Notes for Teachers

Revised August 2021

I've tried to keep these notes straightforward, identifying the purposes of the material and practical issues you need to be warned about. I haven't described every feature of each page! The associated PowerPoint slides provide an alternative resource to the pages of the student text.

What are your ideas about the Middle Ages?

I'd have liked to start with a really involving and enthusing story but this introduction isn't about any one aspect of medieval history but about what ideas the students already have about the period. So I hardened my heart and started with the more prosaic but deeply important business of finding out what students think about the Middle Ages, followed by setting up the overall enquiry 'Are people right to be so negative about the Middle Ages?' which links to each section of 'Medieval Lives'. This enquiry could also be used to link together your own classroom materials.

pp. 1-2 What are your ideas about the Middle Ages? – the questionnaire on these pages will identify students' preconceptions about the period so that you and they have clear base to start from. The students in the research recently undertaken by Jason Todd had a decidedly negative image of the Middle Ages and its people, as does the public at large according to other research. Such ideas need to be identified and then challenged explicitly if students are to develop a more rounded picture of the period. (This also sets a good model for approaching any period of history.) Establishing their initial ideas will also enable students to see later how their perceptions have altered and therefore how much they have learned which is, in turn, important for developing confidence that they can learn effectively.

p.3 What do other students think about the Middle Ages? – this information summarises some of the results of Jason's research, both for comparison with your students' own ideas and to feed into the final page where the overall enquiry is set up.

pp.4-5 Your overall enquiry – this is where this section has been heading! Page 4 sets up the enquiry while page 5 offers space where students can record their developing ideas.

One major danger with KS3 is that students don't link the topics they study together. One way to create links is with an enquiry question which explores interpretations of a period as a whole, hence this overall question 'Are people right to be so negative about the Middle Ages?'

As this is an overall enquiry encompassing all students' work on the Middle Ages it's intended to be light touch, set up clearly, building on students' own ideas and the material on page 3. Importantly the question can be related to whatever medieval topics you're covering but it may encourage some teachers to pick out aspects of topics which show the people of the time in a more positive light.

The real advantage of this approach will be apparent at the end when students should be able to compare their thoughts on the Middle Ages at that stage with those they had when they began. This should give them a strong sense of how much they have learned, not in quantity of details but in their broader understanding of the period. If they feel highly superior to all those other people who don't understand the Middle Ages that will be great!

Making learning visible

During this and other sections I've included brief references to ways in which students can come to understand their learning e.g. identifying what they aren't sure about so they can put it right, identifying their preconceptions about a topic and, particularly on p.4, discussing how this enquiry will be structured. It has always seemed to me essential to be as explicit as possible about how learn effectively, both for important educational reasons and because this does lead onto better exam results. For more on this see Dale Banham's important work on Raising Attainment:

https://thinkinghistory.co.uk/Issues/attainment/index.htm

A note on the use of the word 'hypothesis' – this may seem ambitious! 'Hypothesis' is not always easy to say, it may be hard to spell and many of us did not meet it in our own experiences as history students. However it is the best word to use when explaining that students' first idea is a suggestion and not a definitive answer. Some people prefer the word 'argument' but that comes loaded with baggage – students often think of people shouting each other down – and so readjusting students' understanding of 'argument' can be difficult. 'Hypothesis' comes with no such baggage and many students take pride in learning and using 'difficult' words. Dale's own Y7 classes use it regularly and correctly – it can be done.