where leading barons and representative from counties and large towns met to help run the country	The barons led the protest against the Kings
Edward III held parliaments to raise taxes and called in representatives from counties and towns to attend. They sat separately from the King and his nobles in a chamber that become the House of Commons	
The Petition of Right 1628 and Civil War 1642-49 when Charles I tried to rule without the support of parliament	Various radical protestors including the Levellers
1689 Bill of Rights which limited the power of unpopular James II and created a 'constitutional monarch' William of Orange, who had to seek parliaments approval of policies and to spend money	
Great Reform Act 1832 which gave some middle class property owning men the vote	
The Chartists 1834-48 and the People's Charter in which working class men demanded votes for those over 21 including those who did not own property, through a secret ballot. The movement failed but most of their demands were met later	Chartists
The Second Reform Act 1867 which gave more men the vote, the 1872 Ballot Act which introduced secret ballots for elections and the Third Reform Act 1884 which gave more working class men the vote and led to the House of Commons, which was now more representative of the people, gaining power	

from the House of Lords	
1911 Parliament Act to reduce the power of the House of Lords so they could no longer interfere with matters of taxation or money, following a period of struggle when the Lords rejected bills and a budget that had been passed in the House of Commons	
1918 votes for women over 30 and 1928 votes for women over 21, following the campaign by the Suffragettes who used direct methods of protest including violence	Suffragettes
Reform of the House of Lords 1999, when most hereditary peers had their right to sit in the Lords removed	Various parliamentary and democratic reform groups including the Electoral Reform Society
Devolution 1997-9 to Scottish Referendum and the ongoing debates about transfer of powers within the UK	Nationalist political parties in Scotland and Wales and various campaigning groups

- 3) Pupils find out about parliament and representation in the House of Commons and House of Lords today. What is parliament like today? Who can and cannot represent citizens in parliament as an MP? How many male and female MPs are there? How many women have cabinet jobs? How many male and female peers are there? To do this you could use a 'hot seat' activity where pupils develop and ask questions of an 'expert' such as an A level student/teacher, their local MP or a member of the House of Lords.
- 4) Finally, explore what else could be done to improve the representation of people. To do this you could give them a range of statements and ask them to identify arguments for and against each, for example:
 - 16 and 17 year olds should be given the vote (as they had in the Scottish Referendum)
 - Voting should be made compulsory (as in other countries including Australia)
 - There should be a male and a female MP for each constituency (as is the case in the East African country of Uganda).

Extension activities

- For Key Stage 4, discuss with pupils whether parliament should look more like the people it represents. Revisit the concept map and introduce different types of representation such as:

MAGNA CARTA

www.bl.uk/magna-carta

TEACHERS' NOTES

mirror or descriptive, trusteeship, mandate. Which model do they prefer and why? See the other sources section above for definitions.