

Recording the Magna Carta: Lesson plan

Topic: Looking at the process of parchment making and scribing

Level: B1

Time: 90 minutes

Aims

- To provide practice of proofreading.
- To develop students' ability to write letters of application.
- To practise interview skills.
- To give students practice of using the passive.
- To develop students' awareness of how much work went on behind the scenes in order to record and disseminate the Magna Carta.

Introduction

This lesson is about how people used to write in the Middle Ages, for example when the Magna Carta was produced. It looks at how parchment was made and then focuses on the work of scribes. Both parchment makers and scribes played a vital role in the history of the Magna Carta. The lesson looks at what the two jobs involved and then at the skills needed to do them. Students will practise their reading, writing and speaking skills.

Resources

The four images used on the student worksheets are also in the attached PowerPoint file '**Recording the Magna Carta. Images**', which you can use to print or project the images.

Procedure

Warmer (5 minutes)

- Ask students if they have any idea how much paper they use over the year. (The answer is about 300kg per person). Would they miss paper if it ran out? Can they think of any other materials that could be used for writing on instead? Does anyone have a tablet? Do they use a stylus with it? Do they know that tablets were first used by the Romans, for writing on? Roman tablets were made from wax. Romans used a stylus too, a sharp instrument to make marks in the wax.

Task 1 – Vocab word search : What did people write on in the past? (10 minutes)

This sets the scene by getting students to think about what people used to write on in the past. It also introduces the word 'parchment', which will be explored in task 2.

- Give students **Task 1 – Vocab word search: What did people write on in the past?**
- Check the answers and write the spellings on the board.
- Ask students if they know or if they can guess what parchment is made of.

Answers for task 1

Note – Show slide one of the attached PowerPoint file ‘Recording the Magna Carta. Images’ to project the answers.

M	Z	P	A	P	Y	R	U	S
K	P	A	P	E	R	W	X	V
P	A	R	C	H	M	E	N	T
V	Q	Y	Z	S	L	A	T	E
W	A	L	L	S	Q	W	A	X

1.Wax 2.Paper 3.Papyrus 4.Slate 5.Parchment 6.Walls

Task 2 – Instructions for making parchment (10 mins)

This exercise introduces students to the process of making parchment, by means of an organisational reading comprehension. It introduces the vocabulary that students will need for writing out the process of parchment making in task 3. It also gives students an insight into what a hard and smelly job parchment making was. This will be useful when they come to write the job advert and application for a parchment maker in tasks 5 and 6.

- Give out **Task 2 – Instructions for making parchment.**
- Explain that the different stages have got muddled up. Ask students to work in pairs and put the instructions in the correct order.
- Elicit answers.

Answers for task 2

- 1. Find and kill a sheep.*
- 2. Cut the fleece off the dead sheep.*
- 3. Soak the fleece in a bath of lime to loosen the wool.*
- 4. After a few days, take it out and scrape off the wool with a knife.*
- 5. Stretch the skin and scrape it again until it is really smooth.*
- 6. Wash the smooth skin in warm water and dry before using.*

Task 3 – Describing a process (15 mins)

This exercise gives students practise using the passive and sequence adverbs.

- Give out **Task 3 – Describing a process.**
- Check that students know how to form the passive, using the auxiliary verb ‘to be’ and the past participle, as in the example: *Firstly a sheep is found and killed.*
- Ask students to fill in the five other stages of the process using the passive and adding a sequence adverb.
- Tell the students to check answers in pairs before you elicit feedback as a group.
- Elicit answers and write them on the board.
- Ask students which stage of the process would be the most unpleasant to carry out.

Suggested answers for task 3

1. Firstly a sheep is found and killed.
2. Secondly, the fleece is cut off the dead sheep.
3. Next, the fleece is soaked in a bath of lime to loosen the wool.
4. Then, after a few days, it is taken out and the wool is scraped off with a knife.
5. After this, the skin is stretched and scraped again until it is really smooth.
6. Finally the smooth skin is washed in warm water and dried before using.

Task 4 – Proofreading a scribe’s letter (10 minutes)

Having looked at parchment making, the lesson is now going to focus on the act of writing on the parchment, or scribing. Task 4 gives students the opportunity to proofread a short text. It highlights the fact that scribes could easily make mistakes and so prepares students for the job advert and application for a scribe in task 5 and 6.

- Give students **Task 4 – Proofreading a scribe’s letter**.
- Ask them to look at the picture showing a king dictating to a scribe. You can use the attached PowerPoint file ‘**Recording the Magna Carta. Images**’ and show slide four.
Can students suggest what sort of relationship a scribe might have had with his master? *e.g. trust and confidentiality must have been important.*
- Tell students to read the letter and find and correct the eight mistakes.
- Elicit answers and write the correct spellings on the board.

Answers for task 4

Dear Godfrey,

I am very **worried** about my future. I am **losing** my friends. I am **running** out of money. My **enemies** are **hoping** that I will give in to their demands. However, I am determined to win in the end. **Will** you remain **faithful** if I **refuse** to give up?

Yours sincerely,

King John

Task 5 – Job advertisements (15 minutes)

This exercise is to provide some speaking and writing practice using vocabulary related to qualities needed for the two different jobs of **scribe** and **parchment maker**. Ask the class to read the advertisement for a knight. Ask:

- *Is the advert appealing?*
- *Would you apply for the job?*
- *Is there anything missing? e.g. there is no mention of work experience or relevant skills.*
- Divide the class into two groups: A and B.
- You can show student pictures on slide four of the attached PowerPoint file ‘**Recording the Magna Carta. Images**’.

- Tell group A they are going to write an advert for the job of **parchment maker** and group B for the job of **scribe**. Tell each group to discuss the qualities listed in task 5 and decide which should be included in their advert.
- Monitor and provide content-based feedback if students require it.
- When the groups have finished, write up the two adverts on the board, correcting if necessary.

Task 6 – Letter of application (25 minutes)

This is an exercise that practises writing letters of application.

- Give out **Task 6 – Letter of application**.
- Tell group A that they are going to apply for the job of **scribe**, individually, using the job advert written by group B.
- Tell group B that they are going to apply for the job of **parchment maker**, individually, using the job advert written by group A.
- Explain that this is a fun activity and encourage students to use their imagination. Remind them that they are writing job application letters in the 13th century. Get them to think about books they might have read or films they might have seen about the Crusades or Robin Hood and then imagine themselves applying for a job at that time.
- If there is time, continue with the extension activities.

Extension activities

- Give Group A's letters of applications to Group B and Group B's letters of applications to Group A. Ask the groups to read the letters and select three students for interview.
- Carry out the interviews, with Group A interviewing the three students they selected and then Group B interviewing their selection.