



Magna Carta 2019

Teacher Notes

Overview

The *Magna Carta* program is designed specifically for Year 6 students. It is a fast paced, 60 minute program. Its aim is to introduce students to the significance of Magna Carta and the part it plays in our lives today in Australia's democracy.

In an interactive format students complete a series of activities that include:

- A quiz to set the scene of life in medieval England
- Class discussion on the Feudal system using visual aids
- Role play to help explain the grievances that led to Magna Carta
- Each group will work on a particular snapshot of information on The Great Charter itself
- Timeline of events related to Magna Carta
- Class discussion using visual aids on Australia's democracy and the connection it has with Magna Carta

Objectives

Students will:

- Illustrate their understanding of the feudal system by creating a pyramid
- List some of the grievances that led to Magna Carta by participating in a role play
- As a group select one key point about Magna Carta and explain the point to the class
- Construct a timeline of events in regards to the Magna Carta and democracy today
- Identify how Australia's democracy has been influenced by the Magna Carta

Western Australian Curriculum links

Curriculum Code	Knowledge & Understandings
Year 6 Humanities and Social Sciences (HASS)	
ACHASSK143	<u>Australia's system of government and citizenship</u> The key institutions of Australia's democratic system of government based on the Westminster system, including the monarchy, parliaments and courts
ACHASSK134	<u>Australia as a Nation</u> British and American influences on Australia's system of law and government (e.g. Magna Carta, federalism, constitutional monarchy, the Westminster System, the Houses of Parliament)

Curriculum links are taken from:

<http://k10outline.scsa.wa.edu.au/home/p-10-curriculum/curriculum-browser/humanities-and-social-sciences>
(accessed Jan 2019)

Background information for teachers

King John

King John is best remembered for granting Magna Carta in June, 1215, although he sought its annulment almost immediately. John had succeeded his brother Richard I, as King of England in 1199. King John's reign was marked by a string of unsuccessful military campaigns, a prolonged struggle with the Church and the baronial rebellion which led to Magna Carta.

What is Magna Carta?

Magna Carta was signed, (by royal seal,) in June 1215, between the feudal barons and King John at Runnymede near Windsor Castle.

'Magna Carta' is Latin and means "Great Charter". In placing his seal on the document, King John changed the powers of the monarchy, the rights of an English citizen and the influence Parliament had on the country, forever.

Written on untanned animal (pig/sheep skin), the Magna Carta is one of the most important documents of Medieval England, and it has since had enormous impact on English law and society.

The document was a series of written promises between the king and his subjects. It was an attempt by the barons to curb the powers and authority of a king, who had brought misery and suffering to the people of England.

Why would a king – who was meant to be all powerful in his own country – agree to the demands of the barons who were meant to be below him in authority?

England had for some years owned land in France. The barons had provided the king with both money and men to defend this territory. Traditionally, the king had always consulted the barons before raising taxes, (which the barons had to collect from the people), and demanding more men for military service (who also had to be supplied by the barons). This was all part of the Feudal System.

As King John had not been successful in his military campaigns abroad, his constant demands for more money and men, angered the barons. By 1204, John had lost his land in northern France. In response to this, he introduced high taxes without asking the barons. This was against feudal law and accepted custom.

King John had also made the mistakes of angering the Roman Catholic Church by seizing the monastery at Canterbury when the archbishop died. This made the new archbishop of Canterbury, Stephen Langton, furious. As a result, the Pope banned all church services in England in 1207. Religion played a huge role in almost every aspect of life in the Middle Ages. A fear of going to hell was instilled into people at a young age and they were encouraged to obey the teachings of the Church to secure their place in heaven. Even worse, the Pope excommunicated John, who believed he could never get to Heaven until the Pope withdrew the excommunication order. Thus, he accepted the powers of the Church and gave them many privileges in 1214.

On return to England, after a further military defeat in Northern France, John demanded more money from taxes. This time the barons were not willing to listen. They rebelled against his power. They captured London, however they did not entirely defeat John and both sides sat down to discuss matters. The result was 'Magna Carta'.

Magna Carta consisted of 63 clauses and can be divided into sections:

- The first clauses concern the position of the Catholic Church in England.
- Following clauses state the rights of the barons.
- Many other clauses relate to England's legal system.

Magna Carta promised laws that were just and fair. It outlined basic rights with the principle that no-one was above the law, including the king. It also chartered the right to a fair trial by stating that no free man, (later replaced by the word, 'no-one'), will be imprisoned or punished without first going through the proper legal system - trial by jury.

The last few sections state the rights of the barons to enforce these laws if the king violated those rights. For the first time Magna Carta established publicly the principle that the king was subject to the law.

The royal seal of King John was put on the Magna Carta to show people that the document was genuine.

Legacy of Magna Carta

Signing Magna Carta, under great pressure from the barons, meant the king was subject to the 'rule of law'. John did not want to sign this document but without the nobles and their knights, he did not have anyone to protect him or the kingdom. Nevertheless, despite the Charter being barely eight weeks old, John repudiated the agreement.

This jeopardised the Great Charter's fate, yet it took root and was re-issued with modifications in 1216 and 1217, by King John's nine year old son, Henry III, (under the authority of appointed regent William Marshal). Other editions followed later in 1225 and 1297, (these are collectively referred to as Magna Carta).

There are only four surviving copies of the original Magna Carta, 1215.

- British Library holds two
- Salisbury Cathedral (UK) holds one
- Lincoln Cathedral (UK) holds one

Other places that hold later editions of Magna Carta are:

- The Australian Federal Parliament (1297 edition)
- The United States of America, National Archives, Washington (1297 edition)

Magna Carta inspired a number of other documents, including the US Constitution and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

Feudalism

Feudalism is the name given to the system of government set up in England by William the Conqueror, as it was an ideal way to govern and maintain control over the whole country. Feudalism became a way of life in Medieval England and remained so for many centuries.

The feudal system was a way of organising people and worked on a very simple premise – the granting of land for services. The ruler of the territory, such as a king would own all the land. He would keep a proportion of the land for himself and grant parcels of land to **noblemen, (barons)**, who in return would swear an oath of allegiance to the king, and provide money and soldiers who would fight for the king when the need arose.

To fulfil this obligation the barons would divide up their land and grant the **knights** (soldiers), a segment of land, ('fiefs' or manors), to govern. In return the knights would also swear an oath to the barons, (or duke or earl), collect taxes and fulfil military obligations as the king's army.

The knights worked to maintain law and order over the people, (**peasants**) who were obliged to work for their lord, (knight or master), on his land, farming and growing crops to feed the upper classes. They were not allowed to leave the land without the lord's permission. They also needed his permission to marry and had to make payment to the lord upon their marriage. The peasants were also obliged to pay taxes which would often have to be paid in produce rather than money. In return, the lord promised protection and land that they could use for their own subsistence.

What kept the system working was loyalty - loyalty to a 'lord' and the monarch. To break the oath of loyalty was a terrible crime.

Useful websites

There are many websites that provide excellent information on Magna Carta and its legacy.

British Library: <http://www.bl.uk/magna-carta>

British Council: <https://www.teachingenglish.org.uk/teaching-teens/uk-culture/magna-carta>

BBC: http://www.bbc.co.uk/history/british/middle_ages/magna_01.shtml