

St Robert of Knaresborough



Knareborough Schools Project 2019

King John and Maundy Money

Introduction

- What are the main jobs or duties of a king or queen?
- What makes someone a good king or queen?
- What weaknesses or attitudes would probably make someone a bad king or queen?

TASK: Design a Good King or Queen – And/Or Design a Bad King or Queen. (There may well be differences in expectations and qualities required by kings and queens in the past, which could lead to interesting discussions.) If outlines are needed, the ones below could be used and labels and symbols added. Most pupils will probably prefer to design their own figures.





King John (1167-1216)

John: The Worst King?

Most people think King John was a bad king and a nasty man. Whenever John appears in a story, like the legend of Robin Hood, he is the villain. John became King of England in 1199 when his older brother, Richard, died. He was king for seventeen years until his death in 1216.

As king, John was unpopular with many people in England because they thought he was a weak, lazy, angry and cruel man.

When he became king, John spent a lot of money to fight wars with France but he was a poor soldier and a bad leader, so he lost the battles. This was all a waste of money.

However, although a lot of bad things happened when John was King of England, it does not mean that he was to blame for everything that went wrong at that time.

LINK: Interpretations of King John need to be handled carefully. This is important when using films like this one which are based on truth but open to huge simplification in the name of entertainment. There are still interesting things to consider from 48 seconds into this selection from Disney's cartoon film of Robin Hood.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sGzaqEtJCok>

John: Unhappy and moody

John was the fifth child of King Henry II and Queen Eleanor. He was the baby of the family and he was often ignored by his parents and his older brothers.

King Henry gave land to his sons but, because he said there would be nothing left for John, Henry called John, 'Lackland'. Other people also gave him a nasty nickname when they called him 'Soft-sword' because he was a bad leader and a weak soldier.

John had been an unhappy and moody child. As he grew up, he became greedy and jealous, and he often lost his temper. He moaned if he didn't get what he wanted and he sulked if people disagreed with him. He bullied and threatened people because no one could attack him. When he got married, he was a nasty and cruel husband.

Not long after John became king, some people decided to get rid of him as they hated him so much. They chose his nephew, Arthur, to replace him but during a battle, John captured Arthur and held him prisoner. During this time, Arthur died and most people believe John killed his nephew by drowning him in a river in Paris.

LINK: Horrible Histories tell entertaining versions of events that are based on real events. There is a lot of truth in them but need to be used carefully as they are aimed at modern audiences and are very simplistic.

http://viewpure.com/_bjMB2xbWSU?start=0&end=0

John and Richard the Lionheart

A few years before Henry died, his older sons had tried to get rid of him in a rebellion. The brothers did not ask John to join them, as he was weak and unpopular, so he helped his father instead. When Henry won, this made John a bit more powerful. When King Henry died in 1189, Richard the Lionheart, the oldest son, became king. However, John also became more important as his other brothers had died so he was now the heir to Richard who had no children.

As King of England, Richard decided to go on a Crusade to Jerusalem. This was not long after he became king and it meant he had to leave John in charge of England. Richard didn't respect or like John, though, so he actually named his nephew, Arthur, as his heir when he went off to fight.

While Richard was away, John tried to take over the country and make himself king. This was a serious and dangerous thing to do because no one was supposed to get rid of a king when they were on a Crusade. John's plan failed but Richard was captured by a rival king as he came home and was held as a prisoner in Austria. England had to pay a huge ransom to release him.

When Richard arrived in England, he was very kind to John and forgave him for trying to take over. John could have been executed but he never realised how lucky he was to survive.

John as king

King Richard died in 1199, and John became King of England. This also made him the ruler of large parts of France. John was not happy, though, and he wanted more land so he went to war with the King of France. John won some victories but soon lost most of his land in France. To get back at John, Philip, the King of France, began to help John's nephew, Arthur, to take over as King of England.

Arthur and his supporters started a rebellion against the king but John was too strong and it failed. John captured Arthur and, although he promised that his nephew was being looked after in prison, he actually killed him. John got drunk and had Arthur thrown into the River Seine where he drowned. The English nobles were furious with John because it was a huge sin and a crime to kill a member of the Royal Family who should have become a king when he was older.

John and the Pope

In 1209, a very important event happened. John argued with the Pope, Innocent III, over who should be the new Archbishop of Canterbury. John said that, as he was King of England, he could choose the man to be in charge of the church in England but the Pope refused. The argument got so bad that Pope Innocent excommunicated John and all the people of England. This meant they were thrown out of the Church which made many people angry and scared because there were no sacraments. This was serious because it meant that babies could not be baptised, people could not get married, they could not go to confess their sins and the dead could not be buried properly. John finally gave in during 1213. Pope Innocent had won and the people had their church services again but many people hated John for what had happened.

John and Magna Carta

England lost a war with France in 1214. John returned to England to find that the barons were fed up with him and were planning to get rid of him. In 1215, the barons and lords forced John to meet them and they made him accept a new set of rules and rights called the Magna Carta, one of the most famous and important documents in English history. Although John agreed to the Magna Carta, he immediately broke his promise. He said it was illegal and he would not follow it. This led to another war between John and the Barons and it was around this time that John travelled to Knaresborough and met Robert the Hermit.

LINKS: BBC Teach: The Story of Magna Carta

<http://viewpure.com/wWKTy1NlxZE?start=0&end=0>

Horrible Histories: Magna Carta Rap Battle

http://viewpure.com/F_5My8XH-n0?start=0&end=0

The death of King John

John signed Magna Carta in 1215 but very soon he decided to ignore it. Some of the barons were so angry that they decided to fight John. The king ended up at Newark Castle in Nottinghamshire where he was taken ill. Some people said he ate too many unripe peaches, some that he drank too much ale and some said he had been poisoned. He probably just drank dirty water at a time when he was exhausted. John died a very painful death on 19th October, 1216.

Matthew Paris, a famous monk, wrote about John: 'Hell is a foul and horrible place but it will be made even more horrible when King John goes there.' He really was a very unpopular man.

1210: The First Royal Maundy

King John first gave out 'Maundy Money' to feed and clothe thirteen paupers (poor people) in Knaresborough on Maundy Thursday, 15th April, 1210. The day after this, he fed a hundred local people and, across Yorkshire, he fed a thousand paupers.

The three days between the evening of Maundy Thursday and the morning of Easter Sunday are the most important feast days for Christians. 'Maundy' comes from the Latin word 'mandatum' which means to command or order. This is why the day is called 'Maundy Thursday'.

Christians believe that on 'Maundy Thursday', Jesus ate the Last Supper with his closest friends, the apostles. At that meal, he washed the feet of his apostles and ordered them to serve other people. He commanded them to love and help each other. Jesus also ordered them to share bread and wine together in memory of him.

For many years, the pope, bishops and priests had washed the feet of the people on Maundy Thursday as a reminder of what Jesus had done. It was a sign of how they were to be humble and to serve the people. Many kings gave gifts to the people on Maundy Thursday. Some kings gave away land or animals but John decided to give money. King John chose Knaresborough as the first place to give Maundy Money. This was in 1210.

One of the interesting questions is why John started to do this in 1210. One of the reasons for this might have been that the Pope had excommunicated John and England, which meant they had all been thrown out of the Church. This was a way of making John look better to the people. He was very unpopular at the time and his reputation with the people of England was really bad.

LINK: Queen Elizabeth giving out Maundy Money in 2011

<http://viewpure.com/Ekb2ppBy2jw?start=0&end=0>

1215: John and Robert

We do not know exactly when Robert of Knaresborough met King John but it was early in 1216. This was near the end of John's life as he died later that year at the age of 50. We also know that Robert died in 1218 at the age of about 58. They would both have been quite old for that time.

John had recently signed the 'Magna Carta' but he had already broken his promises. To break a vow or a big promise was something religious people, like Robert, thought was very serious.

Robert was a kind, patient and friendly man but he was also very honest and fair. It is interesting to think about how he might have treated King John. The king had done many bad things in his life so they would have had a lot to talk about but John might have stayed quiet about his bad behaviour.

We know John was praying when John came to see him. Robert carried on with his prayers and then ignored the king by saying he had only one true king and that was God. Things were quite tense because John could not get angry and attack Robert who was a monk and a very popular man in the area.

Things do seem to have improved, though, and John gave Robert about forty acres of land. Robert accepted this land as it allowed him to do more to help the poor. But had Robert given John something so that the land was a thank you?

Maybe Robert offered advice about how to run the country or what to do about Magna Carta. Or perhaps he told the king about his life story and how he had tried to help the poor and look after the animals in Knaresborough Forest. He might have told John that he remembered 1210 when John gave out Maundy Money in the town and it made people happy. Or it could have been that he gave John forgiveness for his sins and prayed with him.

John possibly wanted Robert's help or he wanted to say, 'Thank you' and to help Robert to continue his work in Knaresborough. Sadly, we will never know the reason.

LINK: The opening two minutes and then the final section from 16'30'' of Arnold Kellett's tour of Knaresborough

<http://viewpure.com/vZ9EJ-1aFi0?start=0&end=0>

TASKS: Pupils could do any of the following:

- Look at their own Good or Bad King/Queen and compare the ideas with the evidence of what John was like. Is it fair to describe John as 'The Worst King of England'?
- Write a story, poem or song about King John.
- They could do some of these events about John's life as a series of Tweets or Instagram posts.
- They could design a coat of arms using some of the events and problems from his life.
- Design a series of T-Shirts (or other things, like shopping bags) with images and slogans linked with John's life.
- They could write and perform a play, or a number of little plays, about King John in Knaresborough. They could do a play about coming to Knaresborough in 1210 when he gave out Maundy Money, or about 1216 when he met Robert - or they could include both of these events.