

The Putney Debates

Teachers' Resource Pack

The ideas in this Teacher's Resource Pack can be adapted by primary and secondary school teachers to suit the needs of their schools, classes and pupils.

A study of the Putney Debates would form an excellent basis for the study of Local History, and offers cross-curricular opportunities with English, Geography, Art, RE, and Citizenship.

Background to the Putney Debates

After the first English Civil War of 1642-1646 England was in a state of confusion and upheaval never experienced before. Although England had seen civil war before, never in its history had fighting gone to such unimaginable lengths and concluded so dramatically. In 1647 Parliament found themselves in an unprecedented and very difficult situation. King Charles I was in prison at Hampton Court Palace under the guard of the army and negotiations had begun with the intent to create a new system of government, proposals which the King neither accepted nor rejected. He was aware of the factions growing within the army and planned to bide his time, letting his enemy destroy itself.

The army was of great trouble to Parliament. It had been crucial to Parliamentary victory, but now had gained a confidence and political radicalism that threatened anarchy. By October 1647, the army were disillusioned with Parliament's negotiations with the King, and felt that their achievements in battle had been grossly underestimated. They were furious with Parliament's plans to disband them or send them to fight in Ireland when they had not been granted payment in arrears, which amounted to about 3 million pounds, and had not been guaranteed immunity from prosecution for acts

committed during the war. With the growing influence of the Leveller movement in the rank and file, the army had produced political pamphlets challenging ancient feudalism. One such pamphlet *An Agreement of the People* prompted the Putney debates, which began on 28th October 1647.

The Debates were a meeting of the General Council of the Army which consisted of senior officers such as Oliver Cromwell and Henry Ireton, as well as 'agitators', such as Edward Sexby and Thomas Rainsborough, who had been elected by the junior officers and rank and file to represent them. Their aim: to re-establish unity in the army.



The agitators wanted the right for all men to vote- an entitlement previously limited to the landowning classes. As landowners themselves the senior officers were not comfortable with this challenge to their authority and so the Debates became, at times, rather heated.

The Putney Debates were brought to an abrupt end after only a few days, when King Charles escaped from Hampton Court Palace, triggering the second English Civil War and ultimately his own trial and execution.

Debate

Should children be made to wear school uniform?

- ✘ Have a class debate about whether school uniform should be compulsory.
- Discuss as a class what the pros and cons of uniform are
 - Divide the class into two groups, one for uniform the other against. As a group pupils prepare their argument for debate. The groups may decide they want to elect representative leaders
 - Each side present their argument and debate to follow. All pupils should be encouraged to participate.
 - The class should try to come a compromise, which suits both sides of the argument
 - Pupils should evaluate their debate as a report or through discussion, including any difficulties they faced in finding compromise

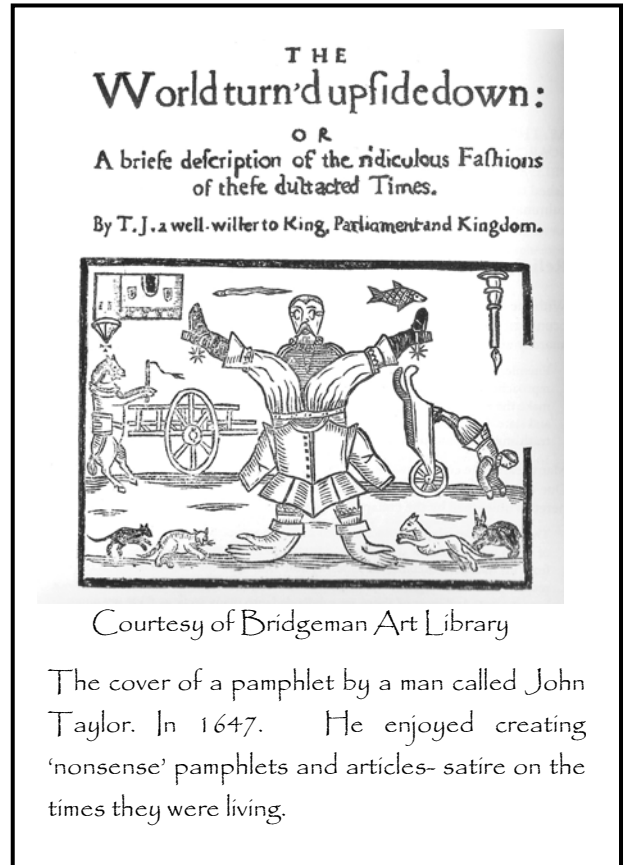


The World Turned Upside Down

The turmoil of the English Civil War brought about a breakdown in censorship creating an opportunity for political and religious radicals to publish their opinions and beliefs. These took the form of pamphlets. Both King and Parliament had needed the backing of men from all sections of society and to gain their support, propaganda was essential. Pamphlets were the ideal way to spread news and views to a wider audience quickly and effectively, much as newspaper do today. Quite often simple pictures were used on the covers of pamphlets to satirise events but also it gave the illiterate access to political thinking.

Worksheet 1:

Aim: For pupils to gain an understanding of the instability and confusion of the period, whilst developing their skills of observation, interpretation and empathy.



Courtesy of Bridgeman Art Library

The cover of a pamphlet by a man called John Taylor. In 1647. He enjoyed creating 'nonsense' pamphlets and articles- satire on the times they were living.

The purpose of pamphlets in 17th Century England

- Propaganda
- To stir up political and religious thoughts
- To inform the masses of your beliefs
- To rouse fury against your enemy
- To educate people in politics/religion

Activity Creating propaganda

- ✘ Pupils produce a short pamphlet expressing their views about a subject
- They will need to use persuasive writing to encourage other pupils in their class/school
 - They might use simple pictures to illustrate their views so that the younger children who can't read very well will still understand
 - They might decide to take the opportunity to attack views held by others



Religion & Politics

Religion in seventeenth century England was at the centre of every man, woman and child's life. Belief was everything and those that didn't believe were damned. With Henry VIII's break from Rome in 1530s the Church of England was born, with the monarch now acting as man's access to God. The monarch was the only person who could talk directly to God and with the assistance of royally appointed bishops and archbishops controlled the church. Reform opened up a whole can of worms, with pious, educated people questioning religious hierarchy and as a result many religious factions grew, fragmenting the Church of England. By the 1640, many religious groups had formed and others would develop through the events that would ensue.

Religion was intrinsic to everything, and different factions heavily influenced the politics of the Civil War and its aftermath. Protestantism as the Church of England was commonly referred to, had extremes. At one end of the spectrum were the Anglicans. Anglican doctrine was similar in many ways to Catholicism, focusing on the Eucharist and using religious icons or images to aid worship. Their difference to Catholicism was that they believed the monarch was the supreme head of the church. The other extreme included The Fifth Monarchy Men who believed that Jesus would return and a new age would begin, The Quakers who believed that God was available to all people and did not need a priest or mediator to access Him, and The Ranters who believed that if one was connected with God, that social convention was not necessary and that anything could be done with Spiritual justification. The latter group were particularly unorthodox, and were considered offensive, using bad language, smoking, drinking and having a preference to nudity. In the middle were the Puritans, who believed in piety and sobriety. They sought to return the church to its early purity and create a Godly nation. It was Puritans who had the greatest influence during this period- dominating Parliament, and the army. But even the Puritans were themselves divided. The Presbyterians sought uniformity in the church whilst The Independents,

which dominated the army, believed in toleration and free worship.

Worksheet 2:

Aim: For pupils to gain some understanding of the complicated religious and political beliefs at the time of the Putney Debates, and their co dependence on each other.

Discussion:

X Have a class discussion about religious belief in the seventeenth century.

Talk about:

- How God was at the centre of everyone's life
- How the Church of England was divided into different groups but they all believed in God
- The Civil War was fought in the name of both religion and for politics

You could compare the English Civil War with wars going on in the world today, discussing how many are religious and political.

! This is a sensitive subject and some children may sadly have first hand experience of such issues.



Portraiture

Portraiture was extremely important in the past. Before photography, and later film, introduced us to our national and world leaders, portraits were our source of information.

The problem with this was that it was often the sitter themselves or a supporter of the sitter, who had commissioned the portrait, and so people only got a representation of what that person wanted to portray. To the illiterate population much could be learnt about the sitter and this is where propaganda came in to play. Symbols that might be overlooked by us today would have been obvious and extremely important to people in the seventeenth century. Fabrics, jewels, objects and backgrounds all told them something about the sitter.

King Charles I was particularly good at representing himself in a positive light portraying himself as monarch, warrior, gentleman and family man. A very short man, Charles would often be shown to appear taller: on a horse, standing on higher ground or standing next to his even shorter wife.



King Charles I
English School,
1660

Courtesy of Cromwell
Museum, Huntingdon

This portrait of Charles was made, eleven years after his execution and the year his eldest son, King Charles II, was invited to take the throne of England.

Activity: Interpreting a painting

* Download this painting from our website *

✕ As a class, interpret the painting of Charles I

Prompts:

- Charles is shown standing with vertical columns behind him, which make him look taller
- He is wearing black, the colour of mourning reminding us that he is dead
- His clothes are made from silk and lace, signifying status and wealth
- He wears the Order of the Garter, a symbol of nobility and chivalry
- Pupils could discuss what they think the significance of the background is- is the sun setting symbolising the end of Charles' life, or is the sun rising through clouds making us think of a new start with a new monarchy (under King Charles II)
- Pupils could discuss what Charles is indicating with his hand- is he pointing to himself and if so why? Perhaps he's meant to be holding something?



Oliver Cromwell

Oliver Cromwell was the son of Robert Cromwell, MP for Huntingdon, who was a wealthy landowner. The only surviving son of 7 children Oliver was educated in the local village school and when he was 17 went to Cambridge University. His father died when he was 18 so Oliver had to return home to look after his mother and sisters.

As an adult, Oliver Cromwell became a Puritan and he allowed his religion to influence everything he did. He became MP for Huntingdon in 1628 and then for Cambridge in 1640.

In 1642 the English Civil War began, a most horrific and bloody war. Cromwell showed himself to be an able military leader and was instrumental in beginning the New Model Army, which eventually won the war for Parliament.

By the time of the Putney Debates, Cromwell was a well-respected leader both in the army and in Parliament.

After the Debates, Oliver Cromwell would go on to encourage the execution of King Charles I, and eventually become Lord Protector of England, Scotland and Ireland, taking the office of King but not the crown.

Cromwell died in September 1658 and the monarchy was restored less than 2 years later.

Activity: Investigation

- Pupils brainstorm questions they would like to ask Oliver Cromwell
- Pupils research Cromwell's life trying to find the answers to their questions.
- Recent findings in a book or through hot seating.

Worksheet 3:

Aim: For pupils to interpret two different portraits of Oliver Cromwell and use sources to form opinions of what kind of man they think Cromwell was.

* Download these paintings from our website *