

PETERLOO



PETERLOO

Lesson Summary

This session introduces students to the Peterloo Massacre, and asks them to examine the causes of the day's historic events. Students are encouraged to think about the importance of banners and political symbolism to protest movements, and are familiarised with Percy Shelley's *The Masque of Anarchy*.

Learning Objectives

- To find out about what happened at the Peterloo Massacre.
- To learn about the reform movement which the demonstrators at Peterloo were a part of, and the changes in society which had made this movement possible.
- To think about the influence that Peterloo had on people at the time, and future generations who fought for equality and the vote.
- To think about the roles of symbols such as particular clothes, flags, images, and colours, in protest movements.

United Nations Sustainable Development Links

- No Poverty
- Zero Hunger
- Reduced Inequality

British Council Core Skills

- Critical Thinking and Problem Solving
- Creativity and Imagination
- Collaboration and Communication
- Citizenship

Curriculum Links

- KS 3-4 History
- Citizenship



PETERLOO

Activity One: Outline and background

Requires: Slides 2-8, Worksheet source 1, whiteboard, marker

Preparation: Print outs of worksheet 1. Slides 2-8 are ready to be displayed.

- Using the notes below (and on slides) go through slides 2-6 and ask students to make notes on what they think are the key facts and ideas.
- Then ask them to read the brief extract in source 1.
- Have them form pairs and ask them to answer the following questions, which can be written on the board:
 - Why did so many people attend the Peterloo demonstration?
 - What kind of demonstration was it planned to be?
 - Why do you think the protest became violent?
 - Why did the Peterloo Massacre become an important issue for so many people?
 - Was it right that the protestors didn't defend themselves against the yeomanry's violence?
 - Why do you think the government stopped trying to suppress protests with similar violence after Peterloo?
 - Why do you think even pro-government newspapers criticised the state's actions?
- After they have discussed these in pairs, ask them to come back together to compare answers.



PETERLOO

Slide Notes

Slide 2: (Context: Conditions in the Early 19th Century)

- Manchester and the surrounding areas were home to the weaving and cotton industries. Workers who spun cotton had traditionally done their work at home, but throughout the 1700s the invention of new machines led to the growth of larger factories, where much more cotton could be spun in a shorter amount of time.
- Increasingly workers were paid less for the work that they did, and people lost their jobs as factory owners looked to reduce the amount they spent on wages. The average wage of a weaver fell from 21 shillings in 1802 to 14 shillings in 1809.
- Britain had spent the years between 1803 and 1815 fighting France in the Napoleonic Wars. National debt had increased, and trade had decreased by the end of the war, leading to even more economic hardship.
- New Corn Laws were introduced in 1815, prohibiting the import of cheap foreign grain. This meant that British landowners made more money from their produce, but that bread became much more expensive.

Slide 3: (Context: Radicalism and Reaction)

- In 1789, the French Revolution sent shockwaves across Europe. An alliance of the middle- and working-classes had overthrown the French nobility, and in 1793 they executed the King of France, creating a French Republic. Millions gained the right to vote, and the privileges of the previous rulers were abolished.
- In Britain, despite the growth of the new cities, they often did not have a single Member of Parliament. Voting was restricted to very rich landowning men, and millions of people did not have a voice in parliament, while the very rich could buy land which allowed them to automatically have their own Member of Parliament.
- British workers and parts of the middle classes became increasingly interested in the radical ideas of the French Revolution, terrifying the wealthy elites in Britain. They elites formed the **Yeomanry**, a military body which was to be used within Britain to attack radical movements developing amongst the poor.
- Without the ability to vote, people used other means to protest. The **Luddite** movement of 1811-1817 saw bands of workers destroying the hated new machines. These protests were put down by the army and the mass execution of Luddites in York.



PETERLOO

Slide 3 cont.

- In 1817 a group from Oldham tried to organise a 'hunger march' to London, where they would present a petition to the Prince Regent asking for relief from the poverty they experienced. They planned for each marcher to bring a blanket, both to sleep under at night, and to show that they were weavers, earning them the name, '**Blanketeers**'. Several of the leaders were young- John Johnson was just 17 and John Bagguley just 18. However, the local yeomanry was used to break up the demonstration as it gathered in St Peter's Field, and leaders were arrested before they could leave Manchester.
- 1818 saw many strikes across Manchester and the surrounding areas, and even attempts to form a general union for workers of every industry. However they were often ineffective, and many workers instead looked to the vote as a means to end their condition of poverty.

Slide 4: (Build-Up)

- With the young leader John Bagguley in prison, Manchester radicals asked Henry Hunt to come and address a meeting for them, to promote the cause of reform. Hunt was a well-known speaker from a middle-class background, whose fiery rhetoric and dramatic nature could draw large audiences.
- They had hoped to copy a similar meeting that had happened in Birmingham, where a well-known radical was voted to be the city's MP in a mock election. However, they had been warned that this was illegal
- Fearful that the yeomanry might be used to break up the demonstration, many attendees practiced 'drilling'- making infantry formations- under the supervision of radical veterans of the Napoleonic Wars.
- However, Hunt was strongly opposed to any hint of violence from the protestors' side on the day, and encouraged the organisers to ensure that the demonstration would be unarmed.



PETERLOO

Slide 5 & 6: (Events of the Day)

- Processions of several thousand people arrived from many of the satellite towns around Manchester. People were decked out in their best clothes and marched in ordered formations.
- Many carried colourful banners and flags, and flagpoles were adorned with the Phrygian Cap- a symbol of the French Revolution.
- In total there were some 60-80,000 people present. William Hulton, of the Magistrates' Select Committee, watched the scene and decided that the protest had to be broken up. He ordered the Yeomanry to arrest the leaders of the demonstration.
- The Manchester and Salford Yeomanry charged on horseback, swords drawn, into the heart of the crowd. They soon became stuck in the mass of people, and began to hack with their sabres at those around them. The Fifteenth Hussars, a regular army force, were sent in to assist them. The protest leaders were arrested, and those carrying flags and banners were targeted.
- Protestors fled the fields in panic, leading to further crushes. The rest of the day saw protestors chased and arrested around Manchester, despite the fact that the protest had been abandoned within 15 minutes of the attack. In total 18 people died from their injuries, and over 650 were injured.
- More can be found here: <https://peterloo1819.co.uk/timeline/16aug/>

Slide 7 & 8: (Aftermath)

- After the Peterloo Massacre, many people were horrified by what they saw. Eyewitnesses wrote articles for national newspapers and the radical press. Even normally pro-government newspapers like *The Times* carried condemnations of the yeomanry's violence. People wrote poems, drew pictures, and sang songs about the massacre across the country.
- People protested against the actions of the government- over 100,000 demonstrated in London, and some 40,000 people demonstrated in Newcastle.
- However the government, led by Earl Liverpool, aimed to prevent Peterloo turning into an even-more radical protest movement. They passed a series of laws called the **Six Acts** which banned radical meetings, increased the price of newspapers, and allowed the government to crack down on speech which they didn't like
- Many of the leaders of the protest were imprisoned after Peterloo. Henry Hunt received a two and a half year sentence. Samuel Bamford, John Johnson, John Knight, and other leading figures also received prison sentences of one or two years.
- Despite the repression, many future protest movements would refer to the Peterloo massacre to inspire their supporters. Protestors who fought for the right to vote, including the Chartists and the Suffragettes, inherited the legacy of these radicals.

PETERLOO

Activity Two: Masque of Anarchy

Requires: slide 9

Preparation: project slide

- Project the slide with several stanzas from the 'Masque of Anarchy' (slide 7)
- Pick four students, and ask each to read a stanza aloud.
- Ask the group:
 - How is Shelley suggesting that protestors respond to state violence?
 - Does reading this confirm what EP Thompson wrote in source 1?
 - Why do you think this was not published until over a decade after Peterloo?
 - Why do they think the poem is called the 'mask of anarchy'? What does Shelley mean by 'anarchy' here?
 - Who is 'ye' (you) here? Who are 'they'?
 - If Shelley was to write this poem today, what event(s) do you think he'd write about?

Activity Three: Creative Writing

Requires: Worksheet source 2. Pens and paper available for students

Preparation: Print worksheet source 2

- Ask students to read the extract by Olivia McFadden which won the Radical Read creative writing competition (worksheet source 2).
- Then ask students are asked to imagine that they attended the Peterloo demonstration as a protestor. Using the sources that they have read, and other information that they can find, they will write a letter detailing the events of the day, to John Bagguley, who is currently languishing in jail.
- Ask students to think about conveying:
 - The events of the day (who, what, when, where, why)
 - How they felt during the events
 - What they think will happen next, and what they hope will happen next.



PETERLOO

Activity Four: Banners

Requires: Worksheet sources 3-8, template of the crowd holding a blank banner, A3 paper

Preparation: Print the worksheet, sources and template, ensure that there are enough paper and pens for each small group of student

- Ask the students to split into small groups.
- Within each group ask each student to read a different source about the banners of Peterloo (sources 3-6 on the worksheet), and ask all students to look at the images of the original and recreations (sources 7 and 8 on the worksheet).
- In their groups, ask them to create a mind map/ spider diagram relating to 'BANNERS'. Some of the large words which come off could be 'Symbols' 'Phrases' 'Colours' 'Importance'.
- Once they have completed their mind maps, ask them to imagine that they are a group of protestors marching to St Peter's Fields in 1819. Based on what they know, ask them to design a banner using the template provided.
- Ask them to think about:
 - What its message should be?
 - What symbols it will use, and why?
 - How to make it visually eye-catching

PETERLOO

Source 1

An Historian's View on the Importance of Peterloo

"The enduring influence of Peterloo lay in the sheer horror of the day's events. In 1819 the action of the loyalists found many defenders in their own class.

Ten years later it was an event to be remembered, even among the [elites], with guilt. As a massacre and as 'Peter-Loo' it went down to the next generation.

And... in its way a victory. Even Old Corruption knew, in its heart, that it dare not do this again... the right of the public meeting had been gained.

Henceforward strikers or agricultural workers might be ridden down or dispersed with violence. But never since Peterloo has authority dared to use equal force against a peaceful British crowd."

EP Thompson - the Making of the English Working Class



PETERLOO

Source 2

By Olivia McFadden - Age 14 - The Barlow RC High School

Welcome To The End

'I'm standing here. In the middle of St Peter's Field. We've been marching for hours, just for this moment. To get here, in amongst all these people with one thing in common. We're all hungry. Some of us are starving. We're determined to tell everyone what we need and what we want. We want to be heard. We want our voices to count. 16th of August, 1819, a year of industrial depression and high food prices. I can see more and more people filling the field. There are banners from Saddleworth, Oldham and Mossley. For years we've been working morning till night for next to nothing. We can't feed our children. But today there's a chance, with all of us together here, we can change that. We want representation in Parliament. We want equal representation. I'm excited! Today, something is going to happen that will change things for ever. That's why I've come with Eliza. She's only four, but I want her to see this.

By the way, if you're wondering, I'm Nancy. Nancy Steele. My body may be gone but my broken soul is still here and forever will be. I was 22 when I died and up until this point my life was far from perfect. But I had a home, a family, a job in a nearby mill and the sweetest little girl you would ever have set your eyes upon.

Let me tell you about the day. It started off great. The bands were playing as the banners swung in the breeze. I'll never forget the sight of those hundreds of women from Oldham all in their white dresses, their white silk banner saying 'Universal Suffrage'. Could you imagine? Votes for all of us?! Votes that could lead to better use of public money, fairer taxes, an end to restrictions on trade, food for everyone.

This was a peaceful gathering. 60,000 of us came together in St. Peter's Field and not one of us armed. For most of us, violence didn't cross our minds. But that's not what the local magistrates thought. They brought in their constables, soldiers and cavalry. Their glaring eyes followed our every move. As if in a way, they were strangely intimidated.



PETERLOO

Source 2 cont

By Olivia McFadden - Age 14 - The Barlow RC High School

I could feel a sudden change in the atmosphere. The crowds started to move but it was confusing. Something was happening but I couldn't quite work out what it was. People began shouting, screaming and running. I could hear the distant sound of horses charging. I could see people being arrested and carried off. Innocent men and women arrested, for simply voicing their opinion. What happened to free will? What happened to human rights? What happened to human worth? Well... us, the lower classes, don't deserve that. If you didn't own land, a big house, servants, you weren't worthy. If you weren't rich and wealthy, you guessed it, you weren't worthy. The ruling classes were alarmed by the size of this crowd because in their minds, who cares about poor people? There was no negotiation, there was no reasoning. The government's first response was arrest, capture or murder! Herds of drunken guards charged towards us. We all stood tightly surrounding the children. That was our only defence mechanism. The guards rapidly rode in on horses carrying, deadly swords hitting everything in their path. The fields were cleared except for the bodies. Eleven killed, 500 people were injured. All the leaders were convicted and sent to prison.

"What's your story?" I hear you ask. Well... in the centre I stood, carrying Eliza in my arms, both of us trembling with fear. My heart was racing. I could feel it pounding. I knew exactly what was going to happen, there and then. Everyone else; fled or dead. So it was just me. With my little girl tightly in my clutches. That was when it happened. A drunk, angry roaring soldier charged towards me. Whipping his horse, with sword in hand, that was it, it was over. Someone rescued Eliza from beneath me. I prayed she'd be alright. I prayed that she'd grow up and have a better chance at life than I did.

You may be wondering why I am writing this. Why now? Because it has been 200 years since this happened. And I've been watching. It's like nothing has changed. Yes we have the vote but there's still so much to be done. There still so much inequality and discrimination. Some people with so much, most with so little. We're all human and in a way, all the same! So take a moment. You've heard my story. Be kind. Make a change. Make a difference.



PETERLOO

Source 3

An Historian's View on the Importance of Banners

"Many of those who bled on the field of Peterloo did so while protecting the flags and caps of liberty which they had laboured over and which they had carried with them, as symbols of democracy, on their long march from Manchester's satellite towns. The mottos inscribed on these flags included 'Liberty, Strength, Unity' and 'Equal Representation or Death'.

As the yeomanry approached the hustings to arrest Hunt, the crowd was seen to 'link arms' and to 'form a solid body', in order to defend their leaders and to safeguard the many banners mounted upon the stage.

Edmund Dawson lost his life defending a cap of liberty, made in his home-town of Saddleworth, while Mary Hays and two-year-old William Fildes were killed in the crush which resulted from the attempts of the cavalry to cut down and 'demolish' the flag-staves of the radicals."

Joseph Cozens - 'The Making of the Peterloo Martyrs, 1819 to the Present', in Quentin Outram, Keith Laybourn (eds), *Secular Martyrdom in Britain and Ireland: From Peterloo to the Present*



PETERLOO

Source 5

Samuel Bamford, a Radical leader, describes the march to St Peter's Fields from Middleton

First were selected twelve of the most comely and decentlooking youths, who were placed in two rows of six each, with each a branch of laurel held presented in his hand, as a token of amity and peace; then followed the men of several districts in fives; then the band of music, an excellent one; then the colours: a blue one of silk, with inscriptions in golden letters, "Unity and Strength," "Liberty and Fraternity"; a green one of silk, with golden letters, "Parliaments Annual," "Suffrage Universal"; and betwixt them, on a staff, a handsome cap of crimson velvet with a tuft of laurel, and the cap tastefully braided, with the word "Libertas" in front. Next were placed the remainder of the men of the districts in fives.

Samuel Bamford, 'Passages in the Life of a Radical' , 1864

Source 6

Jane Brodie, Art Director of the *Peterloo* film, Discusses Recreating the Banners of the Day.

There is a clash in accounts we had to balance - some talk of the beautiful, peaceful nature of these banners, made for this day which was meant to be almost a celebration of the people coming together, they had worn their Sunday Best. Others talk of the violent, terrifying imagery on these disgraceful banners. One account describes a banner with the image of a scary, bloody woman with a dagger in hand - we later realised this was probably a description of an image of Justice someone had got carried away with.

<http://www.curzonblog.com/all-posts/peterloo-mike-leigh-jane-brodie-art-department-protest-flags>



PETERLOO

Source 7

Flags Flown at the 2014 Peterloo Memorial, Based on Descriptions of the Originals



Photo by Catherine Booth

<https://nickypenttila.com/getting-the-details-right-peterloo/#.XFwVdIX7TIU>

PETERLOO

Source 8

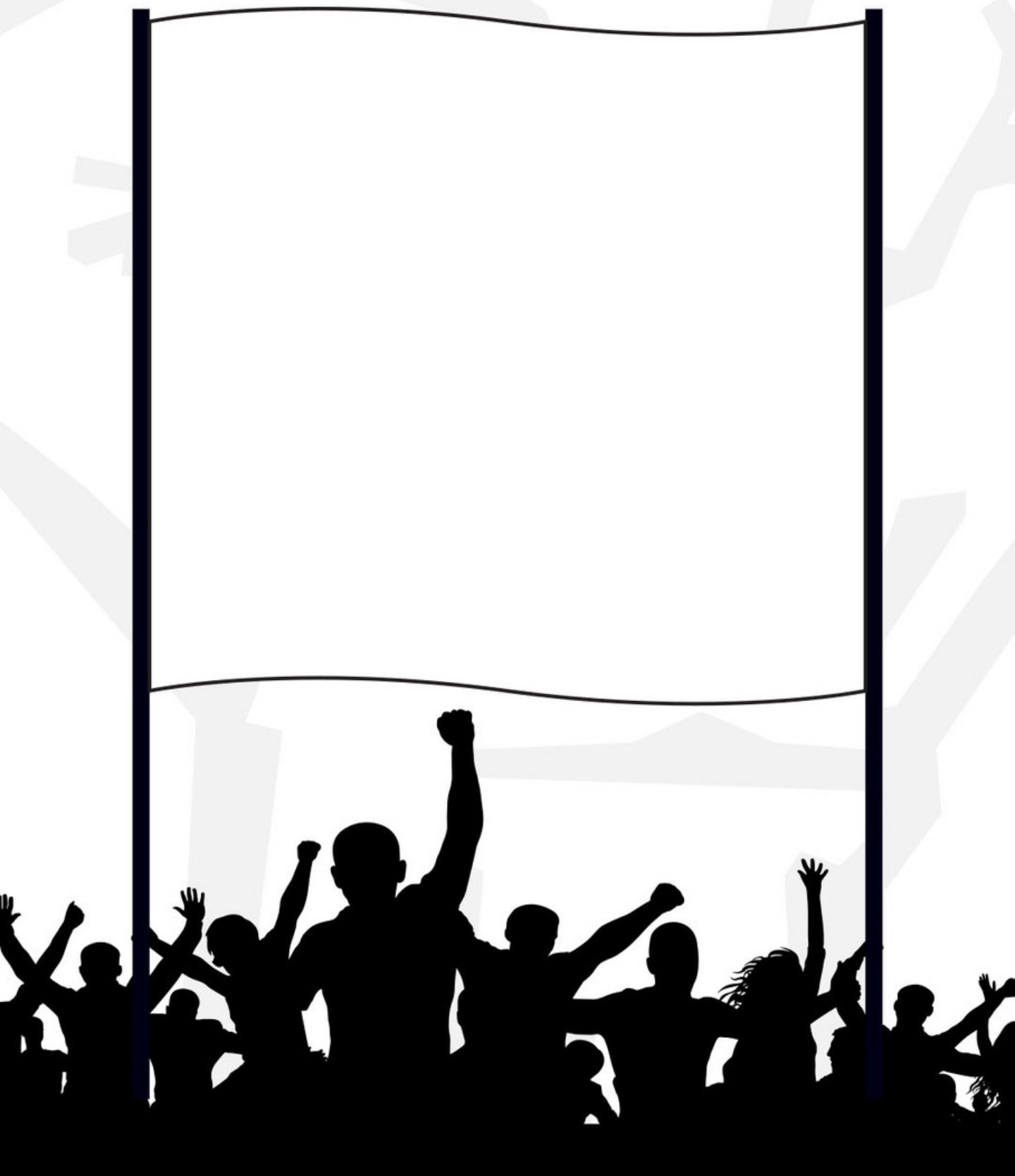
The Last Remaining Banner from the Peterloo Massacre. One side reads 'Unity and Strength. 1819' The other side reads 'Liberty and Fraternity'- a slogan of the French Revolution



<http://www.gmmg.org.uk/our-connected-history/item/peterloo-banner/>

PETERLOO

Source 8
For activity 4



THANKS TO FUNDERS AND PARTNERS:



Supported using public funding by
**ARTS COUNCIL
ENGLAND**



Written and compiled by Dr Daniel Edmonds, danieledmonds237@gmail.com

