

Historical Significance

Using criteria and evidence to judge the significance of events, with Magna Carta as a worked example.

Name _____ Date _____ Class _____

Learning objective: I can use criteria and evidence to judge how significant an event or person was.

✓ I can use significance criteria ✓ I can find evidence ✓ I can make a reasoned judgement

Historians judge **significance** using criteria and evidence, not just opinion. One set of criteria is the '**5 Rs**': **Remarkable** – Was it remarked on at the time and since?; **Remembered** – Is it remembered or commemorated today?; **Resonant** – Do people link it to things today?; **Resulting in change** – Did it have important consequences?; **Revealing** – Does it tell us something about the past?.

Magna Carta, 1215

In 1215, a group of powerful barons rebelled against King John, who had lost land in France and raised heavy taxes. At Runnymede, near Windsor, John agreed to a charter of rights later known as Magna Carta ('the Great Charter'). It said that the king, too, must follow the law and that free men could not be imprisoned without a lawful judgement. The Pope cancelled the charter within weeks, and war followed. However, it was reissued several times by later kings. Today, four copies of the 1215 charter survive, and its ideas are often linked to modern rights such as trial by jury.

Written for The Teacher Vault.

1 Apply the criteria Use the passage to find evidence for each criterion.

Criterion	Evidence from the passage
Remarkable	
Resulting in change	
Remembered	
Resonant	

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2 Weigh it up

- 1 Give **one** reason why Magna Carta was **not** very significant in 1215 itself. [2 marks]

- 2 Why might different people judge an event's significance differently? [2 marks]

- 3 **Rank the events** Rank these from 1 (most significant) to 4 for life in Britain, and give a reason for your top choice below.

Event	Rank
The printing press is brought to England by William Caxton (1476)	
The Black Death (1348)	
The Great Fire of London (1666)	
The building of the Stockton and Darlington Railway, the first public railway to use steam locomotives (1825)	

4 Explain

Choose a person or event you have studied. Explain how significant they were using **at least two** of the 5 Rs. [6 marks]

Answer Key

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Question	Answers
1 Apply the criteria	Remarkable – Evidence from the passage: it was a major event – barons forced the king to agree; the Pope cancelled it Resulting in change – Evidence from the passage: it said the king must follow the law; reissued by later kings Remembered – Evidence from the passage: four copies survive; it is still studied and commemorated Resonant – Evidence from the passage: its ideas are linked to modern rights, e.g. trial by jury
2 Weigh it up	1. It was cancelled within weeks by the Pope and did not stop war; at the time it protected mainly the barons/free men, not most peasants. 2. They use different criteria; it may be significant for one group or place but not another; views change over time as later consequences become clear.
3 Rank the events	The printing press is brought to England by William Caxton (1476) – Rank: any order The Black Death (1348) – Rank: any order The Great Fire of London (1666) – Rank: any order The building of the Stockton and Darlington Railway, the first public railway to use steam locomotives (1825) – Rank: any order
4 Explain	Look for: • Uses at least two criteria explicitly • Supports each with specific evidence (dates, consequences) • Reaches a judgement about how significant

Teaching note: the '5 Rs' are one common framework for significance (after Christine Counsell). Rankings have no single correct answer; mark the quality of the reasoning.