

History: The Middle Ages



Middle Ages 1154-1487

In 1154, **Henry II** of the Plantagenet dynasty became king. He established a permanent court at Westminster and introduced the system of *Common Law*, based on custom and comparison of previous cases. The law was administered by travelling judges, and trial by jury replaced trial by ordeal.

With the *Constitution of Clarendon* (1164), Henry claimed authority in choosing the bishops to reduce the power of the Church.

Richard I the Lionheart became king in 1189. He devoted his life to the defence of the faith and led the Third Crusade. **John** (Lackland) ruled the country while Richard was away and after his death. In 1215, John was forced by the barons to sign *Magna Carta*, a charter of liberties.

Henry III claimed the French throne in 1137 and the *Hundred Years' War* began. Thanks to the use of the longbow, Henry V won the battle of Agincourt in 1415, but the French army won at Orleans (1429) with Joan of Arc. In 1348, *Black Death*, a terrible plague, reached England and one third of the population died.

Between 1444 and 1487, a series of civil wars, known as the *Wars of the Roses*, were fought between two branches of the same family descended from Edward III. The house of York was represented by the white rose and the Lancasters by the red rose. The Lancastrian Henry Tudor defeated the Yorkist Richard III at Bosworth in 1485 and was crowned as **Henry VII**. He married Elizabeth of York and created the Tudor rose, red and white.

Norman Britain 1066-1154

William I, known as the Conqueror, brought to England a new aristocracy from Normandy and established the feudal system. He sent officers throughout England to make a complete survey of the economic life of the country and compile the *Domesday Book*.



American Discovery 1492

After landing on a small island on 12th October 1492, in what he believed were the Indies, **Columbus** sailed along the coast of Cuba, certain that he had finally reached the continent of Cathay. Three voyages later, Columbus still maintained that he had reached China.

Amerigo Vespucci's voyage along the coast of South America convinced most explorers and their patrons that a huge unexplored continent existed across the Atlantic—what Vespucci called *Mundus Novus*, the New World.

Discovery of Florida 1513

A Spanish explorer, **Juan Ponce de León**, landed on the coast of Florida. Probably because his arrival in Florida occurred at the time of the Easter feast (*Pascua Florida*), Ponce de León named the land, which he claimed for Spain, La Florida.

In 1521 his party was fiercely attacked by Native Americans, and he was severely wounded by an arrow. The expedition sailed immediately for Cuba, where Ponce de León soon died.



*The landing of Columbus
(J. Vanderlyn, 1846)*



*The battle of Hastings
(from the Bayeux Tapestry)*



1 Watch this video on Richard the Lionheart and answer these questions.

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

1. Why was Richard different from the other kings?
2. What is surprising about him as a king of England?
3. What good qualities did he represent?
4. Why was he called the Lionheart?
5. What did scholars think of him in the 19th century?
6. What do scholars think of him today?



2 Watch this video on Magna Carta and complete this summary. Then, discuss the questions in pairs.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XPDufeww5HU>

Magna Carta was signed at 1. on 2. It prevented 3. taxation and defined feudal 4. between the king and the barons. It guaranteed a number of right and personal 5. The Church could make their own ecclesiastical 6. Magna Carta was the basis for 7. Law. The most important article is number 8. which says: "No free man shall be taken, 9., deprived of possessions, outlawed, exiled or in any way diminished, nor shall we go against him or send anyone against him except by means of a 10. judgement of his peers of by the means of a law of the land." John needed money to run the 11. and sustain his possessions in 12. The barons revolted because of the heavy taxes and the 13.

1. What is your opinion on Richard the Lionheart? What he a good king?
2. What is the legacy of Magna Carta?



3 Divide into four groups and read a document each.

Then, mix the groups and exchange information.

At the end, each group reports about the document they have not read.

1. What type of document is it?
2. What is it about?
3. What type of information does it contain?



Magna Carta Liberatum

Doc 1: From Christopher Columbus's Journal (11th October 1492) – English translation

All of them go around as naked as their mothers bore them; and the women also, although I did not see more than one quite young girl. And all those that I saw were young people, for none did I see of more than 30 years of age. They are very well formed, with handsome bodies and good faces. Their hair coarse – almost like the tail of a horse – and short. They wear their hair down over their eyebrows except for a little in the back which they wear long and never cut. Some of them paint themselves with black, and they are of the colour of the Canarians, neither black nor white; and some of them paint themselves with white, and some of them with red, and some of them with whatever they find. And some of them paint their faces, and some of them the whole body, and some of them only the eyes, and some of them only the nose. They do not carry arms nor are they acquainted with them, because I showed them swords and they took them by the edge and through ignorance cut themselves. They have no iron.

Doc 2: From a letter of Christopher Columbus about his first voyage of 1492 (November 1493) – Translated from Latin in 1892

From this place I saw another island to the east, distant from this Juana 54 miles, which I called forthwith Hispana and sailed to it. [...] This island is surrounded by many very safe and wide harbours, not excelled by any others that I have seen. Many great and salubrious rivers flow through it. There are also many very high mountains there. All these islands are very beautiful, and distinguished by various qualities, they are accessible, and full of great variety of trees stretching up to the stars; the leaves of which I believe are never shed, for I saw them as green and flourishing as they are usually in Spain in the month of May; some of them were blossoming, some were bearing fruit, [...] each one was thriving in its own way. The nightingale and various other birds without number were singing, in the month of November [...].