The Influence of the Magna Carta on the U.S. Constitution

WebQuest Description: What was the Magna Carta and how did it influence the people of Medieval England? What were the principles of individual rights that our forefathers came to the American colonies with? Where and how did they originate? What aspects of the Magna Carta did the founding fathers incorporate into the United States Constitution? How many other countries have been influenced by our Constitution?

Grade Level: 3-5
Curriculum: Social Studies
Keywords: Magna Carta, United States Constitution, Bill of Rights
Published On: 2011-06-14 20:39:31
Last Modified: 2011-06-14 19:29:18
WebQuest URL: http://zunal.com/webquest.php?w=104437

Introduction

On June 15, 1215, English barons rebelled against King John due to his stringent taxation, military failures in France, and his abuse of feudal and royal privileges. This rebellion resulted in the Magna Carta, a charter defining the rights and privileges of the barons, regularized the judicial system, and guaranteed feudal rights. It abolished taxation by the Crown without the approval of the common council. American colonists referred to this as "No taxation without representation". Freedom of commerce as well as a system of standard measures and weights was enacted. Strict judicial procedural rules and penalties for felonies was standardized. Evidence by credible witnesses, not rumor, were necessary for convictions of crimes. Trial by jury and due process were enacted.

Tasks

Part One: Prior to the Magna Carta, what was life like in Medieval England and what events led up to the nobles' revolt against King John? Part Two: What rights did the Magna Carta guarantee and to whom? Part Three: How did Parliamentarians in the 17th century interpret the Magna Carta and what did this mean for freemen? Part Four: How did the Magna Carta influence the United States Constitution? Part Five: What other countries have adapted the rights and privileges guaranteed by the Bill of Rights and the Constitution?

Process

Part One: Prior to the Magna Carta, what was life like in Medieval England and what events led up to the nobles' revolt against King John? Use the following websites to research Medieval life: Feudalism, work, and recreation http://library.thinkquest.org/o4oct/01895 to research Medieval England http://www.britainexpress.com/History/Feudalism_and_Medieval_life.htm Use the following websites to learn about King John and the actions that led up to the nobles revolt: http://www.britannia.com/history/docs/magna2.html Go to the following link and take the quiz on the Magna Carta: http://www.magnacarta.com/content/history Go to the following link and take the quiz on the U.S. Constitution and the Bill of Rights: http://www.brainpop.com/socialstudies/usgovernmentandlaw/billofrights

Evaluation

Students will write a report on Medieval England including Feudalism, occupations, and recreation of the time. Students will identify three major reasons the nobles revolted against King John and why he was forced to accept the Magna Carta. Students will evaluate
the Magna Carta, its subsequent modifications and interpretations, and its influence upon the United States Constitution.

Students will identify countries that have been influenced by the United States Constitution.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category and Score</th>
<th>Beginning</th>
<th>Developing</th>
<th>Qualified</th>
<th>Excellent</th>
<th>Score</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Students will write a report on Medieval England including Feudalism, occupations, and recreation of the time.</td>
<td>Student report addresses only one of the topics and there are several errors.</td>
<td>Student report addresses only two of the topics and there are several errors.</td>
<td>Student report addresses all topics with a few errors.</td>
<td>Student report is complete with no errors.</td>
<td>25 points</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students will identify three major reasons the nobles revolted against King John and why he was forced to accept the Magna Carta.</td>
<td>Students identify only one reason for the nobles revolt.</td>
<td>Students identify two reasons for the nobles revolt.</td>
<td>Students identify the reasons for the nobles revolt, but do not expound on the reasons King John accepted the Magna Carta.</td>
<td>Students correctly identify the reasons and why King John agreed to the adoption of the Magna Carta.</td>
<td>25 points</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students will evaluate the Magna Carta, its subsequent modifications and interpretations, and its influence upon the United States Constitution.</td>
<td>Students do not provide any modifications or interpretations of the Magna Carta or its influence upon the Constitution.</td>
<td>Students provide limited modifications or interpretations of the Magna Carta or its influence upon the Constitution.</td>
<td>Students provide adequate modifications or interpretations of the Magna Carta or its influence upon the Constitution.</td>
<td>Students extensively evaluate the modifications and interpretations of the Magna Carta and its influence upon the Constitution.</td>
<td>35 points</td>
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<tr>
<td>Students will identify countries that have been influenced by the United States Constitution.</td>
<td>Students do not identify any countries influenced by the Constitution.</td>
<td>Students identify one country influenced by the Constitution without references.</td>
<td>Students identify two countries influenced by the Constitution with only one reference.</td>
<td>Student identifies at least three countries influenced by the Constitution with references for each country.</td>
<td>15 points</td>
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</table>

**Conclusion**

The Magna Carta is a significant historical document which changed an absolute monarchy to one that respected the rights of others. This document was modified and re-interpreted through the years to include freemen as well as nobles. It is the basis of English common law. Common law was brought to the American colonies and as British subjects, they expected that Common law would be applied to them as well, but learned that this was not true. When the founding fathers were looking for a historical document upon which to base the Constitution, they chose the Magna Carta. The Bill of Rights includes many of the rights guaranteed by the Magna Carta. Many countries have been influenced by "the shot heard round the world" - the American colonists fight for independence. Through it's many interpretations, including the United States Constitution, the Magna Carta remains a significant document for the rights of the individual versus the government.

**Teacher Page**

Arizona Department of Education Standards:
- Strand 1: American History
  - Concept 1: Research skills for History
  - PO4: Locate information using both primary and secondary sources.
- Strand 2: World History
  - Concept 6: Age of Revolution
  - PO4: Compare the outcomes of the American Revolution with those of other revolutions around the world.
- Strand 3: Civics/Government
  - Concept 1: Foundations of Government
  - PO1: Identify the democratic principles and ideals associated with the Declaration of Independence and the United States Constitution.

**Standards**

**Credits**

**Other**