

Curriculum subject: History
Key Stage: 3, 4 and 5

Theme: Magna Carta today

Topic: Should we remember Magna Carta?

Rationale

The significance of Magna Carta in political and constitutional history is extremely complex. The fact that we remember it today and yet continue to debate its significance is testament to the varied interpretations of the document over eight centuries.

This activity is aimed at pupils in Key Stage 3, but could be considered for pupils in Key Stages 4 and 5 with less structure and more use of analytical questioning. The activity will focus on handling primary sources as well as developing an understanding and analysis of 'significance' as a concept. This activity is designed as a final summary activity following a series of lessons learning about Magna Carta and its legacy.

Content

Historical sources:

- [Great Seal of King John \(1203\)](#)
- [Magna Carta, 1216](#)
- [Magna Carta, 1225](#)
- [The siege of Lincoln Castle and battle of Sandwich \(13th century\)](#)
- [Papal bull annulling Magna Carta \(1215\)](#)
- [The Bill of Rights \(1689\)](#)
- [Shakespeare's King John \(1623\)](#)
- [The Petition of Right \(1628\)](#)
- [Earthenware mug depicting French Liberty and English Liberty \(1793\)](#)
- [The Lawes of Virginia \(1662\)](#)
- [George Cruikshank's satirical drawing 'Liberty suspended!' \(1817\)](#)
- [The People's Charter \(estimated 1838\)](#)
- ['Nelson Mandela's speech 'I am prepared to die' at the Rivonia trial \(1964\)](#)
- [Proposal to celebrate Magna Carta Day in the British Empire \(1947\)](#)
- [Cartoon captioned 'Magna Carta' in publication Votes for women \(1911\)](#)
- [King John and the Magna Carta: A Ladybird Adventure \(1969\)](#)

- [Costumes, photographs, booklet and rosette flyer for the Runnymede Pageant \(1934\)](#)
- [Repeal of the clauses of Magna Carta in An Act for promoting the Revision of the Statute Law \(1863\)](#)
- [Universal Declaration of Human Rights \(1952\)](#)

Recommended reading (short articles):

All articles on the British Library website will be useful, but particularly the [timeline and legacy of Magna Carta](#).

Film:

- [The relevance of Magna Carta in 2015](#)

External links:

The National Curriculum

https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/239075/SEC_ONDARY_national_curriculum_-_History.pdf

Key questions

- Has Magna Carta been significant for 800 years?
- Should we still remember Magna Carta?

Activities

- 1) This activity can be as open or structured as you wish. Older pupils may be able to set the debate question and use the website more freely to research the evidence that will help them to formulate their own arguments. Below is a list of suggestions of items to use for evidence, but any collection items from the website may be used and/or substituted. The second and third exercise may not be needed with older pupils, but could provide a starting point with younger pupils.
- 2) Explain to the class that they will be preparing for a historical debate. Ask them to use the sources to explore the significance of Magna Carta over 800 years. Firstly, they should decide what each source tells them, whether it could be used for arguing significance or not and finally the century in which it was produced. They should use the sources to plot and produce a significance graph. For centuries where there is no evidence, they should record a zero. Feedback to the class. Has Magna Carta been significant for 800 years?

MAGNA CARTA

www.bl.uk/magna-carta

TEACHERS' NOTES

- 3) Should we remember Magna Carta today? Split pupils into debating teams, some arguing for and some against. Ask them to use the sources and their own knowledge to prepare their arguments.

Source	Possible Inference
Great Seal of King John	Mark of authenticity. Seal of the king meant he had ratified it. However, according to historical sources, this was done under duress.
Letter of annulment from Pope	Pope announced Magna Carta null and void after just a few weeks.
1216, 1225, 1297 re-issues of Magna Carta	The Charter was re-issued by other monarchs, but with many of the original clauses missing. The re-issues should also be considered in the context of the needs of those monarchs.
Siege of Lincoln Castle	The annulment of the 1215 Charter caused a rebellion and war with the barons.
Bill of Rights	The Bill of Rights, issued in 1689 as a condition to William and Mary taking the throne, echoed Magna Carta.
Shakespeare 's King John	Shakespeare's King John makes no mention of Magna Carta. He instead focuses on the issues John faced with the Catholic church, but this might have been because during the time Shakespeare lived, the Protestant Reformation was well underway.
Petition of Rights	The Petition of Rights, Parliaments' demands to King Charles I, was penned by Edward Coke who set great store by Magna Carta and echoed it in this document. Both Parliament and Charles cited Magna Carta to air their grievances. Coke is often cited as responsible for the modern perception of Magna Carta by historians.
Earthenware jug, French Liberty, English Liberty	18 th century jug around the time of the French Revolution. One side looks at French liberty, the other side English.

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	The comparison is unfavourable for France and England's Magna Carta is cited. However, this was produced at a time when the threat of revolution was rife.
Law(e)s of Virginia	18 th century. Designed around the American Declaration of Independence and the constitution, these are for the state of Virginia. From the terms you can see echoes of Magna Carta.
Cruikshank Liberty Suspended.	1817. Cruikshank cartoon reacting to the suspension of Habeas Corpus after the Napoleonic wars. The Freedoms and liberties enshrined in Magna Carta are clearly under threat.
The People's Charter p0002 and 0009	The Chartists clearly borrow from Magna Carta and their "People's Charter" is designed to invoke Magna Carta.
Nelson Mandela Speech p0011	Nelson Mandela expressed veneration for Magna Carta and the principles it espoused.
Correspondence proposal Magna Carta Day	A 1947 proposal for a Magna Carta Day across the British Empire
Cartoon captioned Votes for Women	The suffragettes invoked the struggle of the barons for Magna Carta in their own suffrage struggle. Magna Carta had taken on a mythical status as a symbol of liberty.
Ladybird King John	The story of King John and Magna Carta is immortalised in a Ladybird classic from the 1960s for children to learn about. However, the front cover image is inaccurate. It was never signed but sealed.
Photographs of Runnymede Pageant	A pageant commemorating the signing of Magna Carta in 1934. One of many such popular pageants in the first half of the century.
Repeal Clauses 0003	Statute books of the 19 th century showing many of the clauses of Magna Carta being repealed. In actual fact, most clauses were repealed in the 19 th

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	century and only 3 remain on the statute book today.
Universal Declaration of Human Rights 0008	The Universal Declaration of Human Rights clearly borrows from the principles that Magna Carta came to represent which are echoed in the clauses.
The British Library Magna Carta website and exhibition	2015, to commemorate and coincide with the 800 th anniversary of the sealing of Magna Carta.
The National Curriculum	2014 History National Curriculum for Key Stage 3 pupils