

Thinking across time:

planning and teaching the story of power and democracy at Key Stage

Ian Dawson's seminal work on developing chronological understanding – in *Teaching History* 117, on the website thingkinghistory.org and elsewhere – will be familiar to readers. In this article Dawson considers the question, very much on the agenda currently given the revisions to Key Stage 3 for September 2008, of how we can best help pupils develop a coherent understanding of the past over the course of their studies. The article reflects on this question by modelling and discussing ways of delivering the Key Stage 3 unit on the development of political power from the Middle Ages to the twentieth century and by developing an approach to teaching large scale units like this through 'thematic stories'. The article also contains discussion points to help history departments develop their collective thinking on this issue.

Ian Dawson

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Visualizing Key Stage 3

Why is it so difficult for pupils to develop a knowledge and understanding of a framework of history at Key Stage 3? Visualize a fairly standard outline KS3 coverage, such as that in Figure 1, then look for the story that unites the events and you can see the problem. There is no single overall story for pupils to follow – what are the links from Becket to the Black Death or from the Suffragettes to the Holocaust? Therefore it is very unsurprising that pupils emerge from KS3 with patchy knowledge – in some cases, yes, real depth of understanding of individual people and events (because of the high quality of much in-depth work). There is little chance of pupils attaining a coherent, cohesive big picture of the past when the topics they study have only the thread of chronological order to hold them together.

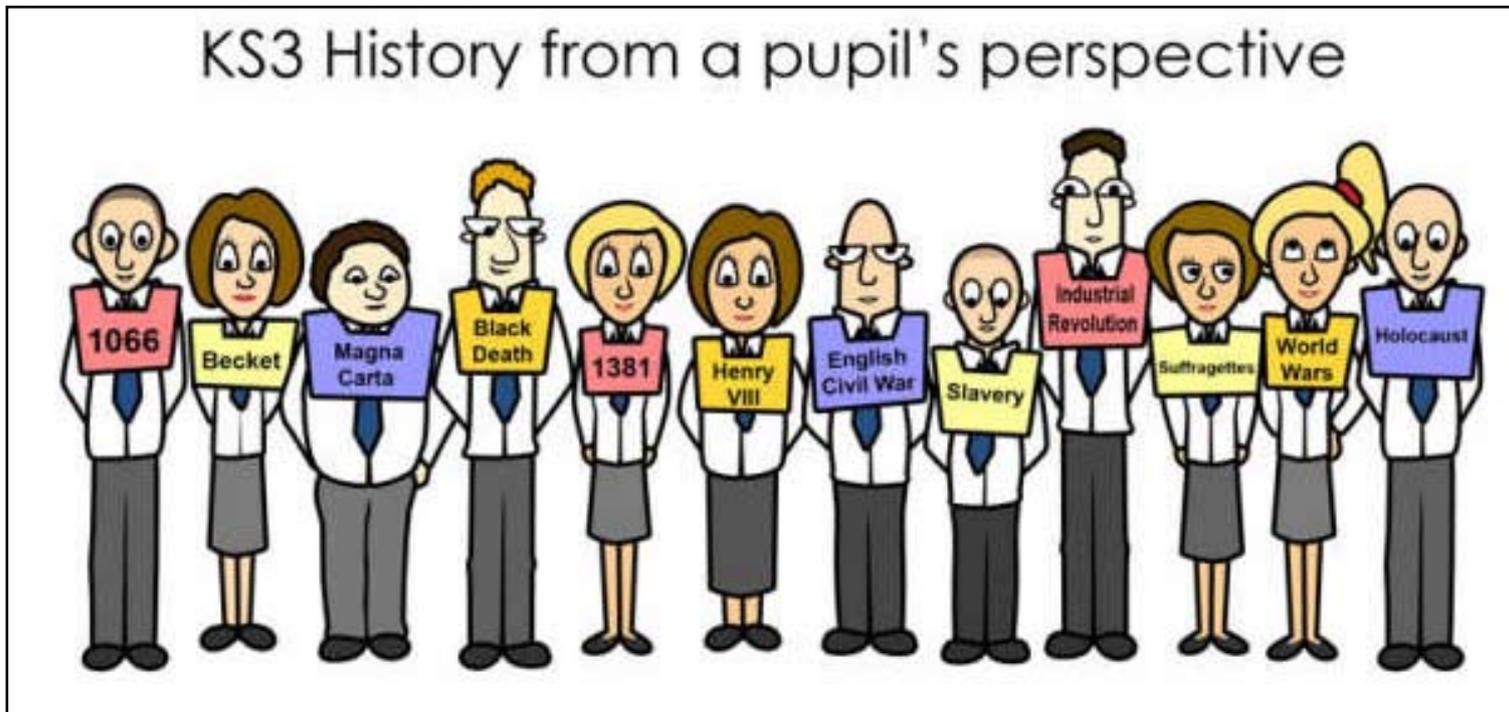
So what is feasible at KS3 in terms of understanding and telling 'big stories' across time? It is realistic, not defeatist, to suggest that achieving an understanding of that all-embracing framework of knowledge by the end of KS3 is simply too ambitious. What is more achievable is that pupils are able to tell individual thematic stories across time i.e. some or all those identified in the History Programme of Study introduced in 2008 – stories of power and democracy, everyday life, empires etc. Dealing with these as individual stories does not preclude making links amongst them but the prime aim should be to give pupils an understanding of these thematic stories as individual stories and help them develop the knowledge and skills to be able to tell them.¹

Figure 2 shows what such a story looks like and this article explores how this story of 'Power and Democracy'² can be planned and taught.³

A note on terminology

Frameworks, outlines, themes, thematic stories, big pictures are all terms used for apparently much the same things. I have chosen to use the term 'thematic stories'⁴ because to me the words 'framework' and 'outline' suggest something static, a set of historical lamp-posts whose relationship to each other is unchanging.⁵ 'Theme' seems similarly inert, more sociological than historical, and so I prefer

Figure 1: KS3 History from a pupil's perspective

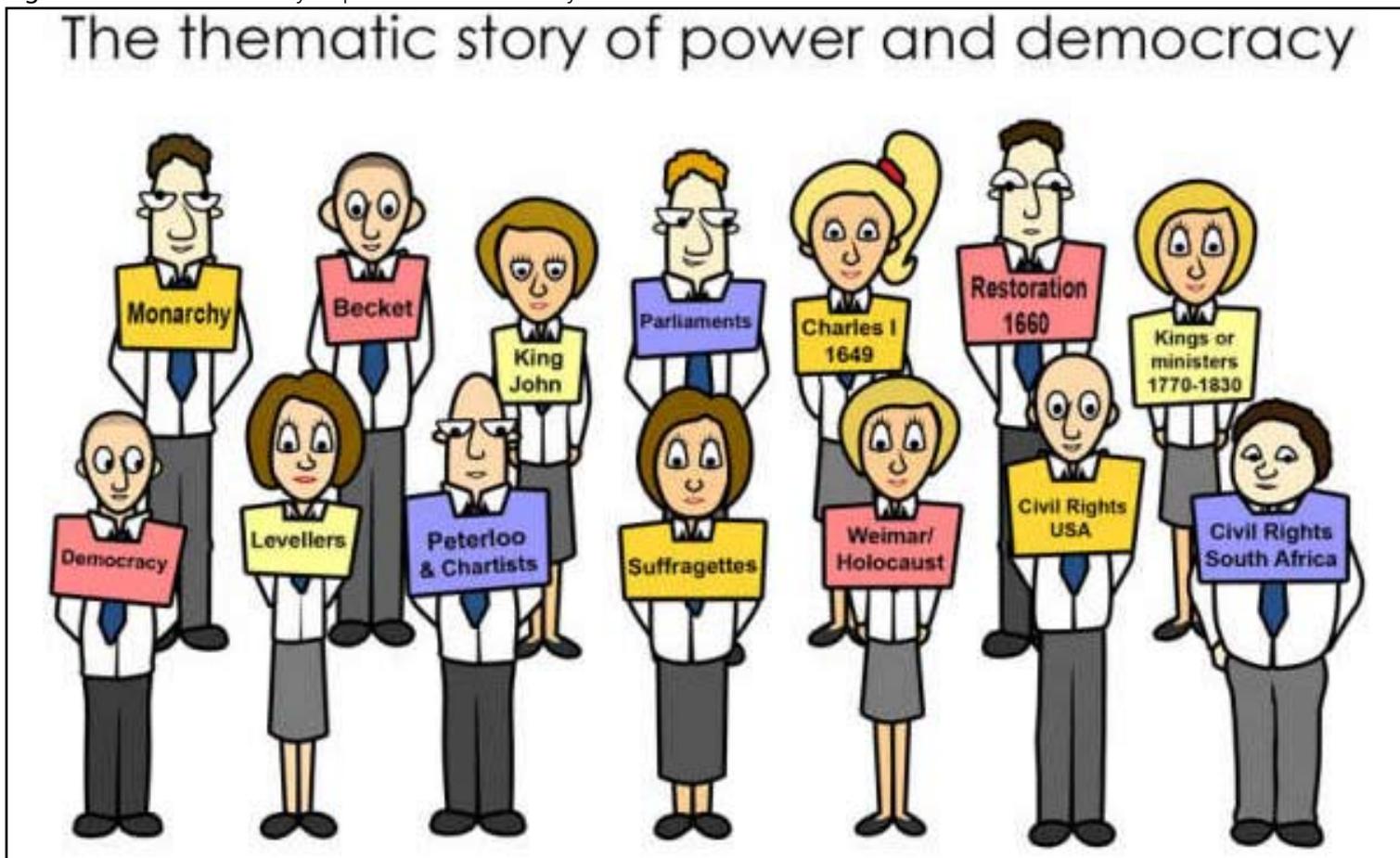


'thematic stories' for the simple reason that it conveys that what we are dealing with is a construct or interpretation and that this story could be told differently, depending on viewpoint or choice of content.⁶

A thematic story can be told in different levels of detail and across varying numbers of lessons. However it is critical

that the whole story be tell-able in one lesson: a summary which enables pupils to see the whole story at once. Ideally, pupils will see this 'big picture' a number of times and use it to contextualize individual events.⁷ This story can then be 'exploded', taught across a term in the style of an SHP Study in Development or in chronological chunks across the whole of Key Stage 3.

Figure 2: The thematic story of power and democracy



What are they going to take away? The critical importance of planning backwards

Show me a blank piece of paper, whisper the words 'KS3 Scheme of Work' and my hand automatically writes down 1066. But that's a mistake. The key to coherence and progression is planning backwards, having first identified what we hope and intend pupils will take-away from their KS3 History. If we do not plan backwards we run the grave risk of running out of time and having to jettison the end of the story, severing links to pupils' own lives.

So what do we want pupils to take away in terms of understanding of people and events? (This article is not concerned directly with take-aways relating to concepts and processes.) For the story of 'Power and Democracy', take-away targets might include the following:

- a) The ability to tell (at an appropriate level of depth) the story of power and democracy since 1066. This will entail understanding:
 - i) how and why the power of the monarch rose and fell;
 - ii) how democracy and civil rights were won and in what circumstances they can be destroyed.
- b) The ability to explain how this story informs understanding of the world today and how it relates to our lives and, perhaps, decisions.

Point (b) is vital. It is an important part of the answer to the question 'why are we doing History?': a challenge laid down

not only by every generation of pupils but also by Ofsted in its 2007 report. Unfortunately, however, Ofsted appear to imply that this is a new problem.⁸ Far from it: it is exactly the challenge taken on by the Schools Council History Project in the 1970s and reflected in structure of SHP examination syllabuses.⁹ It was also a challenge that existed for History teachers throughout the 20th century – and one mostly ignored. Very little 20th century history was studied in schools until the 1970s (and if you dropped History at 14 you didn't get past 1688). Today's National Curriculum offers a much more coherent and logical structure than anything taught in the 'good old days'.

Helping children gain a sense of achievement

The central value of the 2008 Key Stage Programme of Study is that it creates far greater potential for pupils getting a real sense of achievement from their History lessons - "I can tell this story and see the links across time". A sense of achievement creates confidence and enhances the likelihood of future learning. However that sense of achievement can not be realised if a) pupils do not see from the beginning what their objective is and b) if they do not have a product that they can be proud of.

How can pupils understand what their objective is? It is vital that pupils develop a sense of the overall task and know that a central 'take-away' from Key Stage 3 study is the ability to tell a number of thematic stories. The nature of the task needs to be made explicit therefore: introduced early and in a way that ensures maximum impact. Here are two possibilities:

Figure 3: The Big Story of Fun!

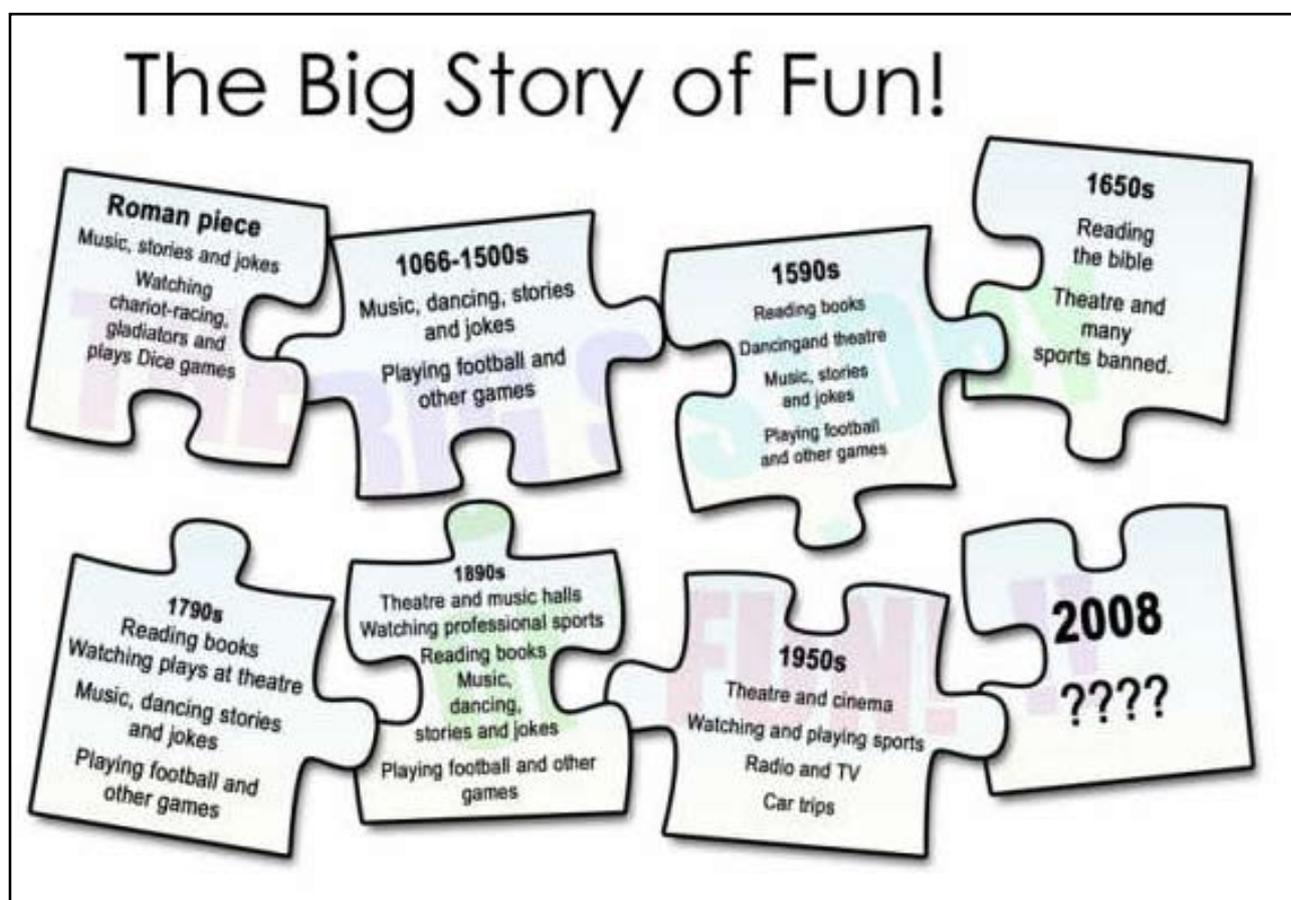


Figure 4: The potential of IT for bringing coherence and a sense of achievement to KS3

IT activities which enable pupils to tell thematic stories e.g. using Moviemaker or Powerpoint. The task can become more complex across KS3 but the aim is to create a complete story which pupils feel they have played a significant part in producing.

- Provide a given set of pictures (still or movie) and ask pupils to write voiceover/story captions to accompany pictures
- Provide voiceover and ask pupils to choose accompanying pictures from a given set – simply matching pictures to parts of voiceover
- Provide voiceover and ask pupils to choose pictures from within a given set of illustrations, selecting some, discarding others
- Offer pupils free range to tell their story by writing voiceover and choosing illustrations

IT activities which make links across KS3, assuming that a thematic story such as power and democracy is told in period chunks e.g. to 1500 in Y7, to 1900 in Y8.

- At beginning of story coverage (e.g. in Y7) show pupils a series of connected images from the story – what do you think this story is about? Use these images to try to tell the story? What questions do you want to ask from this?
- At the beginning of new phase of story (e.g. beginning of Y8) show pupils the story so far without voiceover – can you remember and re-tell what the story was from the pictures alone?
- Show pupils the Y7 story (e.g. the story to 1500 that teacher has created or that pupils created in Y7) as introduction to the Y8 story but add alternative images suggesting different options for what happened next – how do you think the story will develop?

a) Mark one side of the room as the September of Year 7 and the other as the end of Key Stage 3. Give two pupils an A3 sheet showing one of the core questions they're going to explore across KS3 such as 'How were the vote and civil rights won?' As they move across the room (i.e. across Key Stage 3) hand them books and CDs (and maybe other material representing sources, concepts and processes) and then, when they get to the end, give them another A3 sheet on which you've bullet pointed the answers – 'the story you'll be able to explain by the end of Key Stage 3'. Or better still, show them a thematic story made by last year's group on Moviemaker.

b) Use a jigsaw to tell a thematic story in miniature. Figure 3 shows one element of the story of everyday life – the story of fun across time! Pupils have to sort the pieces into order, then identify changes and continuities, turning points, periods of rapid change, think about why there were changes and continuities and finally 'talk and tell' the story. You could model the issue of interpretations by omitting the 1650s piece to begin with, letting pupils construct their story then bring in the 1650s piece and discuss how the story changes. Used at the beginning of Key Stage 3 and repeated (using this or other examples) later on it will help pupils understand what they are being asked to do.

How can pupils create a product they are proud of? This question links to a major problem of Key Stage 3 History – the issue of coherence and reinforcement. Who seriously expects to refer back to Year 7 exercise books or files in Year 8 or 9? But IT is changing this dramatically and is the key element in making returning to past work possible and creating end-products that give pupils a sense of achievement.

In future, your IT files could contain single slide summaries of 'the story so far to 1500' completed in Year 7, ready to return to, show and up-date in Year 8 and Year 9. Alternatively these could be in the form of Moviemaker or Powerpoint stories, created by pupils and carried forward by them across Key Stage 3.¹⁰ If so, these Moviemaker stories are the ideal summaries for pupils to take away from their KS3 History – 'these are the stories I've created and can tell' - products much more interesting and rewarding to show to parents than a flip through an increasingly tatty exercise book, copiously covered in red ink.

Structuring the story of power and democracy across Key Stage 3.

The National Curriculum summary statement about the story of 'Power and Democracy' summarises the story thus:

*The development of political power from the Middle Ages to the twentieth century, including changes in the relationship between rulers and ruled over time, the changing relationship between the crown and parliament, and the development of democracy.*¹¹

One issue apparently hindering coherence across KS3 is the Programme of Study's separation of British from European and World History. However this artificial division is merely a matter of format and in practice it does not hinder the creation of a story that links British to European and World History. Through a mix of outline and depth activities (discussed below) we can follow the story of royal power

in Britain before switching tack into ‘Was the vote won in Britain by violent protest or peaceful campaigning?’, a question that brings together nineteenth-century campaigns with ‘Votes for Woman’. That could leave a sense, that should be challenged, that once rights have been won they cannot be removed or lost – and that is the link to looking at Weimar Germany, why Hitler was able to come to power and remove human rights and the consequences of this in the form of the Holocaust. You could then widen the big story further,

using the answer to ‘how did they win the vote in Britain?’ as a hypothesis to compare with the experiences and methods of those who struggled for equal rights in the USA and/or South Africa.

As regards splitting the topics across Key Stage 3, a variety of approaches are possible, as Figures 5A, B and C show. Many other models are possible because of the glorious flexibility built into the KS3 National Curriculum from 2008.¹²

Planning and teaching ‘Power and Democracy’ – some practical issues

Where do you start?

It is instinctive to begin at the beginning but three questions need asking.

- *How do you help children to link this historic story to today?*
You may wish to start with the end of the story to demonstrate that it’s a live issue. At the time of writing (October 2007), that could have meant using news coverage of the suppression of protests in Burma to ask why people were protesting, why rights mattered so much to them and why it was apparently easy for protests to be suppressed. These events certainly had visual and political parallels to Peterloo, the breaking up of Reform riots in 1831 and even the suppression of Kett’s Rebellion in 1549 and the events of 1381.
- *What do pupils know and understand already?*
We are used to thinking about analysing and using pupils’ prior understandings about concepts and processes but perhaps have done less in terms of understanding of the people and events themselves. For example, if ‘does voting matter?’ is a core question for ‘Power and Democracy’ or ‘why have people risked their lives in war?’ for ‘Conflict and Co-operation’ then we need to know what kinds of ideas pupils begin with. We also need to try to find out whether they have any thoughts about how these stories develop. What might they have done in KS2 that is part of these stories? This will take some teasing out but it is potentially very rewarding to spend a few minutes on

whether they think Henry VIII and Victoria could just do exactly what they wanted as monarchs and whether ordinary people had any say in, for example, going to war during those reigns.

- *What’s the best historical starting point?*

In teaching to a single chronological framework in the past it has been natural to begin with the Roman Conquest or 1066. However each thematic story will not begin with

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the same event. You may wish to commence ‘Conflict and Co-operation’ with the Norman Conquest and so you do not need to cover those events in the story of Power and Democracy where a more fruitful starting point may well be the murder of Becket.

Using what you already do – but perhaps with a twist

The murder of Becket is a good example of a commonly-taught KS3 topic which may seem tricky to fit into this world of thematic stories. Given pressure on time, one question that needs asking about each topic is ‘if you’re never going to refer back to this later in KS3, why are you doing it at all?’ This really sharpens up thinking about the importance of reinforcement and making connections across time across the whole of KS3.

The story of Becket is interesting (blood, murder, mystery) but that applies to lots of topics so where does it fit in and how? Its best place is in the story of monarchy, as an introduction to John and Magna Carta, but first we have to get the enquiry question right. Asking ‘Why was Becket murdered?’ or ‘Was Henry II responsible?’ doesn’t do this but ‘Why was Henry II whipped?’ helps pupils understand that a king had huge power but did not have complete freedom of action. Becket was murdered in December 1170 but Henry was not whipped until July 1174 – why the gap? Henry needed to buy the church’s help against rebel barons. He was not all-powerful – a quite different conclusion (and one linking helpfully into Magna Carta) from one that might be reached by solely studying the events of December 1170. It is important to find the exact enquiry questions to contribute to understanding of the overall story.

Constructing effective outline activities

One danger of this emphasis on thematic stories is a return to the kind of Scheme of Work that does a little on everything but in which nothing is studied in the depth that really engages pupils’ interest or helps them to care about the people in the past. It is vital that we retain the engaging, enthralling depth studies so often described in the pages of *Teaching History* while also constructing equally challenging

Figure 5:

A Following stories across the whole of KS3

Y7 – the story of royal power to c1500

Y8 – the story of royal power after 1500 plus how did they win the vote in Britain?

Y9 – how were rights lost and won elsewhere in 20th century? (Failure of Weimar and impact of Fascism in Germany plus Civil Rights in USA and/or South Africa)

Why do it this way?

Most departments have followed this model of chronological structure in the past and so could adopt it without turning their schemes of work completely upside down. This is likely to be important if also introducing new A level specifications and when at least some History is taught by non-specialists. It's the pragmatic route forward.

B Treating stories as Studies in Development

Treat the power/democracy story as two successive stories taught across e.g. two or three terms in e.g. year 8

Y7 – Everyday life; Movement and Settlement

Y8 – Power and democracy; England, Ireland, Scotland and Wales.

Y9 – Empires; Conflict and co-operation

Why do it this way?

It seems probable that children will develop a stronger sense of individual thematic stories if they are not broken up across all three years. However it will be harder to gain a sense of each major period and perhaps to make connections amongst thematic stories. This will also require a great deal of planning time and resource creation, a task more likely to be undertaken by a department whose members are focussed almost entirely on teaching History and communicate well with each other.

C A compromise between A and B

Y7 – The story of royal power from 1066 to the present

Y8 – How did they win the vote in Britain?

Y9 – How were rights lost and won elsewhere in 20th century? (Failure of Weimar and impact of Fascism in Germany plus Civil Rights in USA and/or South Africa)

Why do it this way?

It mixes the pragmatism of 5A in following the Y8/9 chronological structure of most existing Schemes of Work while tackling the complete story of monarchy rather than splitting it unhelpfully at 1500.

and involving overview activities that contextualize these depth studies.

What constitutes an outline activity in the story of royal power? Here are descriptions of two inter-related activities, each requiring one lesson and together providing pupils with an outline understanding of the key issues of the power of the monarchy up to 1649.

Lesson 1.

Create a timeline, using pupils as monarchs, one per king or queen. You need 25 to get from 1066 to 1649. Each pupil needs a card with the name of his or her monarch and a simple assessment of success, perhaps numerically out of ten or you could create categories such as success in

creating peace at home and success in war. [This activity works really well as a set of Top Trumps cards¹³]. So what do you do? You simply pass a crown down the line, providing a short commentary – ‘The crown goes from William to William (quick diversions into interesting deaths) ... and John was a terrible king but the crown still went to his son ...’ – emphasising that however bad the king was (even in 1327, 1399 and 1461) the crown still passed to a successor. It is vital that pupils pass the crown on physically – until 1649, at which point you can dramatically hurl the crown away. England can do without a king!

So what is the big story for this lesson? That until 1649 they always kept a monarch, however many problems a king had caused. This idea can be captured very simply – as a diagram that pupils draw and annotate themselves or they annotate a diagram you outline for them.

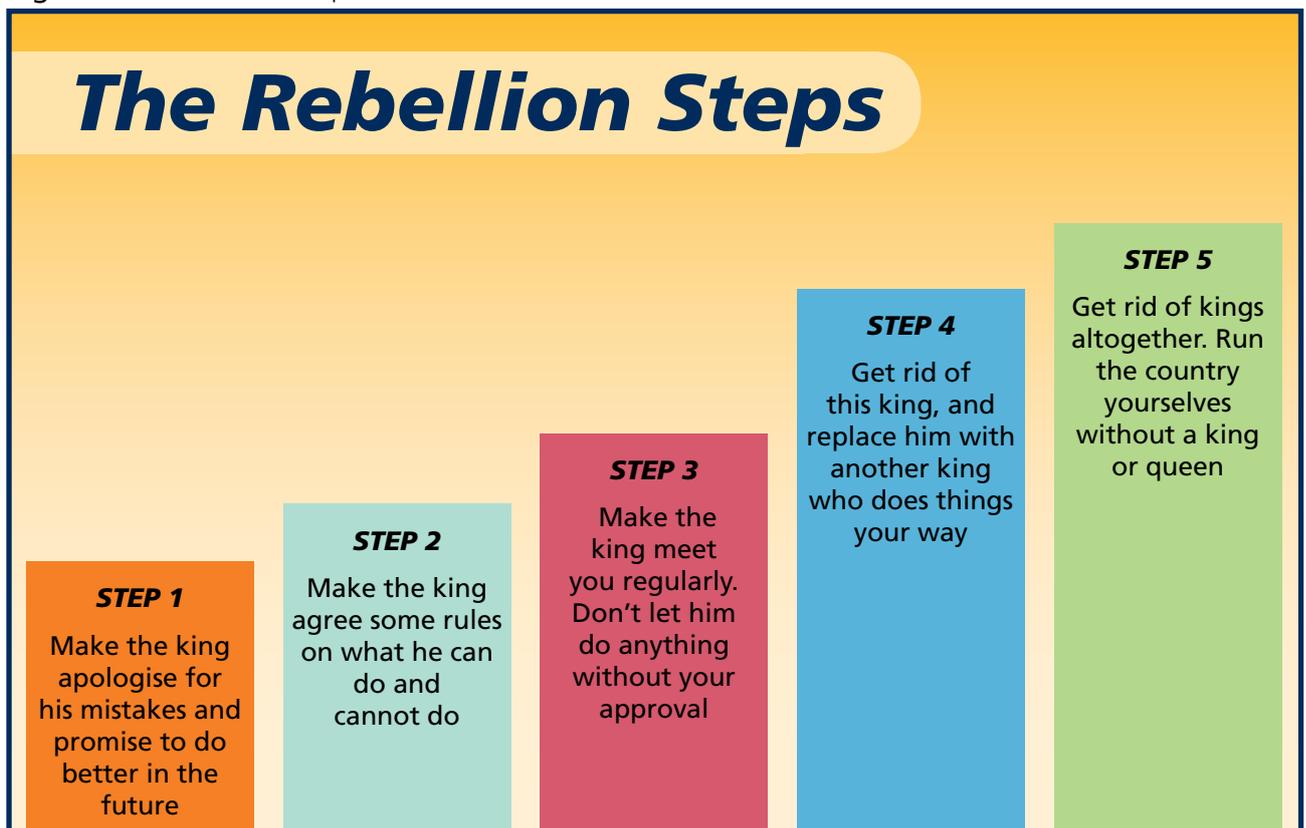
Lesson Two.

This builds on the previous lesson, looking at the pattern which emerges from key confrontations between kings and barons/nobles, using the Rebellion Steps [Figure 6]. The task here is to put kings on the correct Steps, showing how different solutions were tried to the problem of kings who did not consult their barons or Parliament. Different groups of pupils could be given a king each – John, Henry III, Edward II, Richard II, Henry VI, Charles I – plus a little

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information about their king and asked which step he was placed on. The resulting pattern shows that with each major conflict the barons moved up a step but then stuck several times at Step 4 until finally reaching Step 5 in 1649. The aim of this lesson is to show just how significant the events of 1649 were (and an introduction to why it took so long in the 1640s for that decision to be reached). This cannot be done only by studying the immediate past. It needs to be looked at in the much longer term – and all in one lesson, not spread over many weeks.

Figure 6: The Rebellion Steps



So we have two simple outline activities from which you can spin off two depth studies - one on, for example, King John,¹⁴ investigating what a king was expected to do and why his barons rebelled and a second on Charles I (and background) investigating not just why Charles was deposed and executed but why this was done in 1649 when it had not been the solution earlier. If your Key Stage 3 coverage is restricted to two years you would probably do only the second of these depth studies together with the outline activities.

Selecting the content you cover

In making the transition from a 'do everything in chronological order' Scheme of Work to one built around thematic stories, it is necessary to think creatively about where individual topics fit into your overall scheme. For example, the approach to monarchy outlined above has no place for work in depth on Henry VIII and Elizabeth but that does not mean they disappear from Key Stage 3 History. Just because they wore crowns does not mean that their only home is in the 'Power and Democracy' story. Henry VIII's reign may well fit best into the story of everyday life because of the social impact of the loss of the monasteries (which takes you back into his reasons for religious reform). Elizabeth makes a great end of year investigation asking 'Was she really so significant?', 'Why are so many films made about her?' and 'Does anyone else deserve to be remembered more from the period 1500 to, say, 1900?' Faraday? Clarkson and Wilberforce? Pasteur? Who do pupils feel are most worthy of being remembered and commemorated?

Another content issue is asking whether key elements of thematic stories are missing from existing coverage. In the story of everyday life, for example, many schools will touch on aspects of medieval life and industrial urban conditions but not link them into an overall story that reaches the present and links to the wider world. The story of monarchy provides another example as much coverage of 'kings' ends around 1660 and yet monarchs still had considerable power well into the eighteenth century. So, when and why did monarchs cede their power to politicians? This seems to have been the period 1770-1830, thanks to a combination of two incapable or uninterested kings, a lengthy war needing clear leadership, the growing complexity of society and the spread of more liberal ideas from USA and France (linking to possible work on the American and French Revolutions) about how countries should be governed. This period may offer a third depth study in the story of monarchy or be covered in overview linking the outline story of monarchs into the fight for the vote.¹⁵

A third content issue is splitting existing topics amongst thematic stories to achieve greater clarity for pupils. Stopping to investigate methods of fighting the English Civil War in the midst of the 'Power and Democracy' story will only obscure the clarity of that story so why not cover the military aspects of the Civil War in the 'Conflict and Co-operation' story? Similarly, coverage of the events of the World Wars can be detached from Weimar and Nazi Germany and covered as a later stage in the 'Conflict and Co-operation' story, as case-

studies (possibly each covered by half the class) of why people have been prepared (or not) to risk their lives in war.

Conclusion

I would like to end with two justifications for approaching KS3 through thematic stories. The most important is that this approach seems by far the most likely to provide pupils with a sense of achievement – 'This is what I can do after my all those History lessons'. And secondly (and far more personally to me) this approach enables us to pay homage to those who have gone before us, the individuals whose struggles and decisions created our world. If we do not effectively link their experiences to our own then we cannot appreciate what they achieved and suffered – and in curricular terms the only way that I know to do this effectively of is to follow through these thematic stories and link them to today. If the past is cut off from the present we cannot pay homage to those who deserve to be remembered.¹⁶

REFERENCES

1. The 2007 Ofsted report *History in the balance: History in English schools 2003-2007* says (paragraph 21) that 'young people's sense of chronology is relatively weak and they are generally unable to reflect on themes and issues or relate a longer narrative or story of the history of Britain, Europe or elsewhere over an extended period of time.' Herein lies an assumption that an understanding of this 'longer narrative' is achievable by the age of 14. It is time to question that assumption and particularly the insistent use of the singular i.e. 'narrative' 'framework' is helpful. Ofsted's report is available at www.ofsted.gov.uk/assets/Internet_Content/Shared_Content/Files/2007/july/hstryintheblnc.pdf
2. 'Power and Democracy' is my short-hand heading for paragraph (d) in the Range and Content section of the KS3 Programme of Study operational from 2008. The Qualifications and Curriculum Authority's *History: Programme of study for key stage 3 and attainment target* is available at <http://curriculum.qca.org.uk/subjects/history/>
3. This article is essentially a pragmatic discussion of planning and teaching. There are many other theoretical aspects of teaching and learning about 'frameworks' that I haven't tried to address but can be pursued through Howson, J. (2007) 'Is it the Tuarts and then the Studors or the other way round? The importance of developing a usable big picture of the past,' *Teaching History*, 127, *Sense and Sensitivity Edition* and through the footnotes therein.
4. As used in Dawson I, (2004) 'Time for Chronology? Ideas for developing chronological understanding,' *Teaching History*, 117, *Dealing with Distance Edition*.
5. However these interpretations of terms are personal. Given the frequency with which such terms are used interchangeably and confusingly perhaps a short glossary should be written by someone who really understands the differences!
6. For a discussion of the possible progression of pupils' thinking towards being able to perceive narratives as interpretations see Shemilt, D. (2000) 'The Caliph's Coin: the currency of Narrative frameworks in History teaching', in Stearns, P.N. (et al) (eds.) *Knowing teaching and learning history, national and international Perspectives*. New York: New York University Press.
7. For continuing thoughts on the nature of the National Curriculum thematic stories and activities for teaching outlines see www.thinkinghistory.co.uk
8. Paragraph 53 of the 2007 Ofsted report (op cit note 1) says 'the topics teachers choose to emphasise are not necessarily those that will best help young people to understand the contemporary world. This criterion has not featured prominently in teachers' thinking when they are devising what to teach and where to place emphasis.
9. Schools Council History 13-16 Project, (1976) *A New Look at History* pp.11ff. Edinburgh: Holmes McDougall.
10. For a helpful guide to techniques for using Moviemaker see www.innovativehistory.net, developed by Neal Watkin and Johannes Ahrenfeldt
11. Op cit, note 1.
12. For case-studies of alternative ways of structuring KS3 History see <http://curriculum.qca.org.uk/subjects/index.aspx> then click on 'History' and then the Curriculum case studies box.
13. The set of Top Trumps cards plus other materials associated with these lessons can be found in Dawson, Ian and Wilson, Maggie, (2008) *SHP History Year 7*. London: Hodder Arnold.
14. Banham, Dale and Dawson, Ian, (2000) *King John: A Key Stage 3 investigation into medieval monarchy*, John Murray provides both depth study and overview to c.1500
15. For overview activities covering monarchy c1660-c.1830 see Harmsworth, Andy and Dawson, Ian (2002) *King Cromwell?* London: John Murray.
16. For a highly entertaining introduction to the idea of homage to the past (and a very good mystery) see Alan Plater's novel *Oliver's Story*, published in 1994 by Little Brown and Co, now out of print but available second-hand.

Discussion Points for departmental agenda

Visualizing Key Stage 3

1. What can be achieved at Key Stage 3 in terms of understanding of broad pictures of the past? Is aiming for re-telling of individual thematic stories too lowly a target or an important stage towards pulling these stories together into a more complex framework at a later age?

Planning the 'take-aways'

2. What understandings and knowledge do you want pupils to take away from Key Stage 3 in terms of each of the thematic stories laid down in the Key Stage 3 Programme of Study?
3. How would you verbally and visually (and perhaps physically) explain each story across time in a single lesson?
4. How can you explain to pupils how each thematic story relates to them as individuals?

Helping children gain a sense of achievement

5. How can we help pupils visualize what they will be able to do re thematic stories by the end of Key Stage 3?
6. How can we diagnose and use pupils' prior knowledge and understanding of these thematic stories?
7. How can we use IT to develop understandings of stories and so bring more coherence to Key Stage 3?

Developing a Scheme of Work

8. Which Scheme of Work model (Figures 5A-C or others) is likely to suit your pupils and what practical issues (e.g. other staff commitments) will affect your choice?
9. Undertake an audit of the individuals and events studied at Key Stage 3. What patterns emerge and what do the gaps tell you about how effectively you are currently covering the thematic stories in the NC?
10. How will you combine outline activities and depth studies to create complete thematic stories?
11. How can each thematic story cross-over effectively amongst British, European and World history?
12. How does each enquiry question contribute to the development of a thematic story?
13. When are you going to refer back to each topic you cover? If you are not, why is it in your Scheme of Work?