LOC TPS APWH Magna Carta

Is the Magna Carta the foundation of England's constitution? How important is the Magna Carta to our most basic rights?

Grades 9-12

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This activity is sponsored in part by the Library of Congress Teaching with Primary Sources Eastern Region Program, coordinated by Waynesburg University.

Two class periods of 45 – 60 minutes
Description of activity: Students learn about the historical context of the Magna Carta, read the document itself to identify the important protections it contains, and explore its impact within England and beyond.

Focus Question: Is the Magna Carta the foundation of England’s constitution? How important is the Magna Carta to our most basic rights?

Context: This belongs in a unit on medieval European developments after an introduction of the two divergent political trends of absolutism and parliamentary systems.

Objectives: Contextualize the Magna Carta, identify and explain its major protections, and evaluate its importance in the history of England and the world.

Virginia SOLS
The student will demonstrate knowledge of social, economic, and political changes and cultural achievements in the late medieval period by
a) describing the emergence of nation-states (England, France, Spain, and Russia) and distinctive political developments in each.

AP World History
Time Period 600-1450, 1450-1750, 1750-1900
Key Concepts 3.2 State formation and development demonstrated continuity, innovation, and diversity in various regions.
Thematic Learning Objectives CUL-2, SB-2, SB-3
Historical thinking skills: Causation, argumentation, author’s purpose, context, point of view

Assessment: Supporting questions guide thinking and provide structure. Formative assessments check in on learning for accuracy and understanding. Summative assessments gauge the level of actual understanding and provide valuable practice on written assessments.
Primary Sources: find below
Procedure: Supporting questions guide student inquiry. Formative assessments check for understanding. The teacher should lead a class debriefing after completion of the formative assessments before asking students to move on to the summative assessment and action steps.

What you will need before implementing:
This lesson is dependent on computer and internet access for all students. The documents and directions should be shared digitally with all students (through Google Classroom or another format).
Part I What was the historical context surrounding the Magna Carta?

“History has not been kind to King John of England (reigned 1199–1216). Interpretations of his character have ranged from the cruel Prince John of the Robin Hood tradition to the complex but weak-willed sovereign in Shakespeare’s *Life and Death of King John*. Depictions have rarely been flattering. During his own time, King John’s reputation was no better.

King John presided over the loss of the extensive realm that his father King Henry II (reigned 1154–1189) had ruled across the English Channel. His prolonged failure to reconquer that territory, the unprecedented level of taxation he demanded, and conflicts that he unnecessarily caused with Pope Innocent III all served to erode his political support at home. Many barons claimed that King John governed England with disregard for their traditional privileges.

Leaders of a failed 1212 baronial revolt returned to England by 1214, after King John’s defeat at the Battle of Bouvines, and found common cause with English bishops who resented John for weakening the independence of the English Church. Meanwhile, a coalition of northern barons emerged who refused to pay for King John’s wars and were ready to renounce their loyalty to his crown.”

“King John’s military failure at the Battle of Bouvines triggered the barons’ revolt, but the roots of their discontent lay much deeper. King John ruled England in a ruthless manner at a time when the instruments of government and the practices of the courts were becoming consolidated. An expanding legal culture created new expectations among the baronage, who began to count on the courts to protect their interests. Eventually the barons could no longer abide the unpredictable ruling style of their kings. Their discontent came to a head during John’s reign.

In January 1215, a party representing about forty barons met with King John in London to discuss terms of reform, but the meeting produced no concrete results. In May 1215, the barons, along with representatives of the English church, publicly renounced their homage to King John, who responded by ordering the seizure of the barons’ castles. When the barons seized London, however, King John was forced to come to terms. The parties agreed to meet at Runnymede, a watery meadow on the Thames, located halfway between London and the king’s castle in Windsor.

At Runnymede on June 15, King John accepted the terms that would become Magna Carta and placed his seal on the charter. After several days, the barons renewed their allegiance to the king. Within two weeks, as many as forty-one official manuscript copies of the text of Magna Carta were prepared, sealed, and sent to each of the counties, including Lincoln. The Lincoln Magna Carta is one of only four of these that are extant today.”


Explain the circumstances under which King John signed the Magna Carta.

Why did King John sign the Magna Carta? provide a list of specific reasons
Improving Historical Thinking Skills through Source-Based Instruction
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Magna Carta, 1215
15 June 1215
https://www.bl.uk/collection-items/magna-carta-1215

Read the transcript (63 short paragraphs)
List some of the most important protections for individual rights.

Part II  How has the Magna Carta shaped English history?

Watch this short video.
“Professor David Carpenter and Professor Nicholas Vincent explore the survival of Magna Carta after King John’s death, considering its numerous reissues during the reign of King Henry III, and its influence on the creation of Parliament.”
https://www.bl.uk/magna-carta/articles/consequences-of-magna-carta
https://youtu.be/PQ-Q-wZ71lw

What argument did these historians make about Magna Carta?
What evidence did these use to support their argument?
Why do you suppose the protections found in Magna Carta have been reasserted so many times in reissues and related documents throughout the history of England (during times of tension between the monarch and the people) like in the Petition of Right and the English Bill of Rights?

Rare Book and Special Collections Division, Library of Congress (019)


Take the link and do your best to read these two pages.
How did Henry Care understand the importance of condemnation without a trial?
What reasons did he provide?


Rare Book and Special Collections Division, Library of Congress (031)


Take the link and examine the front cover.
What does the image represent?
What could have been the purpose of putting this image on the front of this document from the Frist Continental Congress?
Read the information that accompanies the image.
Why was this image chosen to be the frontispiece in this book?
Why in 1903 – a time that saw the rise of parliamentary governmental systems- might the English have wanted to stress this image?
Part III  How has the Magna Carta had a lasting impact beyond England?

Portsmouth, 1774.
https://www.loc.gov/resource/rbpe.0870160a/
Read the first column.

What references did the delegates make regarding their expectations of good government that were shaped by the Magna Carta?
Watch these two short videos.

800 years of Magna Carta
https://www.bl.uk/magna-carta/videos/800-years-of-magna-carta

William Hague MP and Professor Linda Colley discuss how Magna Carta inspired reformers, radicals and revolutionaries in the 18th and 19th centuries.
https://www.bl.uk/magna-carta/articles/radicalism-and-suffrage

What other political movements invoked the ideals and the spirit of the Magna Carta?
According to the two historians in this video, what value might be gained by aligning one's political movement with the Magna Carta?
Analyze their argument - do you agree? Or might the political movements to which they refer have a more fundamental basis (such as Enlightenment thinking)?

Robin Hood Defies King John in Frederick Warde's Superb Production of Runnymede by Wm. Greer Harrison. Cincinnati and New York: Strobridge Lith. Co., ca. 1895. Prints and Photographs Division, Library of Congress (007)

Read the information that accompanies the image.
Why do you think the legend of Robin Hood was melded with the story of King John and the Magna Carta?
How may this have impacted general knowledge of the Magna Carta?
Optional further investigation
Those interested in learning more might read “Robin Hood and his Historical Context”
By Dr. Mike Ibeji
Last updated 2011-02-17
http://www.bbc.co.uk/history/british/middle_ages/robin_01.shtml

SAQ as Summative Assessment Task
  A. In what ways did it impact the powers of the monarch? In what ways did it impact the rights of the people?
  B. What impact did the Magna Carta have on the development of government in England?
  C. What impact did the Magna Carta have on the development of government in North America? In other parts of Europe?

Taking Action
In the form of a diary entry or comic strip:
Predict what England might have been like without the Magna Carta.
Predict how the British colonists in North America might have acted differently if they had not been a part of this political tradition.