

Explaining some of the features of the Medieval Lives chapters

Style – I haven't tried to hide my enthusiasm and sometimes write in the first person to convey my enthusiasm and thoughts. I could claim this is in keeping with developments in current writing by historians (which it is) but I've done so when I feel this is the best way to communicate effectively.

Vocabulary – I haven't avoided 'difficult' words though I have occasionally included a definition to help understanding. Difficulty, of course, depends on context and on the culture of language that's maintained in the classroom. Finding the 'right' level is impossible and anyway it's essential to expand students' vocabularies – I can still remember my glee at using 'internecine' in an essay when I was in Y12 and getting a tick in the margin!

It's OK to half-understand – Most of us only half-understand things at first but those glimmers of understanding are OK, they lead to curiosity and investigation. So I haven't worried in writing these pages if some of the ideas are only half-understood by some or a lot of students. Having half an idea or even just a glimpse of an idea is better than not being introduced to it at all.

Historians and interpretations – I've mentioned historians and their work when it's seemed natural to do so and I've included the covers of historians' books. Children in PE lessons know what a professional football match looks like – they should know what professional history looks like. In some chapters there'll be specific material on the work of historians but to begin with I've just tried to keep historians visible.

Second-order concepts – In this early material I've tried to help students see the broader process of how we study the past, rather than leaping into the minutiae of work on second-order concepts. There are two reasons for this. Firstly I don't think students appreciate the purposes of working on evidence etc unless they first have that broad picture of the process of studying a period or topic. Secondly I don't believe that answering GCSE-style questions in Y7 is at all necessary to ensure students' success at GCSE. It's far more likely to distort the history and kill students' interest. Learning about the period and people should take pride of place. The joy of History comes before the tyranny of long-term preparation for GCSE.

Tasks and questions – I have included some specific tasks (e.g. diagnosing students' preconceptions) and made suggestions for other tasks in the teachers' notes but have also left more routine pages and material without tasks – it seemed better on these pages to leave the task-setting to you. There are also places where I've offered different ways of approaching the same issue – these will be identified in the teachers' notes.

Notes for teachers – these are provided for each chapter and set out briefly what the material is trying to achieve and anything else that feels relevant.

PowerPoints – I've provided PowerPoint support, mostly material that's in the text but occasionally different material which wouldn't have worked on the pages.

Illustrations – I haven't tried to replicate the highly illustrated nature of modern textbooks because of material being copied in black and white and because of copyright issues.