

What can people's plates tell us about their politics?

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Nature and purpose of the enquiry

This is a single lesson enquiry that uses everyday objects and apparently simple images to introduce the essentially extraordinary diversion of the Stuart line of succession from James II's son to his elder daughter, Mary and her husband, William. It is intended to prompt students' curiosity about why this happened and why there was support for it.

The enquiry focuses on the use of artefacts as sources of evidence, looking both at the meaning of the images – how we can work out what the plates are actually saying – and at what we can infer from other knowledge about the manufacture and sale of these items to tell us about the kind of people who bought them and why they did so. It explores how quite simple images were designed to convey what could be quite complex messages.

Films related to this enquiry

This lesson has been developed with close reference to the film 'Delftware: Popularising the Monarchy'. (The film here is treated as a resource for the teacher rather than the students – since it tells the viewer many of the things that you might be hoping the students would work out for themselves through inference and in light of the information that you supply as they begin to pose questions.)

The use of visual images to convey political messages about the monarchy is also discussed in detail in the film 'Coronation Medals and Stuart Iconography'

Contexts for teaching this enquiry

This lesson, built around a small number of commemorative plates, is intended for **Key Stage 3** students as an introduction to the revolution of 1688-89. It assumes that the students have previously learned about the Civil War and execution of the King (and perhaps about Cromwell's refusal of the Crown) and about the restoration of the monarchy under Charles II –

and points them towards the dramatic constitutional changes that led to the Act of Settlement and Act of Union under Queen Anne.

Resources

- A collection of images of commemorative plates that range from the accession of Charles II to Queen Anne's Act of Union in 1707.
- Two family trees:
 1. A modern diagram showing the principal members of the house of Stuart (with all crowned monarchs shown in red).
 2. A table of the 'Regal Succession' from 1485 to the 'settlement of the Protestant Act of Parliament, 1701 in the House of Hannover'.
- A series of information cards providing details about where and how English delftware pottery was made, who tended to buy it and how it was used, along with possible interpretations of its meaning.

Suggested structure and sequence of activities

Introduction

Start with an image of a relatively recent commemorative cup or plate – associated with the queen's diamond jubilee, for example, or perhaps her 90th birthday. The collection of images to download includes an example of a commemorative cup from the Queen's silver jubilee in 1977, but it would be much more effective if you have an example of your own to bring in – or had students in advance to bring in or take photographs of any such commemorative souvenirs that they have at home. Model the process of asking questions of the mug or plate as a source of evidence both about the monarch depicted *and* about the kind of people who might buy such souvenirs – as well as the process of making deductions about methods of manufacture and cost from what they can see. Asking whether buying or owning or using such a mug *necessarily* marks you out as an ardent royalist may be helpful in drawing contrasts with the 17th century when such purchases were significantly more expensive. This task is one in which the distinction between what we can actually see and what we can infer from it can be made very apparent – and you may want to ask students to record their ideas in two columns or in a layers of inference diagram, linking specific elements that they can see to the inferences that they have drawn from each of them. You might also choose to add a further column/layer asking how confident they can be about each of their inferences and on what basis.

Activity

1. Repeat the same process of examining the details and drawing inferences from them with the image of the large delftware plate from 1665. This could be done in pairs or threes, perhaps with different people taking responsibility for noting the things that they can see, the inferences that they are making and the degree of confidence that they feel in their suggestions. You could also ask the groups to note down specific questions that they have that would help to test or give them more confidence in their inferences. Feed in the information from Cards 1-6 as appropriate – perhaps asking students to annotate their charts or layers of inference diagrams, adding ticks to suggestions that they can now be more confident about and explaining what information gives them that confidence. There may also be suggestions that they now need to reject – again, explaining their reasons for doing so. Card 6 is particularly challenging (and you might retain it as an extension task) since it points to the idea that a few plates were produced (essentially in secret) during the 1650s that showed Charles I, demonstrating a loyalty, among those who bought them, to the old king and to his son, Charles II who was then in exile.

2. Introduce the next phase of the lesson by asking who they would expect to feature on the *next* commemorative plates that were produced. First give out copies/ or display a version of the family tree that traces the principal members of the house of Stuart from James I to George I. Work through the questions to establish the *expected* line of succession – which may involve reminding students of that the male line takes priority, which is essential if they are to understand the significance of the glorious revolution. Contrast this family tree with the version published after the Act of Settlement and use the questions to establish and check students understanding of the fact that while we might have *expected* the succession to pass from Charles II to his brother James II and then to James' son – James Francis Edward Stuart, it actually went to James' eldest *daughter* in a very unusual way. Explain that the next plate they will look at may help them to understand just how unusual this succession was.

3. Give out or display the image of the delftware plate from 1689. Focus initially on the symbolism in the picture and sharing Information card 7 with the students as appropriate. (At this point you might want to focus on the symbolism of the orb – looking back if you studied it to the images shown of Cromwell with the orb and sceptre, suggesting that he had been a king in all but name). The point here is that the orb is a religious symbol of authority (power given under God) and that William is handing it to Mary – the two of them are sharing power. It is a joint monarchy. The key questions then arise: Why did the Crown not pass to James III? Why was the succession diverted? Who made this decision? And why did people support it? The table of regal succession can be used to show that essentially it is a decision taken by Parliament – and the fact that people are buying plates commemorating the succession suggests that it has considerable support.

4. At this point you could either move on to look at how James II alienated significant sections of society and how the hereditary rights of his son were called into question (through the 'Warming-Pan scandal) or you could use the images of the two other plates to outline the pattern of the succession from William and Mary to Anne, bringing with it the union of the two countries, expressed through a joint parliament.

5. As a way of capturing what students have learned, and encouraging them to explain the reasoning behind their inferences in writing (or as an oral task) you might conclude by asking the students to respond to the scenario below, with reference to any one of the plates that they choose.

'The year is 1665 [or 1689 or 1696 or 1701] and you are invited to dine for the first time by a distant relative of your wife [or of your husband]. As you go into dine you see this particular plate [B, C, D or E] is has been hung on the wall. What can you tell me about the person who has invited you – even before you have been able to talk to them?'

Ways in which the suggested structure could be adapted or developed further

While this lesson has taken the delftware as the central source and worked out from it to ask about the views of those who bought it and the political developments that it seeks to commemorate and reinforce, you might want to work the other way round – charting the events of 1688/89 and then challenging students to find a way of summing up that change with a symbolic image that could be easily reproduced.