

To what extent did different innovations impact on the spread of ideas in the 19th Century?

Suitable for students aged 14-16

The 19th Century has been called a time of 'Great Changes' by historians. It was certainly a time of new ideas – from the social change campaigns of the abolitionists and chartists, to the inventions and discoveries that would industrialise Britain, bring people in their thousands to new towns and make it possible for more people and goods to travel further and faster than ever before.

Ask students to study these sources and find out how each impacted on the spread of ideas in the 'Age of Revolution.' Images can be projected onto the whiteboard, printed or viewed on computers or tablets. Some prompt questions have been provided, but students could be encouraged to develop their own questions for interrogating the sources.

1. Penny Black stamp

Show students the image of the Penny Black stamp ageofrevolution.org/200-object/the-penny-black-postage-stamp/. It was introduced by Rowland Hill in 1840 and is now one of the world's rarest stamps.

- Why do you think it is called the 'Penny Black?'
- How similar, and how different, is it to stamps today?
- In which historical period was it in use?
- How can you tell just from looking at it?

Students can use the Penny black notes and further research to answer the questions:

- How did people pay for letters before 1840?
- How long did it take to deliver them?

- What was revolutionary about the Penny Black?
- Why do you think it is so rare today?
- To what extent, in your opinion, did the Penny Black impact on the spread of ideas in the 19th Century?

2. Locomotion I

Show students Locomotion I ageofrevolution.org/200-object/locomotion-no-1/.

- Locomotion sparked a revolution – does it look revolutionary?
- What do you think it was built to do? How do you think it worked?

Students can use the Locomotion I notes and conduct further research to answer the questions:

- Why is Locomotion I famous?
- What revolution did it spark?
- How did it contribute to the spread of ideas?
- Do you think its impact on the spread of ideas was greater than the Penny Black or less? Did one depend on the other for their impact?

3. Telegraph

Show students the Telegraph machine ageofrevolution.org/200-object/cooke-and-wheatstone-5-needle-telegraph-1837/. They can use the Telegraph notes and conduct further research to answer the questions:

- What was this machine used for?
- How did it work?
- When and how was it first used?
- What other inventions were necessary for it to work?
- How did its use develop?
- How did it contribute to the spread of ideas?

- Do you think its impact on the spread of ideas was greater or less than the Penny Black or Locomotion I in the 19th Century?
- Why?

4. The industrial printing press

Show students the Chartists poster ageofrevolution.org/200-object/poster-advertising-the-chartists-demonstration-on-kennington-common-1848/ and the Interesting Narrative of Olaudah Equiano ageofrevolution.org/200-object/the-interesting-narrative-of-the-life-of-olaudah-equiano-or-gustavus-vassa-the-african/.

- What ideas do you think these sources are trying to convey?
- How successful are they at communicating their message?

Students can use the Chartists poster notes and the Olaudah Equiano notes, and conduct further research to answer the questions:

- Where might these have been seen?
- Who by? By how many people?
- How did the industrial printing press contribute to this?
- What ideas were they trying to communicate?
- How did they contribute to the spread of ideas?
- Do you think the impact of the industrial printing press was greater or less than the Penny Black, Locomotion I or the Telegraph in the 19th century?
- Why?

Students can decide which of these innovations they think had the greatest impact on the spread of ideas. They could produce a one-minute manifesto, based on evidence from their research, to share with the class before holding a class vote.

Discuss how useful they think these four sources are to a historian studying the spread of ideas in the 19th Century. What other sources or information would be useful?

Students could explore the sources in the four themes. What were some of the key ideas in the Age of Revolution?



Revolutionary Enquiries

ageofrevolution.org/education

How are ideas spread today? How does this compare with the Age of Revolution, or with the spread of ideas in the 18th Century? How easy was it to campaign, inform or influence people in, say, 1780? How did these four inventions change that? How much easier was it to spread ideas in, say, 1850 and how much easier is it today?

Useful links

The Postal Museum, London - www.postalmuseum.org/

The National Railway Museum, York - www.railwaymuseum.org.uk/

Further sources

Sculpture of Boulton, Watt and Murdoch - ageofrevolution.org/200-object/boulton-watt-and-murdoch-the-golden-boys-of-birmingham/

Description of a slave ship - ageofrevolution.org/200-object/description-of-a-slave-ship/

The life and adventures of Michael Armstrong - ageofrevolution.org/200-object/the-life-and-adventures-of-michael-armstrong-the-factory-boy-by-frances-trollope/

Portrait of Mary Wollstonecraft - ageofrevolution.org/200-object/portrait-of-mary-wollstonecraft/

Anti-Slavery Sugar Bowl - ageofrevolution.org/200-object/anti-slavery-sugar-bowl/

Massacre at St Peter's by George Cruikshank - ageofrevolution.org/200-object/george-cruikshanks-massacre-st-peters/

Manchester Heroes by George Cruikshank - ageofrevolution.org/200-object/manchester-heroes-cruikshank/

The Blessings of Peace or the Curse of the Corn Law by George Cruikshank - ageofrevolution.org/200-object/the-blessings-of-peace-of-the-curse-of-the-corn-law-cruikshank/

Frontispiece to Frankenstein or the Modern Prometheus by Mary Shelley - ageofrevolution.org/200-object/frontispiece-to-frankenstein-or-the-modern-prometheus-by-mary-shelley/

The Kongorou by George Stubbs - ageofrevolution.org/200-object/the-kongouro-from-new-holland-kangaroo/

La Marseillaise - ageofrevolution.org/200-object/la-marseillaise/

HM Bark *Endeavour* - ageofrevolution.org/200-object/model-of-hm-bark-endeavour/

Peterloo Banner - ageofrevolution.org/200-object/peterloo-banner/