

What time does the tune start?

Planning at Key Stage 3: Helping students see the bigger pictures of the Middle Ages

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One of my favourite passages of dialogue in one of my favourite books goes like this:

'What sort of music are you going to make me listen to tonight?'
'Jazz.'
'Obviously. But what kind of jazz?'
'What kinds do you know about?'
'I know three kinds. Hot. Cool. And what time does the tune start?'

And thus, Trevor, crumpled Geordie woodwork teacher and jazz freak, and Jill, radical, feminist English teacher, head off to the singing room of the Limping Whippet in rainswept outer Leeds in search of the music of the Frank Ricotti All Stars, due reward for spiriting the mysterious Ivan over one of the most dangerous frontiers known to mankind – the Lancashire border.

For more, read Alan Plater's *The Beiderbecke Connection* but, before you click on the search engine of your choice, I'll try to explain what that has to do with teaching about the Middle Ages. I suspect that many Key Stage 3 students hear and enjoy the individual notes – the events – of the Middle Ages and some of those notes are memorable, being loud and exciting, but those same students may struggle to hear the tune i.e. an overall sense of the period and its bigger pictures, the patterns of continuity and change and the ideas and attitudes that lie behind the events. This is not a new problem but recent changes have made it much worse in many schools – the

reductions in teaching time, the massive distractions of curriculum change at GCSE and A-level and the mania of management for ill-conceived assessment practices.

But whether you have ten, 30 or 50 hours to teach about the Middle Ages at Key Stage 3 (and the variety of time available is probably even wider than that) it is important to give courses coherence and create a more sophisticated, representative and respectful picture of the period. Much of this will not be new to experienced teachers but I have in mind particularly those new to teaching and those teaching at Key Stage 3 with little background in medieval history.

[As an aside for new teachers, planning (and teaching) is, fundamentally, a problem-solving task, whether students are seven, 17 or 87. You know the parameters of how many lessons, what you want students to learn, what resources you have, what students may struggle with and often misunderstand, and then you spend loads of fascinating time working out how to juggle all those things into a coherent course.]

There are, inevitably, overlaps with discussions in the other articles in this teaching section, such as linking Key Stage 3 to GCSE, the importance of diagnosing students' preconceptions and ensuring that courses don't leave out over half of the population. Omitting those issues from this article on planning

doesn't mean they are irrelevant in planning – it's just that they're tackled separately for the sake of clarity

Finally, by way of introduction, I'd like to emphasise that these ideas are all 'works in progress' that I plan to explore later in the wider *Exploring and Teaching Medieval History* project. It's also worth warning you (you may have realised already!) that I have not written this in a measured, academic, fully-footnoted and evidenced way. This is a kite-flying, conjectural, 'revelling in thinking afresh after years of having to do what's necessary' kind of article, written with a great sense of excitement and passion for teaching this period. There's a vast range of possibilities to be explored – and hopefully you'll hear the tune amidst all the improvisations.

This lengthy article is split into these sections:

1. Planning around the period rather than events
2. Possibilities for 'overview' enquiry questions
3. Planning the 'takeaways' from Key Stage 3 work on the Middle Ages
4. Enquiries on individual 'topics'
5. Some questions about selection of content
6. The structure of schemes of work on the Middle Ages
7. The Middle Ages within Key Stage 3 as a whole

1. Planning around the

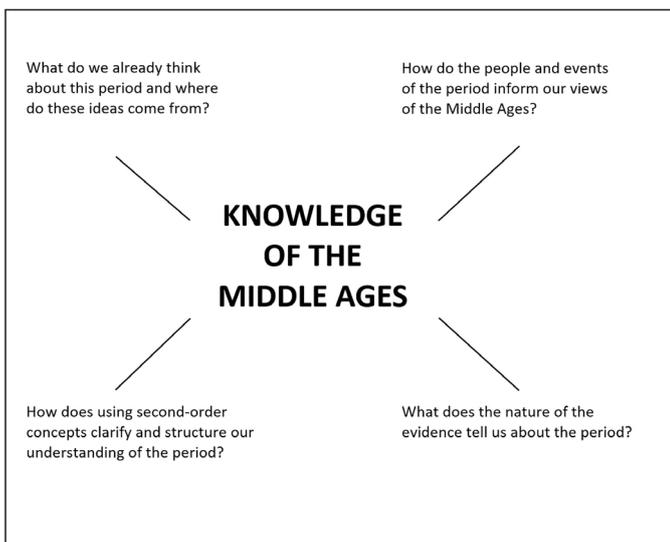
period rather than events

Key Stage 3 students learn about a range of events and people *within* the Middle Ages but this is not the same as gaining an understanding of the characteristics of the period or of their similarities and differences with the characteristics of other periods. It is also very different from understanding the broad rhythms of changes and continuities that lie behind the events. In the historians' summaries on pages 8-11 you can read about some of these broader patterns – population trends, the growth of towns, of freedom, education and literacy, ideas about beliefs, the involvement of the wider populace in politics etc. etc. If students don't gain explicit knowledge of some of these developments then any amount of knowledge of individual events ends up being much less than the sum of its parts.

The core idea in this section is to build planning around understanding of the Middle Ages as a period (as shown in the diagram below), choosing and utilising events and second-order concepts as the means to develop understanding of the period itself. This approach then underpins the discussions in the rest of this article.

Diagram 1

This approach has several potential advantages:



- it provides coherence and can be used over ten, 30 or 50 hours without reducing coherence
- it can be rooted in students' preconceptions of the period, thus enabling them to identify how their understandings develop and change during the course, making their learning visible and hence far more effective.
- it reduces the danger of studying only those events that seem to be foreshadowing events and developments of importance today.
- it provides a better-informed context for studying medieval options at GCSE and A-level (see pages 75-77)

- it has the potential to create stronger links with other periods and enable the planning of a Key Stage 3 history course as a whole.

While much of the emphasis is on supporting departments whose Key Stage 3 teaching time has been cut back, this approach can also help those who still have plenty of teaching time and continue to cover a wide range of events. Herein may lie a different issue – do students, simply because of the greater number of events studied, struggle to obtain a strong sense of the changes and continuities across the period as a whole and can they see similarities and differences between the preoccupations of this period and later ones?

2. Possibilities for 'overview' enquiry questions

Every history course from Key Stage 2 to A-level needs one, maybe two, enquiry questions at its heart to link topics together, create coherence and give a sense of overall direction – to go back to my musical analogy, it enables students to hear the overall tune which links the notes – the individual events, people and shorter enquiries. Having such a question also helps students gain a sense of achievement because at the end, they can provide a fuller and better answer than at the beginning.

To make the period and its characteristics the centre of study here are three types of overview question that could each act as a central thread:

- a question based upon students' preconceptions of the Middle Ages – these aren't necessarily student-friendly wordings but approaches along the lines of 'We described the Middle Ages as '-'. Are we right?' or 'Was the way we first described the Middle Ages fair? or 'How do you think the Middle Ages should be portrayed?'

A note on 'knowledge' and 'understanding'

I have been puzzling over when to use the word 'knowledge' and when to use 'understanding' in this article. Not everyone interprets these words in the same way which can lead to confusions. For some 'knowledge' means remembering individual details and 'understand' means the capacity to explain broader issues such as the impact of the Norman Conquest or the pattern of royal power across a period or make links across longer spans of time. Michael Fordham (in his stimulating blog clioetcetera.com) and others have discussed whether distinguishing between these words is misleading – how can you understand without knowledge and vice-versa? This is the approach I have taken here, using 'knowledge' where some might prefer 'understanding', essentially using them as synonyms.

This ties into the importance of diagnosing students' initial thoughts about the Middle Ages and its people (see pages 72-74). That diagnostic stage loses a great deal of its value if not then built into the fabric of the course and revisited at intervals. That rethinking, re-evaluating of ideas is not only important in the context of an individual period or topic but models what we do when learning most effectively – we keep reflecting back on how our understandings are changing and the evidence that our revised understanding is based on. If the study of history as a whole can be described as a conversation between historians then we all learn most effectively when we hold conversations with ourselves, mentally identifying how our understanding of a topic is developing and, critically, identifying what we are still puzzled or unsure about.

Focusing initially on students' own preconceptions rather than on other interpretations, such as those of historians, a description in a children's book or 'dungeon'-type holiday experience seems important as it gives students an immediate sense of direct involvement – it's their ideas they're working to develop, not someone else's – time later to move on to analysing other interpretations, particularly those of historians and compare them with students' own growing understandings.

b) a question such as 'Did anything ever change in the Middle Ages?' which focuses on degrees of change and continuity and links into the general belief that this was a period of history when little or nothing changed. I used a similar question in a book for the first National Curriculum in 1991; it was, at best, worthy but very dull. It worked as a vehicle for assessing degrees of change in various themes and linked to the assessment of understanding of change and continuity but it never hooked or intrigued anybody!

Dullness doesn't make it a pointless question – it's an important one and an answer helps develop that overall sense of the period. Having said that, an answer can be reached as part of a course conclusion without this question being your central enquiry.

c) The third approach is suggested by Elisabeth Pickles and Rachel Richardson on pages 81-83. They start with a question from near the end of the course: 'Why did the peasants revolt in 1381?' and use their whole course (a short one) to build an answer – to do this you do need to understand about continuities and changes in the nature of kingship and attitudes to monarchy, the role of religion, the changes in population, the prosperity and freedom of the commons. You could also draw on the changing fortunes of the French war, popular involvement in politics etc. It's not just a study of the period since the onset of the Black Death.

This is a really intriguing approach, well suited to having a relatively small amount of teaching time and needing to make an even more rigorous selection of content. It's

a genuine historical question and answering it shows the value of knowledge of both short-term events and long-term patterns of history.

Could a question on Cade's rebellion in 1450 serve the same function? Another possibility is a question along the lines of 'How close did the Pilgrimage of Grace come to deposing Henry VIII?' – another 'good story' to begin and answers draw on changing patterns of royal power (including the perceived impact of the Wars of the Roses), expectations of monarchs, the centrality of religion including the link between religious festivals and risings, the importance of harvests, threats from abroad, the quality of communications and the commons' interest in politics.

Would such a question, used as a central thread, reveal more about the nature of medieval thinking and attitudes, changes and continuities than a course built around or restricted to half a dozen bedrock events? It might – though it raises the question of how you tackle those old favourites in such a context. Is it unthinkable to whizz past the Norman Conquest – or is there another way of structuring a course? For this see point 6 below.

3. Planning the 'takeaways' from Key Stage 3 work on the Middle Ages

A little over 800 years ago, the chronicler Gervase of Canterbury wrote:

I have no desire to note down all those things which are memorable but only those things which ought to be remembered that is, those things which are clearly worthy of remembrance.

Gervase may not have been thinking about writing a scheme of work but he clearly understood the problems of selection, as did many other medieval chroniclers who spent time choosing between the 'worthy of remembrance' and the merely 'memorable'. Similarly, the most important aspect of planning at Key Stage 3 is identifying what we want students to take away from the course. What do we believe it is important for them to know and so be able to use again? In terms of the Middle Ages, such re-use may be in the context of:

- the history they cover later in Key Stage 3
- GCSE and, perhaps, A-level history
- their overall cultural knowledge and sense of historical perspective
- their ability to question public interpretations of this period of history

This discussion of planning is therefore firmly focused on the history, not on the needs of assessing students against a set of generic levels, one of the most retrograde developments in education, now being taken to new heights of absurdity by the application of GCSE

Possible 'takeaway' knowledge about the Middle Ages

- People's quality of life was greatly affected by the quality of the harvest, which in turn depended on changes both in climate and in the weather. Successive harvest failures could lead to great hardship and the danger of starvation for some.
- The population grew quickly until the early 1300s, then fell by up to 50% with the onset of the Black Death. These changes in population affected prosperity and freedom. In the fifteenth century living standards for many were higher than over the next three centuries.
- Life-expectancy and health were similar in this period to other periods apart from that since the late nineteenth century. People tried to safeguard their health, especially trying to improve public health in periods of plague.
- Ideas about science and medicine were very different from ours but were detailed, carefully-studied and logical in terms of the world-view of the period. Scholars sought new ideas and universities developed.
- Christianity was the official religion in Britain though its ideas were sometimes questioned. Ideas of heaven, hell and purgatory had a great influence on many people's actions. The Church's holy days determined working patterns and created many opportunities for rest and community activities.
- The Church in England was part of wider Christendom, under the authority of the Pope, and was very wealthy. Abbeys played a significant part in trade and in providing care for the poor.
- The vast majority of people lived in villages and were agricultural workers, hard physical work shared by women and children. Many towns grew or were founded in the early part of this period.
- Women were regarded as under the command of their menfolk though in practice individual women ran businesses or their husbands' estates and gave their husbands advice on many issues.
- Britain was closely connected to the rest of Europe through trade. England's strong links with Scandinavia were ended by the Norman Conquest. After this, French culture and language had a major influence in England and politics was strongly affected by disputes and wars with France.
- England was the richest and most powerful part of Britain and English lords gradually took over Wales but had little impact in Ireland. Scotland fought successfully to remain independent.
- Wars were chiefly fought for the king's glory and to defend his lands and power. Crusades against non-Christians in the Middle East and Europe continued unevenly throughout this period.
- Monarchs were seen as God's representatives and remained central to government, being expected to defend their people from enemies and disorder at home and from abroad.
- Monarchs were expected to consult their nobles about important decisions before taking the decisions themselves. Magna Carta and parliaments began as attempts to ensure kings did consult nobles and others.
- Nobles were very reluctant to rebel but sometimes did when their own positions were threatened by the uncontrolled actions of kings. Kings were usually only deposed in the last resort.
- Government was increasingly complex with detailed records.
- The commons were increasingly well informed about political events and expected kings and nobles to provide defence, peace and prosperity. They became confident and well organised enough to protest when feeling threatened by poor government.
- People were just as intelligent (or not!) as in later centuries and shared many emotions and ideals with people today. By the 1400s literacy levels were rising and printing developed.

levels to Key Stage 3 and the insistence that students answer formulaic GCSE questions from the age of 11. History has got more to offer than simply being a means of data collection.

In identifying students' 'takeaways' we can think about three categories. The first two overlap a good deal but I've separated them so the first doesn't get lost, as it can do on occasion:

A. long-term developments and issues that underpin much Key Stage 3 History but may not always get the time and focus that's needed to help students see their importance – these include population changes, urbanisation, climate, harvest-dependence.

B. long-term 'stories' that students can follow across Key Stage 3 and which are usually represented in schemes of work, though not always in every period – social conditions, royal power, the development of popular involvement in politics, beliefs and religion, England's relationship with the rest of Britain, Britain's relationship with the rest of the world, migration, the development of empires, changes in gender roles.

C. individual events – the Norman Conquest etc. etc. etc.

Although a good deal of planning may focus on the third category, the first two are more important in terms of re-useable knowledge in the context of the four bullet points on page 100. It's those wider themes that provide the context for understanding the significance of individual events and give meaning to their inclusion in schemes of work. All too often rapid overviews of such themes are seen as the second-class citizens, left out when a depth enquiry over-runs, but maybe this order of priorities needs re-thinking with overviews having a much stronger place in schemes of work, especially when there is a limited time available – you do cover a lot more history that way! Is there a case for planning depth around a core of overviews (usually very brief) rather than squeezing overview themes into gaps between depth enquiries? There is a myth that themes are less interesting because there are no good stories to tell and no people to talk about. This is pure myth – stories about individual people are the very things that illuminate broad patterns.

Page 102 provides ideas for discussion relating to categories A and B above – what might constitute a set of 'takeaways' from work on the Middle Ages that students will re-use in the future? A couple of further points first:

- this is not a list of the only things they should learn! It's a set of takeaways that relate to the tune behind this whole article – a broader knowledge of the period than may be gained through the individual events in category C above.
- these are not written in 'pupil-speak' as no single version is suitable for all students.

You may not want or have time to cover all these points or, in other cases, many of these points will be present in schemes of work. If they are not, does a list such as this (maybe necessarily a shorter one) help plan a course that provides a fairer, more representative view of the age? And does it provide a good focus for assessment?

4. Enquiries on individual 'topics'

This section sets out questions which may reveal deeper understandings of the Middle Ages than those that focus on a single event or individual. They also link back to the overview enquiry questions above in section 2. I haven't tried to tease out precise wordings for the 'ultimate enquiry question'. There's a lot to be gained, e.g. in terms of departmental co-operation, in 'wrestling' your way to the ideal question. It may be, however, as much time needs to be spent working out how to develop students' ability to formulate their own questions – one of the hallmarks of high-quality students.

a) How good were medieval people at problem-solving?

To take one example, how effectively did they organise military expeditions? Anne Curry's article (pages 60-63) shows that military campaigns could be very well organised, though not all were. The starting point is to ask students what they think would be needed for an expedition and if they can suggest how they would do it – what could go wrong and what would be the worst mistakes? Then reveal how Henry V tackled this in 1415 – how does this compare with students' plans and what have they learned from this? Taking us into understanding that government was an increasingly complex and sophisticated process. William of Normandy's preparations in 1066 provide another example. Another topic under this heading would be how people dealt with growing and supplying more food as the population grew or how to best plan a castle for defence *and* comfort. There are plenty more possibilities (see page 90 for the example of the Neville Screen in Durham cathedral).

b) What is the most valuable evidence for understanding beliefs about religion? A question about the nature of evidence, doubling up to reveal ideas about religion. One attraction is the range of evidence – the Luttrell Psalter and other religious books, wills, chronicles, buildings and their contents, which means not only churches but the placement of chapels in castles, for example.

c) What really mattered to Geoffrey and Agnes Luttrell and their villagers? The Psalter is such an enticing starter because its images tell us a lot – but so does Geoffrey's will and so do the careers and marriages of the family. These take us into issues of religion, charity, community and the future of souls, to war and honour, the importance of the family and land and to the labour of the villagers, their roles as household servants and to the centrality of farming and the harvest. There is also

the sense of uncertainty – we cannot know but only suggest, which must be a continuing thread in all work on medieval topics particularly.

d) 'Medieval lords were always eager to depose kings.' To what extent do you agree with this statement? A mature formulation but easily made concrete with an Agree-Disagree continuum line identifying initial thoughts. This question saves us from getting bogged down in John and Magna Carta. It may be a starting point but after that groups could explore other events with depositions almost always a prolonged and reluctant process (throwing the events of 1483 into high relief). A companion question 'Did ordinary people care about politics?' provides a broader understanding, more than just a study of the events of 1381.

e) Was everyday life in the medieval countryside just about survival? Another 'challenge a generalisation' question – you can find answers in Chris Dyer's article on pages 52-55. Many topics on 'village life' struggle to build in a sense of change across time whereas this enables variations to appear naturally and to embrace the impact of the Black Death as well as looking at the fundamental role of religion in people's lives.

f) What were the three most important moments in the history of, for example, the Crusades or England's relationships with the rest of Britain or England's relationship with Europe? These are big significance questions, setting out wider stories and providing context for individual events. They need not take anything like as long to cover as may appear at first glance and have very clear outcomes which can take us into significance and interpretations.

One concern about the above questions is that the second-order concepts that have so dominated assessment at Key Stage 3 are not as immediately apparent as they often are (nor do these questions echo GCSE assessment questions). One reason is that cause and consequence questions are often about individual events or developments – why did x happen? – which gives primacy to studying individual events and loses the bigger understandings of the period. Having said that, there is a great deal in these questions of broader value for assessment at Key Stage 3 and GCSE – making judgements supported by evidence, knowledge and understanding of key features and characteristics of the period (saving time at GCSE?) as well as issues about change and continuity and the nature of evidence. Another important element is ensuring that there are opportunities to challenge generalisations, gaining practice in identifying e.g. that motives or experiences varied among an apparently similar group of people. This helps move away from the feeling that the only good answer is a definite answer, whereas so often the best answers are the 'definitely uncertain' ones (with supporting evidence, of course!).

5. Some questions about selection of content

a) Does the choice of content distort students' understanding of the period? Let's take Richard III, a popular 'mystery' puzzle, usually studied to prompt thinking about the nature of sources. But if all you study about Richard III is the disappearance of the Princes in the Tower the implication is that royal children were fair game for any would-be crown-seeker, that this sort of thing was accepted in the constantly murderous fifteenth century. This is not an accurate view of this period – if it was, then there would not have been a widespread rebellion later in 1483, prompted to a large extent by the violence of Richard's seizure of power and by some element of moral outrage. To understand the range of motives and actions we need to look at the aftermath of the disappearance, not just the 'mystery' itself. The same argument applies to other topics – are students gaining a fair sense of the period or a very one-sided, negative view that builds up a sense of our superiority (especially moral superiority?) over the people of the past?

b) Are topics being studied to reveal the most significant features of medieval life? There are attractions to turning a lesson into an episode of Midsomer Murders – why was Becket murdered? how did Wat Tyler die? These questions help students understand something of the process of analysing sources but are they the most worthwhile approaches to these events? With Becket there's far more to be learned about twelfth-century society if we ask 'Why did Henry II agree to be whipped?' – which takes us into the importance of religion and the limits of royal power. For 1381 we learn far more about the period by concentrating on the personnel and organisation of the rising, their aims (why didn't they attack the king?) and so their knowledge and interest in the quality of government. Drama, good stories, an element of mystery are not excluded by changing the focus – it's where you go after attention has been grabbed that's different.

c) The really 'big' themes – climate, population patterns, the growth of towns etc. do not actually need much teaching time and this simplifies revisiting them in later periods of history, though always in overview, looking e.g. at the impact of changes in the pattern of population. It only takes a few minutes of excitingly didactic explanation (that's not sarcasm – the most riveting and engaging teaching often simply involves the teacher talking) to get the pattern across. Then you can have as much or little discussion time as you want – but the patterns of these background topics reveal a great deal about the period (and are very good for studying the concept of consequences). A similar topic is the nature of the religious year – all those holy days when communities had time off. Just how many were there and when did they fall? What we need is a simple calendar marking off the days when labour was required, when meat could not be eaten etc. – it's something that

really only works when students get the chance to see and think through what that calendar means.

6. The structure of schemes of work on the Middle Ages

We start at the beginning – usually in 1066 – and go through to the end. That’s how we’ve always organised schemes of work though gaps of varying sizes have opened up in many schemes because of lack of time. This section asks whether this framework can effectively accommodate the multiple objectives we have – a sense of chronology, knowledge of individual events and overviews, enhanced understanding of how we study history and use second-order concepts, the opportunity to study in depth etc. etc. Is starting at the beginning and going through to the end the best structure for achieving such a varied set of objectives? Perhaps it is worth considering other structures within whatever teaching time is available. Such alternatives may not turn out to be better but the unorthodox can be worth exploring. Here’s an alternative structure in four parts:

A) Necessary beginnings – find out how students think of the period and where their ideas come from. Then set up an overall enquiry about whether students’ perceptions present a fair picture – plus lessons on the nature of sources and on ‘attitudes and emotions’ – see the articles on pages 72-74, 78-80 and 84-86.

B) Spend 25% (maybe 33%, probably no more) of the course providing an overview outline – what were the key events in each century? How do they reflect on our perceptions of the period? This would involve lots of story-telling with students thinking in terms of headlines, sequence and overall patterns and not going into depth. The SHP textbook *Contrasts and Connections* (1992) had a single page activity (page 152) listing key developments in each century and asking ‘which century would you most like to live in if you were ...?’. Now I don’t think that’s a good question as without anaesthetics, antibiotics, electricity, test cricket etc. we don’t want to live in any of them but amending and reversing the question (‘when would you least like to live?’) and arguing for and against (‘depends who you were?’) provides a potential overview activity for this section of the course and it links into the even bigger question about perceptions of the period. This is also much more easily studied and answered over a limited number of lessons than many. Among the many valuable ideas on Russell Tarr’s website are approaches that can contribute effectively to this strategy:
www.classtools.net/blog/timeline-jigsaw/

C) Spend the bulk of the medieval unit on other kinds of enquiries – one or two in real depth so students can look closely at the decisions that people had to take and the care they took over them. As the ‘highlights’ in part B above may emphasise wars and disasters, one criterion on choosing such depth studies might be to balance up that perspective with questions which help

to create more positive images of the period. This is also the place where you might do very rapid overviews of fundamental issues which underpin medieval society such as population and climate change, the importance of the harvest and the centrality of religion. Important topics don’t necessarily need the longest time if the teaching is clear, powerful and interesting.

D) Round off the overall enquiry into students’ views of the Middle Ages – have they changed and why? How would they now describe the Middle Ages? Also an opportunity to look at overall changes and continuity in the period.

And now for the really big question – what about the Norman Conquest?! The Conquest probably gets more lesson time than any Key Stage 3 topic other than The Great War– it’s a dramatic story with identifiable characters, enables interesting ‘source work’ with the seemingly very accessible Bayeux Tapestry, everyone looks forward to teaching it and it gets Year 7 off to a great start. But it can get very tangled, with story and analysis sitting uneasily together – one minute it’s the beginning of term and Edward the Confessor’s dying and suddenly it’s half-term and you’ve only reached Domesday Book. And there’s now the complication for a lot of departments of teaching it at GCSE. Perhaps the alternative structure above can help, separating the bones of the story (and nobody wants to lose that) in part B from a depth enquiry into the causes of the Conquest or its effects in part C. This allows the Conquest to be placed more effectively in a longer span of time in part B than is often the case when it sits in dominating isolation at the beginning of a course.

7. The Middle Ages within Key Stage 3 as a whole

After the above, it is equally important to say that work on the Middle Ages should not be planned in isolation but in the context of the whole Key Stage 3 course, which itself needs planning as one coherent unit so students see its logic and make connections and contrasts across time. You’ll be relieved to know I am not going to add another five pages on this, partly because a great deal was written about these issues when the 2008 National Curriculum was introduced – see links to that material below. So some brief thoughts: It is important for retaining knowledge for students to revisit the medieval period in a meaningful way. One method is to ensure that key themes appear in each year of Key Stage 3 (royal power, popular politics and democracy, standards of living etc.) so that students can identify these continuing stories and create their own narratives of them. This requires revisiting – ‘Where did we get to with this story?’ ‘What were the key points up to 1530?’ ‘How does what’s happening in the period compare with developments in the Middle Ages?’ In planning it’s therefore vital to identify these ‘stories across time’ and when they will continue to appear.

Three other strategies can be used to revisit the Middle Ages later in Key Stage 3 (and begin visiting the nineteenth and twentieth centuries in Year 7).

a) Revisit in one lesson when most relevant as context the 'biggest' themes such as population, urbanisation and climate.

b) Build in '1,000 years or longer' overviews of topics in two, maybe three lessons across the Key Stage. Possible topics include Britain and Europe, England and Britain, the changing status of women, migration. In Year 7 this can be described as moving 'Fast Forward through time', later on it's more 'Fast rewind across time'! Students are not going to be comfortable moving forwards and backwards mentally across time unless they're given practice in doing so – they may feel lost to begin with but that won't be overcome by abandoning the idea. And yes, it would be wonderful to spend more time on each of these but perhaps there is more to be gained in seeing the whole pattern in one viewing than risk losing them if spread across the key stage. Students should have the chance to see any major theme in one viewing (standards of living, for example) but with some you can spend time on more detail in each year.

c) Spend half a term on a GCSE-style Thematic study near the end of Key Stage 3 to prepare for GCSE and revisit some of the major characteristics of the medieval period.

One final point (which I'd hoped to spend longer on but will write up online) – do we really need to think of there being a significant break in 'history' around 1500? Are we too in thrall to the idea of the Renaissance, a periodisation established centuries ago but which has been challenged by historians on the grounds that (a) there were changes taking place during the Middle Ages and plenty of evidence of enquiring minds and (b) there were a great many continuities between the 1400s and the early 1700s: transport, the nature of work, forms of energy, population size, life expectancy, health and medical care saw only slow change. Other changes were not much greater – Britain's involvement with the wider world, the reduction in the power of the monarchy, for example. Perhaps the clue is in that most unhelpful of labels 'Early Modern' which, in many aspects, is really just the 'Later, Later Middle Ages'. Is it possible that we search too hard for 'change' c. 1450-1700 to justify the label 'Renaissance' rather than thinking from the other direction? Do all the really major changes come in the eighteenth century?

Yes, massive generalisations in that paragraph but, if you only have two years for Key Stage 3, then maybe seeing c. 1000 to c. 1750 as one period and looking at patterns of change and continuity across that bigger period can both save time and make more sense, create more coherence for students, enabling clearer contrast to be made between pre-industrial and industrial societies. The Reformation – yes, a huge split

in Christianity but in terms of varieties of belief and non-belief in Britain perhaps the major change is even later still, in the twentieth century.

Conclusions

Can we keep that tune audible i.e. make sure that coverage of the Middle Ages is not 'just' one interesting lesson after another but a series of interesting lessons which give students a sense of the period – its chief characteristics, its rich variety, its contradictions – illuminated, not obscured, by people and events? Such a course could be more representative of the period, not creating a rosy glow around all aspects of the Middle Ages, not turning it into a more glamorously-dressed version of the early twenty-first century, but respecting people for what they achieved and tried to achieve. If this sounds harder for students then it's even more important to begin with their assumptions. It's a good and helpful strategy to challenge students explicitly – 'this is going to be challenging and it will make you think – are you up for this?' and bring in the work of historians to compare students' views with. Better still, bring in an historian to discuss his or her views on the Middle Ages!

Resources linked to this article

I hope to use this framework to produce free online resources over the next two or three years in. It is a three-year project after all!

There are many articles in *Teaching History* which overlap with the issues in this article. Inadequate though it is I'll pick out three, two new, one older – those by Chris Eldridge in edition 165, by Tony McConnell in edition 166 and by Dale Banham in edition 99.

See also discussions on planning on the History Resource Cupboard website run by Richard McFahn: www.historyresourcecupboard.co.uk/ and a recent (September 2017) blog by David Hibbert on interleaving at GCSE which could have parallels at Key Stage 3: <https://anactofcommunication.wordpress.com/2017/09/01/planning-for-memory-interleaving-at-gcse/>

My own website has a range of discussions on planning across Key Stage 3, particularly exploring themes such as royal power, plus related teaching activities and articles on this theme originally published in *Teaching History*. See the 'Teaching Issues and Discussions' in the Key Stage 3 section of: www.thinkinghistory.co.uk

For discussions of periodisation on different scales see, for example:

J. L. Watts (ed.), *The End of the Middle Ages?* (Sutton Publishing, Stroud, 1998) – a collection of articles exploring aspects of the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries.

Jacques Le Goff, *Must We Divide History into periods?* (Columbia University Press, New York, 2015) – one of the great historians of the twentieth century discusses the idea of the Renaissance and whether a 'long Middle Ages' provides a helpful rethinking of periodisation.