

## Learning objectives

- Develop an overview understanding of what the revolt was and people's attitudes towards it.
- Explore and understand key vocabulary.

## Task 1: Retrieval practice

1. The Peasants' Revolt took place in 1381. Which century was this and in which time period?
2. How many years and/or centuries had it been since the Battle of Hastings?
3. Explain two features of a peasant's life.
4. What was the feudal system?

## Task 2: Contextual clips

Watch these clips, which give an overview of the key events of the Peasants' Revolt.

- BBC Teach video from Robert Bartlett's Plantagenets series ([youtu.be/WsML7hiTnsY](https://youtu.be/WsML7hiTnsY)).
- Timelines TV video ([youtu.be/D3EzLF2rOKY](https://youtu.be/D3EzLF2rOKY)).

After watching, discuss and record your answers to these key questions:

1. What seems to have provoked the revolt? What were people angry about?
2. Who was the king at the time? How old was he?
3. Where were the rebels mostly from?
4. Where did they march to?
5. What were their demands?
6. What happened to the Archbishop of Canterbury?
7. Who were John Ball and Wat Tyler?
8. How did the revolt end?
9. Choose three adjectives to describe the revolt. You will revisit these later on in the enquiry.





**Key term: rebel**

**What does it mean generally?**

**What did it mean at this moment?**

**Use it in a sentence:**

**What would be the opposite?**

**Small picture to sum up the key term:**

**Key term: underlying cause**

**What does it mean generally?**

**What did it mean at this moment?**

**Use it in a sentence:**

**What would be the opposite?**

**Small picture to sum up the key term:**

**Key term: trigger**

**What does it mean generally?**

**What did it mean at this moment?**

**Use it in a sentence:**

**What would be the opposite?**

**Small picture to sum up the key term:**

### Task 4: Contemporary responses to the revolt

Read through these sources carefully, with a highlighter and pen ready to make annotations.

- Do the writers sound like the Peasants' Revolt made them feel worried or angry?
- What do the writers seem to think of the rebels themselves?
- What do the writers think of the king and his guards?

**Source 1:** English monk Henry Knighton (writing in 1390) describes the actions of the rebels when they reached London.

'The rebels returned to the New Temple which belonged to the prior of Clerkenwell [the head of the monastery there] ... and tore up with their axes all the church books, charters and records discovered in the chests and burnt them ... One of the criminals chose a fine piece of silver and hid it in his lap; when his fellows saw him carrying it, they threw him, together with his prize, into the fire, saying they were lovers of truth and justice, not robbers and thieves.'

**Source 2:** French monk Jean Froissart (writing in 1395) describes the moment the king managed to persuade most of the rebels to leave London.

'Then the king ordered thirty clerks to write letters, sealed with his seal. And when the people received the letters, they went back home. But Wat Tyler, Jack Straw and John Ball said they would not leave. More than 30 000 stayed with them. They were in no hurry to have the King's letters. They meant to slay all the rich people of London and rob their homes.'

**Source 3:** A monk writing in his monastery's chronicle in 1381 describes the aftermath of Wat Tyler's death.

'When the common people [the peasants] saw that their leader, Wat Tyler, had been killed, they fell down there among the corn, like beaten men. They asked the King for pardon for their crimes and he kindly granted them mercy. Then most of them ran away. But the King appointed two knights to lead the other Kentish men through London and over London Bridge. The rebels were not harmed, but each was allowed to go quietly to his own home.'

Now, discuss the following questions:

- How similar are the writers' views of the revolt?
- The writers were all monks writing within living memory but without having witnessed the revolt first-hand. Why do you think they were so negative about the rebels but positive about the government?
- How has this task added to your understanding of the revolt so far?
- Perhaps you think the revolt now sounds more complicated and harder to understand - why?
- What questions do you now have about it?

## Task 5a: Interpretations of the Peasants' Revolt through time (visual)

Study and discuss these visual interpretations of the Peasants' Revolt. Annotate them to show what you think of the following questions:

- What kinds of people seem to be depicted in the image?
- What do most of the rebels seem to be wearing? Does this seem accurate?
- What was the artist's view of the revolt: threatening, violent, orderly?
- Think about the time period in which each image was created, remembering that the artist has not drawn from memory to try to create as accurate an image as possible (like a photograph), but rather tried to record what he/she wanted people to think about the revolt. Can you spot any patterns according to the time period?

### Interpretation 1:

An illustration from a 1470s edition of Froissart's Chronicles, showing John Ball giving a speech to the rebels.



### Interpretation 2:

An illustration from a 1470s edition of Froissart's Chronicles, showing King Richard II arriving by boat to meet the rebels at Smithfield.





### Task 5b: Interpretations of the Peasants' Revolt through time (verbal/written)

In 2017, Dr Clare Kennan (a medieval historian at Royal Holloway University) explained why she and other historians think the name 'Peasants' Revolt' is inaccurate and misleading. Watch the clip ([youtu.be/aKVRrsE8DmE](https://youtu.be/aKVRrsE8DmE) - Citizens' Project video) and then discuss and record your answers to the following:

1. When was the name 'Peasants' Revolt' first used?
2. Why is 'Peasants' Revolt' not particularly accurate?
3. What evidence does Dr Kennan present about who was involved to show it is an inaccurate name?
4. What alternative name do many historians prefer?
5. What do you think - should we rename the revolt?

### Task 6: Think again

Are you still happy with the three adjectives you chose to describe the revolt in task 2?

- Change any adjectives you are less happy with now and explain why.
- If you are happy with all three, add a piece of evidence or a key idea you learned from the subsequent tasks to explain why you are still happy with them.





### Teaching notes

This lesson is designed to provide an overview of the Peasants' Revolt: chronological awareness, some context (causes will be a more direct focus in the follow-on resource 35367) and representations of the Peasants' Revolt at the time and throughout history.

This lesson is the first part of a four-lesson scheme of work on the Peasants' Revolt (see resources 35367, 35368, and 35369).

### Answers

#### Task 1:

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1. 1381 is in the 14th century, during the Middle Ages.
2. By 1381 it had been 315 years, or just over three centuries, since the Battle of Hastings.
3. Peasants mostly lived in feudal villages, in peasant houses made of wattle and daub. They would attend church every Sunday, on all feast days, and many Saints' days.
4. The feudal system was a hierarchy set up by William the Conqueror, following the Norman Conquest. It organised England's people into three main ranks, below the King himself, and divided England's land.

#### Task 2:

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1. The revolt was mainly provoked by the King's introduction of the poll tax. People were angry that they all had to pay the same amount, despite different people having different incomes and levels of wealth. They were particularly angry that the King was taxing them so highly after the devastation of the Black Death.
2. Richard II was the King at the time of the Revolt, and he was 14 years old at the time.
3. The first rebels were mostly from Essex, and some other parts of the East - but there were uprisings from rebels all over the country, from the North to the South West. The rebels who marched were mostly from Kent - the South East.
4. The rebels marched to London and camped south of the River Thames.
5. The rebels demanded that the poll tax be dropped, and for a new Magna Carta to be drawn up. The rebels wanted this new Magna Carta to extend full rights to all English men.
6. The Archbishop of Canterbury was found by the rebels and publicly executed. His head was put on a spike over London Bridge.
7. John Ball was a priest who argued against the unfairness of the feudal system. Wat Tyler was the leader of the peasants who marched on London.
8. The revolt ended when Richard II met the peasants at Smithfield. The boy king diffused the situation with false promises, convincing the peasants to go home, but then turned on the peasants and killed their leaders. They did not achieve their goals.
9. Students may choose any adjectives for this task.

### Task 5b:

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1. The name 'the Peasants' Revolt' was first used in 1874, by a historian.
2. The term 'Peasants' Revolt' isn't entirely accurate as the people involved were not predominantly peasants (rural land workers).
3. Evidence that the use of 'peasant' is not entirely accurate includes that Wat Tyler himself was a tiler (skilled craftsman), and John Ball was a priest. There are also contemporaneous records of many different crafts and trades represented in the protests.
4. Many historians prefer the term 'Great Revolt' because it more accurately captures the wide appeal of the rebels' demands.
5. Students should make and justify their own responses to this question.