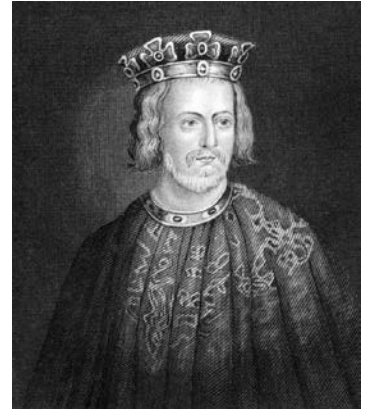


Warmer – Magna Carta: the basics

Read the text about the Magna Carta, and decide whether statements 1–3 are true or false.

The Magna Carta is a document which limited the powers of kings and queens. It was reluctantly agreed by King John at a meeting with 25 powerful landowners known as ‘barons’. The barons had forced John to this meeting in June 1215 because they wanted more rights. The meeting took place at Runnymede, a meadow¹ by the River Thames, 23 miles from central London. It was freemen who gained rights from the Magna Carta. However, after 1215 a large proportion of the population were serfs who were still not free: they were not allowed to leave their villages and had to do work for the local baron. Free women also had fewer rights than men, especially after marriage.



John, king of England 1199-1216

1. King John was happy to agree to the Magna Carta. (*true / false*)
2. The Magna Carta meeting was held in the countryside outside London. (*true / false*)
3. The Magna Carta gave rights to all men and women in the country. (*true / false*)

Task 1 – rhyming words in poem 1: King John

Use the words from the box to fill the blanks in the poem. Each missing word rhymes² with the final word of the line above.

Runnymede John Harpenden day charter want here

King John by Hugh Chesterman (1884–1941)
 John was a tyrant, John was a tartar.
 John put his name to the great big _____.
 Every baron from Thames to Tweed,
 Followed that road to _____.
 Every baron had something to say
 To poor confused King John that _____.
 “Please sign your name, said Guy De Gaunt,
 It’s easily done and it’s all we _____,
 A ‘J’ and an ‘O’ and an ‘H’ and an ‘N’,”
 Said Hugo, Baron of _____.
 Quietly spoke the Lord of St Pere,
 “Your name, my king, to be writ just _____.”
 And with so many hurrying him on
 You can’t help feeling sorry for _____.

Glossary

tyrant: a person who has complete power in a country
tartar: a person in authority who is bad-tempered
charter: a written statement describing the rights that a particular group of people should have
baron: a landowner whose family had been given land by the king in return for support
Tweed: part of the River Tweed is the border between England and Scotland
writ: written

¹ meadow: an area of grassland, often used for hay; a piece of low ground near a river
² This means the ends of the words sound the same.

Task 2 – listening and speaking: King John

- Work in pairs and practise reading the poem aloud to each other. Do the endings rhyme?
- Now listen to the poem. Listen carefully for the rhythm.
- In pairs, read the poem aloud again. Try to keep the same rhythm and rhyme as the audio version.
- Think about the meaning: do you think it is a serious poem? Why?/Why not?
- What parts of the poem make the reader feel sympathy for King John? What part of the poem makes the reader dislike King John?

Task 3 – describing nature

Work in pairs. Imagine you are sitting in this meadow. It is a warm, sunny day and there is a gentle wind.

Describe:

- what you see
- what you hear
- what you smell
- what you feel.

Do you think it has changed much in the past 800 years?
Share your ideas with the class.



The River Thames at Runnymede
Photograph by Anthony McCallum

Task 4 – reading and listening to poem 2: The Genius of the Thames

Read and listen to this extract from the poem.

Extract from *The Genius of the Thames*
by Thomas Love Peacock (1785–1866)

And sweetly, on the mead below,
The fragrant gales of summer blow,
While flowers shall spring, while Thames shall flow,
That mead shall live in the memory.

Where valour, on the tented field,
Triumphant raised his patriot shield,
The voice of truth to kings revealed,
And broke the chains of tyranny.

Glossary

mead: meadow/field

fragrant: smelling pleasant

gale: gentle wind (old meaning); strong wind (modern meaning)

valour: bravery, courage

triumphant: having won a battle, victorious

patriot: a person who supports their country

shield: a piece of metal which protects

tyranny: cruel and oppressive government

Task 5 – the meaning and rhythm of poem 2: *The Genius of the Thames*

Think about the meaning:

- a. The first four lines are different from the last four lines. What is described in the two sections?
- b. How do you know this poem is about the Magna Carta when the name is not mentioned?

Read aloud and listen:

- c. Listen again, this time for the stress and rhythm of the poem. Can you hear that the stress is not as strong and regular as in the first poem?
- d. Now read it aloud to a partner.

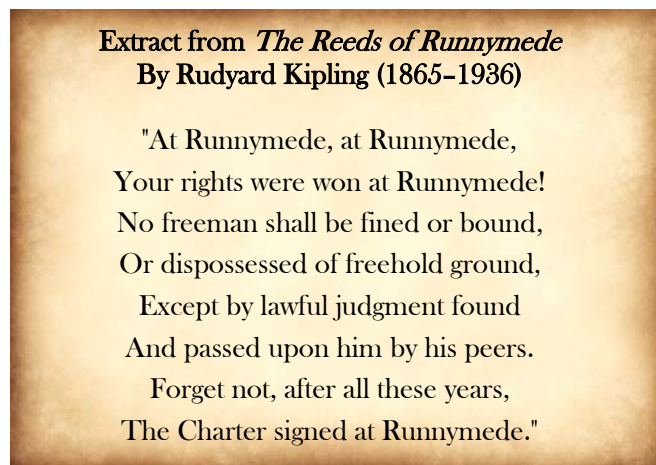
Task 6 – vocabulary for poem 3: *The Reeds of Runnymede*

Match the vocabulary (1–8) with the definitions (a–h). Check your answers with a partner.

- | | |
|---------------------------|---|
| 1. freeman | a. people who have had property taken away from them |
| 2. to fine | b. ownership of a building or land with no time limit |
| 3. to bind (irreg: bound) | c. a person who is the same age or who has the same social status |
| 4. dispossessed | d. allowed or recognised by law; legal |
| 5. freehold | e. a person who is not a slave |
| 6. lawful | f. to give a legal decision |
| 7. to pass judgment | g. to tie (something) tightly |
| 8. peer | h. to punish someone by making them pay money |

Task 7 – reading and discussing poem 3: *The Reeds of Runnymede*

Listen to and read this extract.



Now work in small groups. Cover the definitions, then explain the meaning of the poem. Start with the words: 'This poem is about the Magna Carta, which was signed at Runnymede. It was here that ...'.

Task 8 – discussing the three poems

Look back at all three poems and answer the questions.

- a. Which poem do you think children would enjoy most? Why?
- b. Which poem is most political? Why?
- c. Which poem helps you to imagine Runnymede best? Why?
- d. Which is your favourite poem? Why?

Task 9 – writing inspired by Haiku

a. Read about haiku poetry.

Haiku is a style of Japanese poetry. English haiku-style poems:

- have a maximum of 17 syllables
- have three lines (5, 7 and then 5 syllables)
- give a ‘snapshot’ picture, rather like a photograph.

You should be able to read the whole poem with one breath.

b. Look at this example of a haiku poem.

- Can you imagine the scene?
- Do you think it is effective?

A peaceful meadow
Disturbed by men on horses
Making history

c. Use these six lines to make two haikus, one about the Magna Carta, one about the Thames. Remember to use the 7-syllable line as the middle line.

Children race to the water	And people gained rights
King John’s power was challenged	Summer by the Thames
In June twelve fifteen	White swans glide smoothly

Check your haikus with your teacher, then try mixing lines from the two haikus. Are there any new combinations of lines (following the 5-7-5 rule) that make good poems? Why?/Why not?

d. Now write your own haiku. Choose one of the following themes.

- a description of nature
- an event in history