

# Unit 1: When was the medieval period?

## National Curriculum Key Elements

- 1 Chronology (a, b)
- 4 Historical enquiry (a)
- 5 Organisation and communication (a, b, c)

## Activities

The aim of this unit is to introduce students to the medieval period. The word 'medieval' is derived from the Latin words *medius aevum* meaning 'the middle age'. By the end of all the activities students should have developed their understanding and knowledge of this fascinating time in this country's history.

The first activity requires the student to use the background information and images, any other materials he or she can find and their existing knowledge to build up a picture of the Middle Ages. It provides an opportunity to work with other students to build up a spider diagram to illustrate their group's knowledge of medieval Britain. The framework for the spider diagram is provided as **Student sheet 1** (page 3) and students should aim to give at least five examples for each section. This can be extended by asking students to design an appropriate cover for a textbook on this period of history.

The final two activities will help the student to place people and events into the correct timeframe and thus provide them with a chronology of the period (using **Students sheets 2 and 3**, pages 4 and 5).

## Extension activity

There is scope for students to carry out their own independent research into an event or person of this period of history. Their task is to collect information about the event or find out about the role of an individual. The information should be used to produce an educational poster about his or her chosen event or character. The poster, which might be in the form of a storyboard, should be informative, attractively presented and well-organised. The final choice of topic is up to the student, but must be linked to British medieval history. The activities in this unit should provide them with some ideas. A look through any textbook on this period of history is another good way of getting ideas. Unit 2 (page 6) is designed to help the student plan their own response to such a task.

## Background information

It is often stated that the medieval period began with a battle and ended with another. The beginning is 1066 and the Battle of Hastings, probably the best known date and event in English history, when William of Normandy defeated the English army led by the last Saxon king, Harold Godwinsson. The end is 1485 and the Battle of Bosworth, when Henry Tudor took the throne from Richard III. This marked the start of the Tudor Dynasty. Textbooks and the film industry have tended to portray this as an era of death and destruction, in which a valiant few have struggled to overcome the evils of the time. Certainly films, such as Mel Gibson's *Braveheart* and Kevin Costner's *Robin Hood*, provide this image of the period, as well as, in the interests of a good storyline and box office success, a somewhat distorted view of the facts as known. However not all was doom and gloom. The period saw great buildings constructed. These included many that survive today, such as the Tower of London, Warwick Castle and the cathedrals at Lincoln and Peterborough. Contact with the Arab world also led to developments in science and technology.

## Setting Research Questions

The following examples, from different periods of time, are to help you to establish your own research questions in preparation for carrying out your investigation into the importance of an event or person in medieval history.

### Example 1: The Battle of Waterloo

a **Background information:**

When did the battle take place? Where did the battle occur? Who were the two armies involved? Who were the leaders of the two armies? Was the battle part of a bigger conflict?

b **The event:**

Who won the battle? How many people were killed and wounded? What were the main events in the battle? What were the turning points in the battle? What factors led to the victory of one side over the other?

c **The consequences:**

What happened as a result of the battle having taken place? What might have happened if the other army had been victorious?



### Example 2: King Henry VIII of England and Wales

a **Background information:**

When was Henry born? Who were his parents? When did he die? When did he become King? Who did he marry? Did he have any children?

b **Key events in his reign:**

What were the main events affecting England during the reign of Henry?

Who were the people to influence Henry?

c **A summary of his reign:**

Was Henry a successful King? What were his strengths? What were his weaknesses? Did he create problems for any future monarchs?



# Gaining Control of England

The Battle of Hastings was a great victory for the Normans, but it did not mean that William had conquered the whole country. He had gained a foothold in the south-east corner of England, but still needed to bring the rest of the country under his control.



The statements below show some of the main challenges still facing William and some of the ways in which he tackled these problems:

- 1 Cut out the statements and sort them into two piles, one headed 'Problems' and the other 'Solutions'.
- 2 The next step is to match a solution to a problem.
- 3 Imagine you are William, put the problems into the order that you would deal with them.

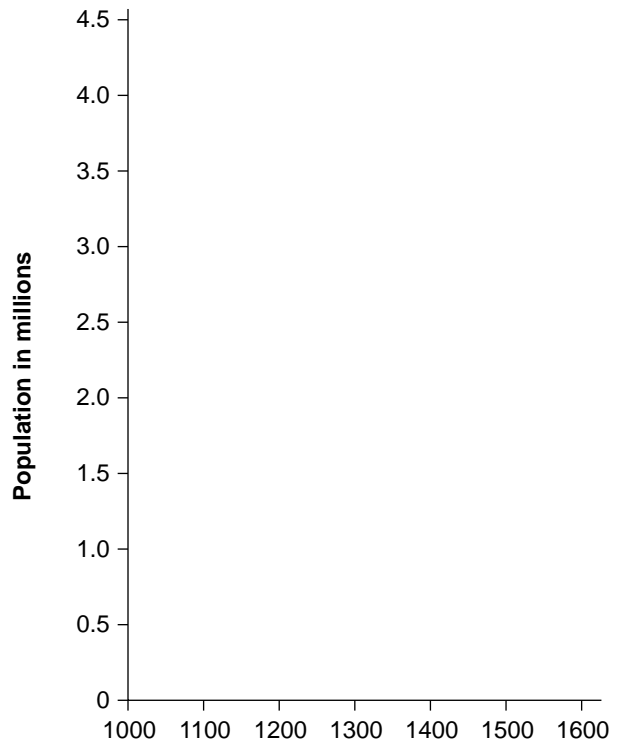
<p>England is without a King, now that Harold is dead.</p>	<p>March to Dover and confront the defenders and take control of the fortress.</p>
<p>Recruit more soldiers in Normandy to strengthen your army.</p>	<p>Give your supporters, the Barons and Knights, land in England to manage on your behalf.</p>
<p>March to London and get yourself crowned King.</p>	<p>Build castles across England to provide bases from which to control the Saxon earls and their people.</p>
<p>Organise a survey to find out how much everyone owns and whether they should pay more tax (the Domesday Survey).</p>	<p>A large force of English soldiers is based in a fort at Dover. This army could mount an attack or cut you off from your home in Normandy.</p>
<p>The people of Northumbria do not accept your rule and rebel.</p>	<p>You need to raise money to pay for the conquest and defence of your new kingdom.</p>
<p>There remains a threat of invasions from Norway and Denmark.</p>	<p>Organise a campaign of terror in the north of England to show your power and anger.</p>
<p>Many of the English Earls cannot be trusted to control their parts of the country and may not accept you as King.</p>	<p>Many Normans supported you in the hope that victory would bring wealth and power. They might challenge your position if not rewarded.</p>

# The Effects of the Great Pestilence

The most striking effect of the Black Death was the decline in population. The following figures are best estimates of the population of England at set times in the Middle Ages and early modern age.

Year	Population (million)
1086	1.5
1327	3.0
1377	2.0
1521	2.5
1600	4.3

Figures from material in H C Darby, *A New Historical Geography of England before 1600*, Cambridge University Press, 1976



Draw a line graph to show these figures. Will the population of England have grown or declined as steadily as your graph suggests?

Try to explain your answer by suggesting what factors might have affected the growth of population in this period.

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The impact on some of the villages in Cambridgeshire was as follows:

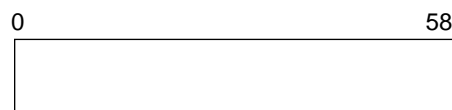
1 Dry Drayton  
(20 out of 42 tenants died) = %



2 Oakington  
(35 out of 50 tenants died) = %



3 Cottenham  
(33 out of 58 tenants died) = %



Effect	Short or long term
Villages were abandoned as there were so few people left	
Wages increased as there was a shortage of labour	
Peasants began to stand up for their rights	

