# Knowledge Organiser: Why was the power of the monarchy challenged in the Medieval period?

## Topic Summary:

During the Medieval period there was a continuing power struggle between the King, the Church, the Barons and the people. Ultimately it would result in the creation of Parliament and the King accepting that the Church should govern its own affairs. This topic will look at the different causes of the power of the monarchy being challenged.

## Key Dates:

**1153**
After 18 years of civil war, it is agreed Stephen would remain the King of England, but Matilda's son Henry would inherit the throne.

**December 1170**
Thomas Becket is murdered after falling out with Henry II

**1173-74**
Eleanor of Aquitaine, and 3 of her sons, lead a failed rebellion against her husband, Henry II. She is imprisoned for the next 16 years.

**1215**
The Magna Carta is signed by King John which confirms the right of the Barons to consult with and advise the king.

**1258**
Henry III is forced to sign the Provisions of Oxford by the Barons, which states the King cannot make decisions without the Great Council's agreement.

**1265**
First sitting of a truly representative Parliament created by the Earl of Leicester, Simon De Montfort.

**1272**
Prince Edward became King Edward I. He didn't want to risk more wars with the Barons by ignoring Parliament, so he kept meeting with them.

**1381**
The Peasants Revolt against the Poll Tax, the Statute of Labourers and the Feudal System.

## Key People:

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|  | **Matilda** was heir to the English king, Henry I, but was usurped by Stephen resulting in civil war. |
|  | **Henry II** strengthened royal administration but quarrelled with Thomas Becket over the power of the Church and faced rebellion from his wife, Eleanor of Aquitaine, and sons. |
|  | **Thomas Beckett** was Henry II's Chancellor and Archbishop of Canterbury who was murdered after falling out with Henry II over the power of the Church and Church courts. |
|  | **Eleanor of Aquitaine** was one of the most powerful monarchs of the Middle Ages—the wife of two powerful kings, and the mother of two others, and queen, in her own right, of a great portion of France. |
|  | **King John I** was an unpopular and controversial king due to his failures in foreign wars, high taxation, and his conflicts with the nobility. The Barons rebelled forcing him to sign the Magna Carta. |
|  | **Henry III** did not learn from the mistakes of his father. He faced rebellions, financial struggles, and disputes over royal power, leading to the Provisions of Oxford in 1258. |
|  | **Simon De Montfort**, Earl of Leicester, was the leader of the baron's revolt against King Henry III and established the first Parliament. |
|  | **Wat Tyler** was the leader of the Peasants'' Revolt. |
| | **Richard II** faced the Peasants' Revolt due to his youth, poll tax and Statute of Labourers. He successfully suppressed the revolt. |

## Vocabulary:

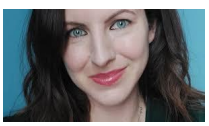
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| **Church**  | A Christian organization with its own clergy, buildings, and distinctive beliefs. |
| **State**  | The government that have control over an area of land and population. |
| **Archbishop**  | The leading *bishop*, responsible for all churches in a particular country. |
| **Martyr**  | Someone who is willing to die for his or her beliefs. |
| **Baron**  | A rich nobleman who held large areas of land from the King |
| **Magna Carta**  | A document that gave certain rights to the English people. |
| **Parliament**  | Is the legislature of the United Kingdom, helps to create and carry out government policies. |
| **Statute**  | Laws made by Parliament. |
| **Revolt**  | To rise up and fight against the government or other authority. |
| **Taxation**  | Money paid to a government, which the government uses to pay for its services to the people and to maintain itself. |

**Core Knowledge:**

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| **Lesson 1: How powerful were medieval monarchs?** | • In order to become powerful, a monarch needed the support of their **Family**, **Barons,** the **Church**, a strong **Army** and contented **Peasants**.. This combination was not always easy to achieve.<br>• The '**Mirror for Princes'** consisted of advice aimed at princes or rulers which offered guidance on governing and leadership - **War / Territory / Religion / Taxes / Law & Order / Law Making**<br>• The **'Mirror for Ladies**' was a similar text which advised female rulers or those aspiring to positions of power – **Wife / Mother / Religion / Peace / Fashion / Regent** |
| **Lesson 2: Why was Matilda never crowned the first Queen of England?** | • In 1135, Henry I died and the succession for the throne of England was disputed. Although his daughter, Matilda, had birthed a son (Henry II) through her second marriage he was only two years old and too young to rule England. **Matilda was therefore supposed to be Queen**.<br>• However, Henry I's nephew, **Stephen, broke his promise to support Matilda and raced to London to be crowned King of England on 22nd December 1148**. Matilda fought him for the Crown.<br>• Finally in 1153, after 18 years of fighting a bitter civil war, Stephen and Matilda reached an agreement. **Stephen would remain the King of England but when he died, Matilda's son Henry would inherit the throne.**<br>• She was not able to be queen due to being a woman in a patriarchal society and her strong personality. |
| **Lesson 3: Why was Henry II's power challenged by the Church?** | • Henry II and Becket were originally best friends and Becket was Henry's Chancellor.<br>• **Henry II tried to gain more control over the Church by making Becket Archbishop of Canterbury**.<br>• However, Becket became very holy and took his role of Archbishop seriously.<br>• They argued over tax policy and control of church land but their biggest **conflict was over Church Courts and the legal rights of the clergy**. Becket claimed that if a church official was accused of a crime, only the church itself had the ability to put the person on trial. |
| **Lesson 4: How did Becket's murder affect Henry II's power?** | • In 1164, Becket fled into exile in France and remained in exile for several years. **Becket returned in 1170 and excommunicated all the bishops who had helped Henry** II to run Church business whilst he was away.<br>• When Henry II found out, he was furious and shouted, **"who rid me of this troublesome priest?"** Four knights overheard and believing the king wanted Becket out of the way, **murdered Becket brutally on 29th December 1170 in Canterbury Cathedral**.<br>• Hery was horrified and sought repentance by walking to Canterbury barefoot and praying at Becket's tomb.<br>• **The Pope forgave Henry and Henry stopped his plans to change the Church courts or to control the Church.** |
| **Lesson 5: How powerful was Eleanor of Aquitaine?** | • Eleanor of Aquitaine was considered another strong-willed and powerful Medieval Queen.<br>• After her father's death in 1137 she inherited his lands and titles and became Duchess of Aquitaine (an area in Modern day France). **She was the richest and most powerful woman in Europe during the high Middle Ages.**<br>• In 1137 She became the 'Queen Consort of France' through her first marriage to King Louis VII. In 1154 she became Matilda's daughter-in-law and **Queen Consort of England through her second marriage to Henry II.**<br>• She led several armies throughout her life and was the leader of the Second Crusade.<br>• In 1137, **Eleanor led three of her sons in rebellion against Henry II to protect her rights, responsibility and agency over Aquitaine**. Her rebellion failed and she was imprisoned for the next 16 years.<br>• Later, **Eleanor was mother to Richard I and ruled England whilst he was away on the Third Crusade**. She raised his ransom when he was captures and travelled Europe to manage his armies. She also helped support her second son, John, when he was king. |
| **Lesson 6: Why did the Barons rebel against King John?** | • **The Barons rebelled against King John of England primarily due to his ineffective and tyrannical (harsh) rule,** which led to widespread discontent among the nobility.<br>• The Barons were unhappy with John due to the **heavy taxes he charged and wasted, the loss of French lands, conflict with the Pope and Church and his abuse of power. He also had an unpopular marriage and was suspected of murdering his nephew.**<br>• This led to the Barons rebelling in 1214 and forcing him to **sign the Magna Carta in 1215.**<br>• **This event had shown that the barons were a real threat to the king's power.** If they were not respected, they could summon armies and threaten the king's throne. |

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| **Lesson 7: How did the Magna Carta affect King John's power?** | • The Magna Carta was the **first time that the king was forced to accept that all people, even himself, were subject to the law**. He could no longer do whatever he wanted. **The king now had to ask for advice from the barons, not rule only by himself.**<br>• Magna Carta **only protected 'freemen'.** Since most people were 'unfree' peasants at the time, it didn't help them at all. It therefore only seemed to protect the rich barons and bishops and did nothing to help the rights of women or children. However, it did help more peasants as they became 'free' over the next 200 years.<br>• The Magna Carta had a significant long term impact**. Parts of Magna Carta are still used in UK law today. The provisions also formed the basis of many laws around the world in later years**. The Americans later based their legal system on Magna Carta. The United Nations used the ideas from it to protect rights around the world. Therefore, in 2006, the BBC survey found that signing Magna Carta was seen as the most important event in British history. |
| **Lesson 8: Why did Henry III argue with the barons?** | • King Henry III fell out with the Barons for several reasons, but the main factors stemmed from his poor rule, financial mismanagement, and a growing sense of anger among the nobility over issues such as: **favouritism towards his friends and family, heavy taxes, and failures in France.**<br>• By 1258 the Barons had had enough and **threatened to fight Henry III unless he accepted the terms of the Provisions of Oxford.** This said that the King could not make decisions without the Great Council's agreement and that the Great Council should choose the monarch's advisors**. This gave the Barons a lot more power.** |
| **Lesson 9: Why did the creation of Parliament change the power of the monarchy?** | • In 1264, Henry III fought the Barons who were led by Simon de Monfort, a powerful landowner who was married to the King's sister. The barons won the Battle of Lewes and Herny III and Prince Edward were taken prisoner.<br>• In 1265, Simon de Montfort called '**the First Parliament' which was meeting of the Great Council that included barons, bishops and two ordinary people from each town (burgesses) and two knights from each country.** This was the first time ordinary people could discuss the running of the country.<br>• Although Edward escaped and killed de Montfort in battle, **Edward had to continue using Parliament to keep the peace. Parliament was powerful as they controlled the King's money and could make new laws**. This has continued until today. |
| **Lesson 10: How did the Peasants Revolt challenge the Power of the Monarchy?** | • In 1381, peasants rebelled against King Richard II. They were led by Wat Tyler.<br>• The peasants were angry about a range of issues, such as **low pay due to the Statute of Labourers and the introduction of a Poll Tax.** They demanded changes were made.<br>• **A priest called John Ball also preached that God saw everyone as equal,** and that peasants were unfairly treated. His ideas encouraged peasants to demand changes.<br>• The revolt did not achieve all of the peasants' aims and the leader, Wat Tyler, was killed. **In the longer term, there were some changes and improvements to peasants' rights.** |
| **Lesson 11: Enquiry Outcome** | • You need to explain the key causes (factors) that explain why the power of the monarchy was challenged in the Medieval period.<br>• You need to write a supported judgement as to which was the most important cause and provided an explanation to support this. |

**What do historians say?**



**Dr Sophie Ambler, *The Song of Simon – England's first Revolutionary***
Ambler argues that the character of the Monarch was key. Where monarchs were tyrannical, such as King John, this led to calls for restrictions on royal power such as Magna Carta.



**Helen Castor, *She Wolves***
She-Wolves is a true account of how royal power came to lie female hands thanks to the influence of four women: Matilda, Eleanor of Aquitaine, Isabella of France and Margaret of Anjou.





**Marc Morris, *Treachery, tyranny and the road to Magna Carta***
**Dan Jones, *The Legacy of Magna Carta King John***
These are the main historians on King John. Marc Morris has said that not only was King John exceptionally cruel but he was also a coward. Dan Jones agrees that King John acted tyrannically throughout his life.

**How can I find out more?**

**Podcast: *Gone Medieval***




***Documentary: She Wolves***

