The Wars of the Roses at KS3: Notes for Teachers

How would you describe the people of the Wars of the Roses?

Many thanks to Dale Banham, as so often, for his advice and suggestions.

The structure of the resources

1. Students' preconceptions and an introductory story: A Battle and a Ring

2. The pattern of the Wars: using an outline timeline

3. Myth-busting the Wars of the Roses

4. The story of the Wars: Walter Devereux's decisions

5. The Consequences of the Wars

6. Pause and Reflect: Takeaways and Conclusions

For a quick route use 1, 2, 3 and 6 but include 4 and 5 for more depth

A set of PowerPoint slides supports the whole package.

The ideas behind these resources

The Wars of the Roses can be hard to teach with confidence because:

- it seems likely to confuse Y7 students – all those kings with the same names, all those battles and the difficulty of finding one clear story when the phases of the wars were very different.

- you don't have much teaching time and the complexity of WotR accentuates this

- few teachers study WotR at university so aren't *au fait* with the sources or historiography

- it's hard to relate WotR to GCSE assessment objectives e.g. if you focus on causation then you spend the bulk of the time on the beginning of WotR and not the next 30 years (and

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each phase has its own distinct causes anyway). Focussing on 'evidence' may lead to diving into one element of the wars and losing the bigger picture (but see below for some positive GCSE links!)

So much for potential problems – what can I say that's positive?

I started by asking myself – do I give more weight to the events (battles and depositions) or the attitudes and ideals of the people of the time? I want to do both but where will the balance lie?

I chose to emphasise the attitudes and ideals of the people because:

- It's important for students to understand the attitudes and ideals of the people of any period as a necessary precursor to exploring motives and the causes of events.
- These understandings can be helpfully re-used when studying other topics and periods.
- They challenge students' preconceptions about the topic and period (e.g. people were eager for war) whereas focussing solely on events does not.
- Students are more likely to retain key points about ideals and attitudes than they will retain a very complex list of events.

This doesn't mean ignoring the story – but it has to be tackled in a way that students can assimilate, hence I have layered the story in these resources with an outline followed by a deeper narrative.

Long-term GCSE preparation - my enquiry question does not relate to causation etc but there's much that's valuable in terms of vocabulary and particularly sense of period (e.g. ideas and attitudes) to prepare students for the medieval sections of Thematic Studies, for Depth Studies on Henry VIII or Elizabeth I or Edward I and for your study of the Historic Environment.

These resources therefore use this enquiry question:

How would you describe the people of the Wars of the Roses?

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The Takeaways: What might students learn from these resources?

I've directed most of these takeaways at the enquiry question about the people and their ideas but you'll want to make your own choices about what and how many takeaways to emphasise. Item (e) for example is a huge simplification because each phase of the Wars had different causes but I've picked out fear as a factor as it was common to much of the fighting and it's very transferable to other wars in other periods and to today.

a) The Wars were intermittent – not 30 years of continuous warfare

b) People wanted peace, not civil war. Everyone wanted a good, strong king who would make the country peaceful.

c) People were very loyal to kings and risked their lives in loyalty to the crown. Nobody rushed into war or wanted to depose Henry VI for a long time even though he was a poor king for many years.

d) There was little destruction or looting but the Wars made many people anxious. Many people grieved for their loved ones who died in battles.

e) There was a mix of reasons why battles were fought. Fear caused some battles when a nobleman attacked his enemy before they attacked him. Other battles were caused by a nobleman trying to control the king to increase his own power.

f) Powerful lords could start fighting even though everyone else wanted peace.

g) The sudden changes of king later in the Wars made future kings more afraid of rebellions.

h) Women did play a part in the Wars, including acting as mediators and go-betweens to try to keep peace

i) Students will develop their vocabulary and understanding relating to government, power and monarchy (see below in Using the Resources)

In addition, students will build up an outline knowledge of the main events and personalities of the Wars but exactly what depends on them and on what priority you give this.

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To consolidate the key points the Concluding activity *Pause and Reflect* asks students to identify the takeaways they think are most valuable for them.

The Enquiry Question:

How would you describe the people of the Wars of the Roses?

I came late to this question after getting stuck on others. I chose it in the end for several reasons:

- it focusses on the people, men and women, and I've tried to build real individuals and their range of ideas and attitudes into the resources. It also has a humanising effect which may appeal to pupils.

- it links into any preconceptions students may have and can immediately be explored in the opening story 'A Battle and a Ring'

- it can be steadily developed throughout the work and allows exploration of some important issues – the problem of generalisations about a large group of people in one period, how many-sided each individual is, the opportunity to explore talking and writing about variety (see below in next point)

- it can be answered at a range of levels in a variety of ways. My jottings of possible ways of describing people include:

Peace-loving violent brave loyal anxious and frightened

Keen to be respected torn between loyalties disloyal and treacherous

Conscientious skilful soldiers prosperous knowledgeable

Dealing with the unexpected, desperate for a good king, wanting the wars to end

Murderous Ruthless acting as mediators, heartbroken

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There's lots more – the whole idea is help students build up light and shade via their selection of words and phrases – on the one hand … on the other or at times … but at other times.

And, of course, students need to justify their choice of descriptions, using what they have read as evidence. Depending on the class they can explain their choices at length or in short paragraphs and decide whether they think it's important to focus on the military or political aspects or the human issues.

An alternative strategy in terms of the overall question would be to use this direct question early on but move at a later stage in the work to a related but differently worded question e.g:

> What do the Wars of the Roses tell us about the ideas and attitudes of the people of the 1400s?

Using the Resources

Introductory points:

> a) The resources are planned as layers that build up students' knowledge of the pattern of the Wars and contemporary ideas, therefore revisiting ideas and content, NOT as a chronological sequence of lessons, each covering a stage of the wars from causes to consequences.
>
> b) You can take a fast or slow route through the resources – for the fast route omit items 4 and 5.
>
> c) One over-arching objective is to enhance students' vocabulary, partly to prepare them for aspects of GCSE work. This will also reinforce vocabulary used earlier in KS3 e.g. dynasty, depose, crown, kingship, power, monarchy etc. I haven't tried to provide a definitive list.
>
> d) Links from earlier work – the obvious connections are to Magna Carta, the first Parliaments and clashes between kings and nobles. A good way to remind students and to prime them for the work on The Wars of the Roses is to use the role-play 'Why were medieval kings deposed?' which looks at the broad issue without focussing on an individual event. For this activity see
>
> https://www.thinkinghistory.co.uk/ActivityBase/WhyWereMedievalKingsDeposed.html

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e) If the text feels ‘wrong’ for your class then feel free to adapt it to suit your students – it may be quicker than starting from scratch.

The PowerPoint slides either provide independent material or support the core resources. I’ve identified below where the slides fit in. The page numbers refer to the various information sheets which are numbered consecutively across all the sections of the Resources.

Now – what’s in the Resources?

1. Students’ Preconceptions and an Introductory Story: A Battle and a Ring

PowerPoint Slides 1-11 and Pages 1-3 of the Resources Pack

It’s always important to begin a topic by trying to dig out students’ preconceptions, in this case what ideas come to mind when they hear the phrase ‘Wars of the Roses’? (slide 2). This is intended to be quick – to garner some words, ideas, impressions. These can then be used to create an initial hypothesis, a first answer to the enquiry question.

I’ve next included a story – ‘*A Battle and a Ring’* about the Battle of Edgecote in 1469 which is based on contemporary evidence. I’ve written this to focus on individuals caught up in battles, not on warfare, to help students think about the experiences of the people involved. You could tell the story to students yourself – nothing like telling a story! – and/or give students pages 1 and 2 to read.

The notes on page 3 of the Resources Pack provide brief information about the images on PowerPoint Slides 3-10.

Having read the story, you could explore

a) How this fits in with students’ own ideas about the wars – does it confirm or challenge any ideas?

b) What have they learned from this about what mattered to people at the time?

After discussion of the story you can then use slide 11 to introduce the overall enquiry question and discuss first ideas about an answer – a hypothesis. Ask students to note their ideas down somewhere secure so they can come back to them later.

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2. The Pattern of the Wars: using an outline timeline

Timeline sheet, resources pack page 4 and slides 12-15

The timeline provides an overview of the Wars focussing on an outline pattern of the Wars. You can cover a more detailed story of the Wars later through the section on Walter Devereux's decisions.

The core activity is a lesson on the timeline sheet (also on slide 13) which explores whether this was one continuous war or a series of wars fought in fits and starts. Questions 1-4 lead into the more important questions 5 and 6 – it's the answers to 5 and 6 they will hopefully carry forward and use when thinking about the enquiry question. Page 4 provides a summary of the phases of conflict and peace in support of the timeline if needed.

If you wish to explore the geography of the Wars then slide 14 provides a map showing the whereabouts of the battles which show how widespread they were (the 1483 rebellion was in the south from Cornwall to Kent and north to Oxfordshire and into Wales – the south wasn't free of conflict).

Students may need re-assuring they don't need to recall all the details – sequence of kings, names of battles etc – to tackle the enquiry question. It takes ages for A level students to gain a confident grasp of the story as a result of revisiting the story time and again.

3. Myth-busters: The Wars of the Roses

Slides 16-24 and pages 5-12

This unit provides a longer activity – how long depends on how you divide up the myth-busting task amongst the class but more on that practicality below. The focus is on six statements about aspects of the wars. The six statements (A and D are the 2 True ones) are:

A. Soldiers in full armour could move easily and quickly in battles.

B. The armies badly disrupted people's lives and damaged many homes during the wars.

C. People were violent and keen to join in the wars. They didn't try to stop battles taking place.

D. The nobles thought it was important to be loyal to the king. They did not change sides easily.

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E. Women played no part in the Wars of the Roses.

F. The wars ended as soon as Henry Tudor became king in 1485.

To begin there's a practice opportunity (page 5 and slide 17) - two brief 'myths' about the soldiers all came from Yorkshire and Lancashire and wore white or red roses as badges. Use slide 17 to ask the students if they think these two statements are myths and then give out the information to page 5 and ask students to rewrite the myths to create more accurate statements. You could obviously split the two statements between halves of the class to speed up the time.

The core Myth-busting activity is set up on page 6 which asks students to suggest which of six statements are true (A and D) and which are myths (B, C, E and F). Their task is to use the information pages 7-12 to check their answers and rewrite the myths to create more accurate statements. To begin, you could take a class vote on which are the 2 True ones and then explore A and D before looking at the 4 Myths as the second stage of the activity. Clearly you can split these around the class if it takes too much time for every student to tackle all the statements.

There is additional scope for refinement by using the 'Making this more complicated and interesting' boxes – see page 6 for an introduction to using these boxes to refine answers.

Links can also be made back to the 'A Battle and A Ring' story – e.g. the impact of the death of William Herbert and his Welsh soldiers relates to statement C and Anne's Herbert's experiences relate to statement E.

Choosing these six statements meant leaving other interesting topics out, such as the involvement of other countries in the Wars but you can obviously expand the number of statements if you wish.

Slides 18-23 provide the statements. Slide 24 can be used to link this task back to the enquiry question – statements C and D relate most directly but others (B, E and F) pick up the desire for peace and A helps see that people were intelligent in developing armour to give them the best chances of survival.

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4. The Story of the Wars: Walter Devereux's decisions

Slides 25-37 Pages 13-23

This section provides a deeper narrative of the Wars and therefore is not part of the Quick Route identified at the beginning of these notes. If you want to include it but not in lesson time at school it could be set up as a homework.

Deciding how to pitch the text was tricky but, as I've seen this as the optional element, I've not over-simplified it. A more detailed narrative will also help prepare students for more demanding reading as they move through KS3 towards GCSE. I also hope the decision-making activity motivates students to read on. This activity is built around six decisions in the career of Walter, Devereux, Lord Ferrers who was killed at Bosworth fighting for Richard III although there are reasons for arguing that he could have chosen to be one of the Yorkists who supported Henry Tudor in the wake of the disappearance of Edward V and his brother.

Why a decision-making activity and not just a narrative account? I have often used decision-making activities, from KS3 to A level and they are from the frivolous and unchallenging activities a few people believe them to be. In my and other teachers' experience, these activities lead to more focussed reading and stronger recall of information. The latter is the result of the deeper thinking required by the task of making a decision based on the evidence provided in the text. This also links to the benefit of encouraging constructive discussion (which in turn helps build the sense that focussed discussion is an important part of history lessons).

More important from the point of view of understanding the history is that, by putting students 'inside a past situation' these activities ask them to think from a contemporary standpoint and engage with contemporary ideas (in this case ideals such as loyalty and respect – 'good worship') and students' answers can reveal their misunderstandings.

This activity may well end with students losing all their points, echoing the fate of Walter Devereux's family after he chose the wrong side in 1485 and was killed at Bosworth. This should show the significance of these choices – they were vital to the welfare of a family – but so too were issues of loyalty (in 1455 Walter could be loyal to York and Henry and he had no choice but to profess loyalty to Henry in 1459 but he could not be loyal to both in 1461) and the respect of others.

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In terms of practical use of the decision-making activity:

- completing it in pairs and seeing which pair does best is great for classroom engagement. Who's winning? Who's lost all their points already?!

- Students could note their decisions on a timeline to reinforce their grasp of the overall story (and annotate the timeline with the reigns?) and then use the timeline to record their points and overall score.

- the PowerPoint slides provide the choices and the resulting scores and page 23 provides the scores too. Whether you cover all 6 decisions in one go and then look at scores or take a decision-score-decision-score etc path will depend on the class.

You can of course change the scores for the decisions if you disagree with my adjudications.

Pages 21 and 22 provide what are clearly my own conclusions about what we might learn from The Wars of the Roses – it seemed best to identify myself as author than leave this as disembodied text. You could give it to students to read after the Devereux activity or save it for the Conclusion.

5. The Consequences of the Wars

Pages 24-25 and Slides 38-41

This is a one lesson activity on the consequences of the Wars which could also be extended into a brief discussion of their significance.

The Consequences activity is a card sort which can be used with slide 39 which sets the sorting task and slide 40 which links back to the enquiry question. I've kept the task direct and hopefully not overly complex – students are asked to organise the cards into categories as follows:

Immediate consequences – cards 1, 4, 6, 8

Consequences over the following century – cards 2, 7, 10

Longer-term consequences – cards 5, 9

Card which deals with topics not affected by the war – card 3.

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You can obviously build from here to discuss consequences in whichever ways suits your class – slide 26 ties back to the enquiry question.

If you wish and have time, you could then link from the consequences to the significance of the Wars. You could give students a set of criteria for significance and use their knowledge and the consequences cards to assess in what way the wars were significant. Possible criteria below but I assume you have a set of criteria that you use for consistency within your department:

- did the Wars directly affect many people's lives at the time?

- did the Wars affect the way people lived e.g. food, housing?

- did the Wars have long-lasting effects?

- did the Wars have an impact on other countries?

- did the Wars change people's ideas or attitudes?

- do the Wars affect how we see the people of the Middle Ages?

- do the Wars teach us lessons about courage, morals, how to deal with problems?

Slide 41 offers a question that could be used for summarising the significance of the Wars.

6. Pause and Reflect: Takeaways and Conclusions

Page 26 (and possibly 21-22) and Slides 42-43

This worksheet and its tasks are based on similar pages in each of the Medieval Lives chapters I've written and made available on Thinking History. It's of fundamental importance for effective learning that students pause and reflect explicitly on what they've learned – these tasks focus on the overall enquiry but, importantly, go beyond that task to help students identify what they feel has been particularly important in their work by offering them a set of 'takeaways' to think about and discuss.

In addition, to reinforce students' vocabulary, you could give them (e.g.) 10 key concepts, words or phrases to define or use in sentences or ask them to explain these terms verbally.

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