

Topic English history: the Middle Ages and the Magna Carta

Level A2

Time 45–60 minutes

Aims

- To develop students' fluency through a jigsaw reading and speaking task
- To develop students' vocabulary to talk about key historical events – *battle, tax, revolution*, etc.
- To develop students' understanding of the context to the Magna Carta

Introduction

This lesson is about some of the key events of the Middle Ages. It provides students with some useful vocabulary and the opportunity to learn some basic facts, while developing reading and speaking skills.

Preparation

Copy enough sets of the timeline activity '**Key events of the Middle Ages: Student A & B timelines for Task 4**'. Each student needs a copy of *either* sheet A or sheet B.

There is also a PowerPoint file, '**Key events of the Middle Ages: Images**' with the six images from the lesson. You may wish to use these when setting up or feeding back on **Tasks 2, 4 or 5**.

Warmer – the Middle Ages (5–10 mins)

- Give out handout. Put students into pairs or small groups and ask them to discuss the questions. It doesn't matter if they don't know very much, this is just to judge the amount of background knowledge they have. If students have very little background knowledge, then bring the activity to a close quite quickly, or ask them to join a group where there is more knowledge.
- Feedback as a class. Establish that the Middle Ages is usually said to be between the 5th and 15th century. Elicit any examples students have of things that happened (though don't dwell on the events covered in the lesson) and ask them what they think life was like for poor people, or rich people, etc.

Background information

There was a lot of conflict at this time, such as the Hundred Year's War between 1337 and 1453, where England and France were at war over the French Throne (the Kings of England from 1066 onwards were at least partly French themselves and it wasn't always clear where England ended and France began). You might like to show the students a map of Norman England and France, such as <http://etc.usf.edu/maps/pages/1700/1785/1785.htm>

Poor people were often serfs – meaning that they were little better than slaves. They had no choice about who they worked for and were either very poorly paid or not paid at all.

Task 1 – Useful words (10 mins)

- Still in pairs, ask students to try and match the words and the definitions. Monitor and help as needed, or ask students to use their dictionaries. Feedback as a class.

Answers

1. *battle (n) – d. a fight between armies in a war*
2. *prison (n) – c. a building where criminals are kept*
3. *tax(es) (n) – h. money you have to pay to the government (from your earnings)*
4. *obey (v) – i. do what you are told to do*
5. *elected (adj) – g. chosen by voting*
6. *parliament (n) – a. a group of people who make laws*
7. *disease (n) – f. an illness caused by infection*
8. *peasant (n) – e. a poor person who works on the land*
9. *revolution (n) – b. a sudden change in the way a country is governed*
10. *escape (v) – j. become free; get away from a place where you do not want to be*

Tip

Check students understand the words by asking concept-checking questions. For example:

- *If two people fight, is that a battle?*
- *Can you tell me the name of a prison in this country (or city)?*
- *How many people in the class pay tax? What does the government do with taxes?*
- *Give me an example of a rule you must obey.*
- *Who was elected last year?*
- *Where does our parliament meet?*
- *Give me an example of a disease. (You could accept an answer in L1 here.)*
- *Do we use the word peasant to talk about people who farm land nowadays? (Not usually, it can be offensive.)*
- *What happened to the political system in Russia after the Russian Revolution? (It became communist) – or other example suitable to your context.*

Also, check students can pronounce the words.

Task 2 – Vocabulary practice (5–10 mins)

- In the same pairs, ask students to talk about the pictures on the page, using the vocabulary where possible. Monitor to check understanding. Elicit a few good examples in front of the whole class
- In feedback, you could project the images from the PowerPoint file, '**Key events of the Middle Ages: Images**' to focus attention on one particular image at a time.

Task 3 – Dates (2–3 mins)

- Although students are usually familiar with more recent dates, they can sometimes struggle with less familiar ones. Either elicit the pronunciation with the whole class or ask them to practise in pairs, depending on how much difficulty you think they will have. Each date is pronounced as two 2-digit numbers, e.g. ‘ten sixty-six’.

Note: 1100 is pronounced as ‘eleven hundred’.

Task 4 – Timeline (5–10 mins)

- Draw a simple timeline on the board with some recent historical dates you know your students will be familiar with, and establish that this is a timeline. The dates you choose will obviously depend on your context.
- Explain that you are going to give them a timeline about important events in the Middle Ages. Using the timeline on the board to illustrate, explain that Student A will have information about some dates, and Student B about other dates. They need to ask each other questions to find out information (show the sample questions on the worksheet at this point). They should write on their timeline as they find out the information.
- Note that it may be helpful to point out how we write and say kings’ names. We use Roman numerals and ordinal numbers, so William II is William the Second.
- Put students **in pairs** and establish who is Student A and who is Student B.
- Monitor the activity.

Task 5 – Jigsaw reading (10–15 mins)

- Put students into **groups of six** (or three if you have a small class). Ask each student to choose one of the dates on the timeline (or allocate these if you prefer). Then ask them to read the paragraph (in groups of three they will each have two texts) and try to memorise the facts.
- Ask students to put away their texts and talk together with their group to share information from their texts.
- Feedback as a class. Again, you could use the PowerPoint file, ‘**Key events of the Middle Ages: Images**’ to focus the students’ attention.
- Elicit what they have learnt, or ask questions. Depending on the level of the group, you could ask some questions which encourage students to think about how the events link together, e.g.
 - *Why did the peasants become strong enough to have a revolution in 1381? (Because there were so fewer peasants after the Black Death that the landowners needed them more.)*

Extension activities

The short texts could be used as a way of reviewing the past simple tense.

- Ask students to underline the past simple verbs in 'their' texts.
- Then ask them to write a list of those verbs in the present simple tense on a separate piece of paper. They should put the date of their text (e.g. 1066) at the top.
- Everyone puts away their worksheet.
- Each student then passes their list of verbs to their neighbour.
- With the new list and the date, each student tries to write a few sentences using the verbs in the past tense and what they remember of what happened on that date.
- Students then look at the original texts and compare with what they wrote.

Homework

- Ask students to prepare a short timeline with at least three key events from the history of their country. They should be ready to explain what happened on these dates, in English.
- In a subsequent lesson, put students in pairs or small groups to present their timelines. Or, if some students are more confident, they could present their timelines to the class.