

Why did workers protest during the Age of Revolution?

Suitable for students aged 11-16

The following enquiry can be undertaken as described or adapted to suit the teaching and learning needs of your students. Students can undertake their enquiry individually, in pairs or in small groups. Images can be projected onto the whiteboard, printed or viewed on computers or tablets.

During the Age of Revolution, very few adults could vote – some constituencies (known as ‘rotten boroughs’) had as few as just four or five voters. The main way ordinary people could make their voices heard was by protest. This activity focuses on five objects, each associated with one key protest from the period.

Students explore the objects, research the protests and answer the enquiry question: Why did workers protest during the Age of Revolution?

Each student/group can investigate every object, or different objects can each be allocated for different students/groups to explore and then share their findings with the rest of the class through presentation or debate. Images can be projected onto the whiteboard, printed or viewed on computers or tablets. Older students can develop their own questions to interrogate each source.

1. The Nore Mutiny

Ask students to listen to the song The Colours ageofrevolution.org/200-object/the-colours-by-the-men-they-couldnt-hang/, written and performed by the punk folk band *The Men they Couldn't Hang* in 1988. The song is about a famous naval mutiny in 1797, when naval sailors turned against their superiors. The lyrics can be found here lyrics.wikia.com/wiki/The_Men_They_Couldn%27t_Hang:The_Colours (and on similar websites).

- What do the lyrics tell us about the lives of sailors at the time?
- What do the lyrics tell us about the causes of the mutiny and why the sailors are protesting?
- What is to happen to the leader of the mutiny?

Students can then read the notes about The Colours, research the Nore Mutiny and decide:

- How accurate do they think the lyrics are?
- How useful is this as a piece of evidence about:
- Protest at the time?

- Government reaction to the protest?
- Why has the songwriter chosen to focus on the colours red, white and blue?

2. The Peterloo Massacre

On 6 August 1819, thousands of people, many in their best clothes, gathered together for a political meeting at St Peter's Field in Manchester. Many of them carried banners.

Show students the Peterloo Banner ageofrevolution.org/200-object/peterloo-banner/.

- According to the banner, what did the protesters want?
- What do you think is meant by these words?
- Which other famous protest used these words as a slogan?

Students can then read the Peterloo banner notes and conduct further research about the events at Peterloo.

- What were people who gathered in St Peter's Field protesting about?
- Why do they think ordinary people named the events in 1819 'The Peterloo Massacre'.

3. The Merthyr rising

In 1831, coal miners in Merthyr Tydfil held a protest. It turned into a full-scale uprising, with workers taking over the town for several days.

Show students the Tipstaff used to arrest Dic Penderyn ageofrevolution.org/200-object/tipstaff-used-to-arrest-dic-penderyn-during-the-merthyr-rising/

Ask them

- What is it made of?
- Is it complete?
- What do they think it might be used for?
- Can they explain the dents?

Students do not need to come up with the 'correct answer', as long as their answers fit with what they can see, the fact that it comes from the early 1800s and is linked to a popular uprising.

Students can read the Tipstaff notes and carry out further research about the Merthyr Rising to find out more about the object and what happened to Dic Penderyn (Richard Lewis). From what they have discovered:

- How does their research impact on their initial ideas about the Tipstaff?
- Why were people in Merthyr protesting in 1831?
- How useful is this object as evidence of events in Merthyr in 1831?
- Why do they think Dic Penderyn was arrested and hanged?

4. The Tolpuddle martyrs

In 1834, six agricultural labourers from the village of Tolpuddle in Dorset were sentenced to 'transportation' for seven years. In 2000, the Trade Union Congress (TUC) commissioned this sculpture showing George Loveless, one of the convicted labourers awaiting transportation to Australia. Show students the Tolpuddle sculpture ageofrevolution.org/200-object/tolpuddle-martyrs-sculpture/

- Why do they think there are six seats?
- How is George Loveless depicted? How is he dressed, how does he look, can they guess what he might be feeling?
- Why might the sculptor have shown George Loveless like this?
- The sculpture was made in 2000.
- How useful is it as evidence of the events in 1834?
- Why might a sculpture about these people and events have been made over 150 years later?

Students can read the Tolpuddle martyrs sculpture notes and carry out further research about the Tolpuddle martyrs.

- What did they want?
- What did they do about it?
- What happened to them as a result?
- How did the Government respond?
- How did thousands of people in Britain respond?
- What happened to the six men in the end?

5. The Chartists

The Chartists were a group who wanted to reform the political system, so that working men could have a voice. Their 'six demands' are said to be the basis of our democracy today. Show students the Chartists poster ageofrevolution.org/200-object/poster-advertising-the-chartists-demonstration-on-kennington-common-1848/, about a meeting due to be held in London on 10 April 1848.

- What do the Chartists want?
- What kind of demonstration is this to be?
- What time is the demonstration? Where?
- How useful is this poster in telling us about the problems facing working men in 1848?
- How useful is this poster in telling us about the actions taken by the Chartists to let people know their grievances in 1848?
- How useful is this poster in telling us about the Chartists as a political movement?
- How useful is this poster in telling us how successful the Chartists were?

Students can read the Chartists poster notes and find out:

- The Chartists 'six demands'
- How many of these are in use today
- Whether or not the Chartists were successful in their campaign for political reform.

Students could make a mind map with the heading 'Workers' Protests in the Age of Revolution'. They plot causes of protests, events and consequences, then make the case for which, in their opinion, was the most successful protest. Students could do this in groups and then present their cases to the class to be put to the vote. Draw out links between this activity as a democratic process, versus the situation for ordinary men and women in the 1800s.

Or students could present their findings in the form of a debate e.g.:

- *This House believes peaceful protest was a successful tool for change in the 1800s*
- *This House believes the (e.g.) Merthyr Rising was the most impactful protest of these examples*
- *This House believes all protest should be peaceful*

etc

Students could choose one of these protests to focus on. What is the protestors'/campaigners' key message? Make a banner with a slogan of a maximum of five words to get your message across. How can colours and symbols contribute to this?

Talk about how workers might protest today. What do they protest about? How similar/different is this to the Age of Revolution?

Useful Links

People's History Museum, Manchester - phm.org.uk/

Tolpuddle Martyrs Museum - www.tolpuddlemartyrs.org.uk/story

Further sources

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/

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