

Oxford Dictionary of National Biography

Britain in 1605: teacher's notes

Lesson aim:

- to encourage students to appreciate the complex background to and causes of the Gunpowder Plot and the political, religious, and social discontents surrounding it
- to encourage students to use electronic resources effectively and to present their research using ICT
- to practise research skills like understanding what is relevant to a task and what isn't
- to practise evaluation of research and assessment of the presentation of results

During the Tudor and Stuart period there were great changes that affected many people, rich and poor. Rapidly increasing population, rising and falling prices and wages, climate changes that brought spells of particularly cold weather, years of bad harvests, and epidemics of plague, influenza and, later, smallpox, all had an impact on people's lives.

Religious change led to discontent and division; new ideas meant people began to think in different ways about the world around them. Through stories, ballads, books, pamphlets and, for the first time in the seventeenth century, newspapers, people got to know much more about what was happening in their country. They expressed strong opinions about their rulers—kings and queens and, in the middle of the seventeenth century, Oliver Cromwell and the council of state. In all parts of Britain there were often riots, sometimes rebellions, and even civil wars.

You may like to use this opportunity to ask students to review what they already know about this.

Your task is to find out about the events of 1605—one of the most action-packed years in the reign of James VI of Scotland and I of England. You will then use the Oxford DNB to focus on one person who played an important part in the events of this year.

With more able students you might like, as a follow-up or alternative session, to look at another year or event. If the topic is not covered by one of the theme articles (see below) you will need to do some preparation by conducting full text searches, perhaps for 'Armada' or 'restoration of the monarchy' or 'died of the plague', restricting these by a period of years for more precise results.

You will prepare [\[individually or in groups\]](#) a PowerPoint talk on the year 1605 from the viewpoint of the person you choose, using the dictionary to find basic information about them. You will show your presentation to the rest of the class who will assess it.

You can use [this pre-prepared PowerPoint template](#) to help guide you through how you might set out this task. Feel free to make your own up if you wish.

Instruct students to select 'Save' from the download file dialogue box.

How to do your research

Log in to the Oxford DNB: click on the blue link: www.oxforddnb.com/subscribed. If you have access by username and password, you will be prompted to type them.

Go to the tab at the top called Themes, and then on to 'What are themes?' in the right-hand box, and then to 'Feature essays' at the bottom of this box. From the list in the next window choose:

EITHER The Gunpowder Plot
OR Publications and performances of 1605

TIP: Although it gives a very useful overview of the year, the latter article is more suited to the more able students in so far as the people mentioned in it inhabit the world of the theatre and print rather than the more familiar territory of treason and plot, and their articles are often more challenging to read and interpret. Even so, the essay is a good starting point to find a person who was active and influential in 1605.

Look at the article and choose someone who appears in it. Before going any further make a note of what his or her role was, using the information given in the feature essay.

Now click on his or her name, either in the article or in the left-hand pane, so that you can read the article on that person. In that article try to find answers to some or all of the points below. Use them to fill in the rest of your PowerPoint, explaining the events of the year from his or her point of view:

- when the person was born and how old he or she was in 1605
- what his or her occupation was
- where he or she was born or lived
- what he or she thought about having a Scottish king
- what his or her religion was
- what he or she did in 1605
- how he or she reacted to the events of that year
- who his or her friends or enemies were
- any other interesting or surprising things about him or her

To help students with their research you could ask them to copy and paste the information they need from the Oxford DNB into a blank word document. This would allow them to edit the information before they place it in their presentation. However, for the more able, to underline the point that plagiarism is to be discouraged and to encourage students to interpret what they read as they read it, it may be better to take notes in their own words from the start. Single out for special praise attempts to take note of where our evidence comes from!

Assessment

This task allows the students to review their own performance and establish the criteria by which it will be judged. Once these criteria have been decided, it would help if the mark sheet had the criteria added to the top to enable students to keep them in mind as they complete their task. At the end of each group/person's presentation you could ask them to share with the rest of the class the areas they were happy with and those they would like to improve and why.

Make up a grid like the one below [on the student worksheet] to help you decide how you are going to mark each group's presentation.

Fill in the row at the top with the criteria you are going to use to mark the work. This will be the result of class discussion. Fill in the areas you are going to assess at the top of the table below.

Fill in the names of the students as they make their presentations. You will not need to mark yourself. Listen carefully, and be fair about your mark. It should be your decision, not that of your friends.