Takeaways and their central role in planning KS3 courses

I have no desire to note down all those things which are memorable
but only those things which ought to be remembered
that is, those things which are clearly worthy of remembrance.
Gervase of Canterbury, whose writings date from c.1180 to c.1210

A search of my laptop reveals that my earliest surviving document containing the word 'takeaways' dates from 2007, when I was thinking ahead to a new version of the National Curriculum. A multitude of other documents and PowerPoints then show that discussion of takeaways was a central feature of the many KS3 CPD courses I ran at that time and of planning for a series of SHP KS3 books. I've kept using the term too, notably in the HA publication Exploring and Teaching Medieval History (2018), and yet I've only just realised in 2021 that I've never written an article for ThinkingHistory to explain in any detail what I mean by the term 'takeaways' and how they can help planning. So here goes, only fifteen years or more late!

Notes

- All the examples below relate to the Middle Ages as this is the curriculum area that I'm working on in retirement, but the idea of takeaways applies to all topics and periods. These takeaways are not written in 'pupil-speak' as no single version is suitable for all students.

- Fuller discussions and more examples will be found in the articles in the Teaching Medieval History section of this website which will be significantly updated in summer 2021.

Contents (Main sections are denoted by the Pizza Man)

1. The basic ideas about 'takeaways' – what are they and how do you use them?
2. Categories of takeaways – an introductory list
3. Categories of takeaways – definitions and examples
4. Planning backwards – how to use takeaways in planning a KS3 scheme of work
5. Concluding thoughts

Further Reading
Appendix 1: Activities for students on which takeaways they think are most important
Appendix 2: Some possible takeaways from studying the Middle Ages at KS3

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1. The basic ideas about takeaways:
What are they and how do you use them?



a) Takeaways are the understandings we want students to remember – to take away from their study of a topic or enquiry or a period or from KS3 as a whole so they can be used again in later lessons or topics during KS3 or at GCSE or on other occasions.

A few varied examples of takeaways to get across the idea:

- People were as intelligent in the Middle Ages as today
- Important changes took place during the Middle Ages even if they were not as rapid or affected as many people as many changes later during the Industrial Revolution.
- Nobles were very reluctant to rebel against kings but sometimes did when their own positions were threatened by the actions of kings. Kings were usually only deposed in the last resort.
- Ideas about science and medicine in the Middle Ages were very different from ours but were detailed, carefully-studied and logical in terms of the world-view of the period, scholars sought new ideas and universities developed.
- Historians' interpretations of events and life in the past often change when they study evidence in more detail or find new evidence. Historians are expected to challenge and re-write past interpretations.
- We are often uncertain about what happened or why people did things in the past – knowing when to be uncertain is an important part of studying history.

b) Takeaways are the bedrock of planning a successful, coherent course at KS3 and should, after identifying your aims for your course, be the starting points in planning. They are far more effective in creating a coherent course than beginning with a chronological list of topics because it means you are planning backwards from what you want students to take away from a series of lessons, a year of study, the whole of Key Stage 3. 'Planning backwards' is essential to effective teaching and learning.

c) In planning takeaways it's essential to identify categories of takeaways to ensure an effective balance of coverage (see sections 2 and 3 below) and to include takeaways which directly challenge students' likely misconceptions about topics, periods and the nature of history.

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d) Takeaways need to be discussed explicitly with students so that they know what it is that's the core of their work. It's therefore important to ask students at the end of a topic to explore or explain 'what are the most important takeaways?' in their eyes. Examples of end of enquiry activities on takeaways can be found in Appendix I at the end of this article.

e) Takeaways need to be revisited at intervals in order to build them into long-term memory. This is most naturally done by referring back to takeaways from earlier in students' courses which help them understand new topics e.g. by realising that aspects of what appears to be 'new' on the surface have been studied before in other contexts (e.g. why people protest and how protests have been handled by governments and written about by observers). You can't assume that students will make such links themselves so as you start new topics identify meaningful links with previous takeaways. 'Do you remember when we did …? What were the key takeaways from that topic?'

f) Takeaways may be re-used on a variety of occasions, most obviously later in KS3, at GCSE and A level but will also be valuable for questioning public and popular interpretations of any period in the past or of individual events and for the development of students' personal sense of historical perspective in relation to events today.

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2. Categories of Takeaways: An introductory list



In Section 3 below I explain a little more about these categories and provide some exemplar takeaways. But here's the outline list:

a) Enquiries across time – long-term themes e.g. living and working conditions, royal power and the development of popular involvement in politics.
b) Understanding people as human beings – what mattered to them, what they were good at
c) Enquiries into topics – events, actions and motives e.g. the Norman Conquest
d) The histories of other cultures – to create a balance of coverage across KS3
e) Periods – what have we learned about an individual period as a whole?
f) The process of studying and communicating history and why history is worth studying

It's essential to identify categories of takeaways for KS3 History before compiling your list of individual takeaways, otherwise you can end up with an utterly random list. I've come up with the six categories listed below from my work on the Middle Ages There's a clear link between categories (a) to (d) and the different types of enquiry I think are needed – a scheme of work dominated by category (d), enquiries about individual events, cannot deliver the understandings I'd like students to develop. Another important influence is the importance of diagnosing students' likely misconceptions of periods and people which again can't be challenged through just one category of enquiries/takeaways.

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3. Categories of Takeaways: Definitions and examples



3a) Enquiries across time – long-term themes across KS3

Long-term themes provide the glue which gives KS3 History coherence, preventing a scheme of work dissipating into a series of isolated topics or enquiries. The obvious long-term stories (which needn't be restricted to British history as they can very helpfully create links across a variety of societies) are: living and working conditions, royal power, democracy and totalitarianism, migration, the causes and consequences of warfare, the development of empires, changes in gender roles, changing understandings of the world (which can include beliefs and religion). There are also the themes of England's relationship with the rest of Britain and Britain's relationship with the rest of the world.

I'll also pick out critical long-term threads that easily get lost amidst a concentration on events e.g. population changes, urbanisation, climate, harvest-dependence.

In planning, one important question is 'which long-term themes do you teach as part of a developing narrative across Y7, Y8 and Y9 and which are to be taught as rapid enquiries across time in just 1 or 2 weeks?'

The best way to plan teaching of such themes is to identify takeaways for each one from KS3 as a whole and, if taught in sections in Y7, 8 and 9, identify the takeaways you want students to take forward from each year for re-use when they return to the theme later. For example, takeaways from the Middle Ages about power and monarchy which will be needed when exploring royal power after 1500 are:

- Monarchs were seen as God's representatives and remained central to government, being expected to defend their people from enemies and disorder at home and from abroad.
- Monarchs were expected to consult their nobles about important decisions before taking the decisions themselves. Magna Carta was one example of attempts to ensure kings did consult nobles and others.
- Nobles were very reluctant to rebel but sometimes did so when their own positions were threatened by the uncontrolled actions of kings. Kings were usually only deposed in the last resort.

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- The commons were increasingly well-informed about political events and expected kings and nobles to provide defence, peace and prosperity. They became confident and well-organised enough to protest when feeling threatened by poor government.

There are more detailed discussions of the planning of themes or enquiries across time (which now feels a better title) – these articles date from the 2008 NC but are still very relevant:

https://thinkinghistory.co.uk/Issues/IssueKS3Intro.html

3b) Understandings of people as human beings

Enquiries about what mattered to people in a period or about what they were good at seem to be becoming more common. Such enquiries are essential for helping students see people who lived in the past as being as human as ourselves and not falling for the misconception that people were less intelligent or loving or emotional or inventive as ourselves. This is essential for building students' respect for the people of the past. Some exemplar takeaways for Y7 on the humanity of the people of the Middle Ages:

- People were as intelligent in the Middle Ages as today and wanted to improve their lives if possible
- They the same kinds of emotions and feelings e.g. loving their children that we have today,
- Children took ten years longer to grow to their full heights than people do today
- Food, housing, clothing could not be taken for granted by the poor.
- Being of good worship – respected by other people – mattered to nearly everyone.
- Everyone wanted their soul to reach Heaven – this was deeply important to people.
- What mattered most to people varied from person to person – exactly the same things did not matter to everyone.

For examples of enquiries on these issues see:

https://thinkinghistory.co.uk/MedievalBase/Section2.html

https://thinkinghistory.co.uk/MedievalBase/Section3.html

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3c) Enquiries into topics – events, actions and motives

This is the category that many current KS3 enquiries fit into – they're important but need to be balanced against other categories because topics such the Norman Conquest or Magna Carta can't deliver the kinds of takeaways identified in categories (a) and (b).

In identifying takeaways from these topics, it's helpful, in addition to understanding the story and explanation of causes, consequences or interpretations of events, to think about:

1. What the topic reveals about the period as a whole and whether the topic helps students develop a balanced understanding of the period or only creates a one sided, often negative view.
2. The long-term significance of an event and therefore how it contributes to the long-term stories taught across KS3

Exemplar takeaways about the Black Death

- Over 40% of the people of Europe and Asia died.
- Outbreaks continued from the 1340s for 300 years
- This was a deeply frightening human crisis and no-one understood its true causes. Many believed the pestilence was a punishment by God.
- People tried all possible methods of cure and prevention that were logical to them
- Many people coped with great bravery and resilience e.g. neighbours visited the sick, mourned the dead, comforted the bereaved and looked after orphans. Most bodies were buried in an orderly manner even if in trenches rather than single graves.
- Public health improvements were made by local government and by individuals who left money in wills to improve supplies of fresh water, improve roads, take away sewage.
- Society kept functioning in the face of a human crisis impossible to imagine.

3d) Periods

Although schemes of work and the NC often refer to historical periods, studying a succession of individual topics can make it difficult for students to develop an overall picture of a period, its key elements and of patterns of change and continuity within periods.

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Examples of such 'period' takeaways about the Middle Ages (particularly important because of the common misconception that there was little or no change in the Middle Ages) are:

- There were continuities in medieval life, including some of the most significant aspects of life such as the importance of the harvest every year for people's health and welfare.
- There were important changes e.g. the growth of towns, rapid population changes and the development of printing and gunpowder.
- Many aspects of people's lives had both continuities and changes. Religion remained very important, but people did not just believe what they were told and had new ideas about how to worship God.
- Changes in the Middle Ages were very important even if they were not as great as many changes later during the Industrial Revolution.

For an example of resources aimed at helping students build knowledge of a period as a whole see

https://thinkinghistory.co.uk/MedievalBase/Section4.html

3e) The histories of other cultures

This is clearly essential for creating a balance of coverage across KS3. However I am not at all knowledgeable about the histories of other cultures and do not want to guess what might be appropriate takeaways in detail. Much depends on whether you choose to study a single culture or create an enquiry which visits a number of cultures (I have a sense that the latter has more to offer students as it will do more to broaden their experiences of other histories). What I can suggest is that takeaways might include aspects of the following:

- Exploring what kinds of things mattered to peoples in different societies
- The achievements of societies and why societies flourished at particular times
- The range of contacts societies had with other cultures

See **Helen Snelson**, 'Looking beyond the horizon: why we should teach about societies other than English society in the Middle Ages' in *Exploring and Teaching Medieval History* at

https://www.history.org.uk/secondary/resource/9290/exploring-and-teaching-medieval-history-in-schools

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3f) The process of studying and communicating history and why history is worth studying

Some aspects of this category are obvious candidates because they appear in lists of GCSE assessment objectives but I see this category as far wider than assessment objectives. It's important at KS3 to give a much greater sense of the nature of historical study 'in the round', to discuss how to improve their own learning in history (visible learning) and their ability communicate effectively in history, the advantages and pitfalls of e.g. generalisations and to help students see how studying history relates to their own lives – my SHP roots from the 1970s are showing! The kinds of issues that could be discussed as the basis for creating takeaways include (in addition to the classic second-order concepts about causation, significance, evidence etc):

- History is a subject where we are often uncertain – complete certainty is rare
- History is constantly being rewritten by historians who are doing new research
- Historians disagree about their interpretations of the past, often because the sources do not provide as much evidence as we'd like.
- The nature of sources changes across time
- How students can improve their own learning and communication – memory, research, identifying and constructing arguments and use of language
- Studying history helps us see connections with events today and understand today's events more fully.
- Respecting people in the past helps us understand people today whose lives or ideas are different from our own.

For a discussion of takeaways about Sources see 'What do we want students to learn about medieval sources?' in *Exploring and Teaching Medieval History* at

https://www.history.org.uk/secondary/resource/9290/exploring-and-teaching-medieval-history-in-schools

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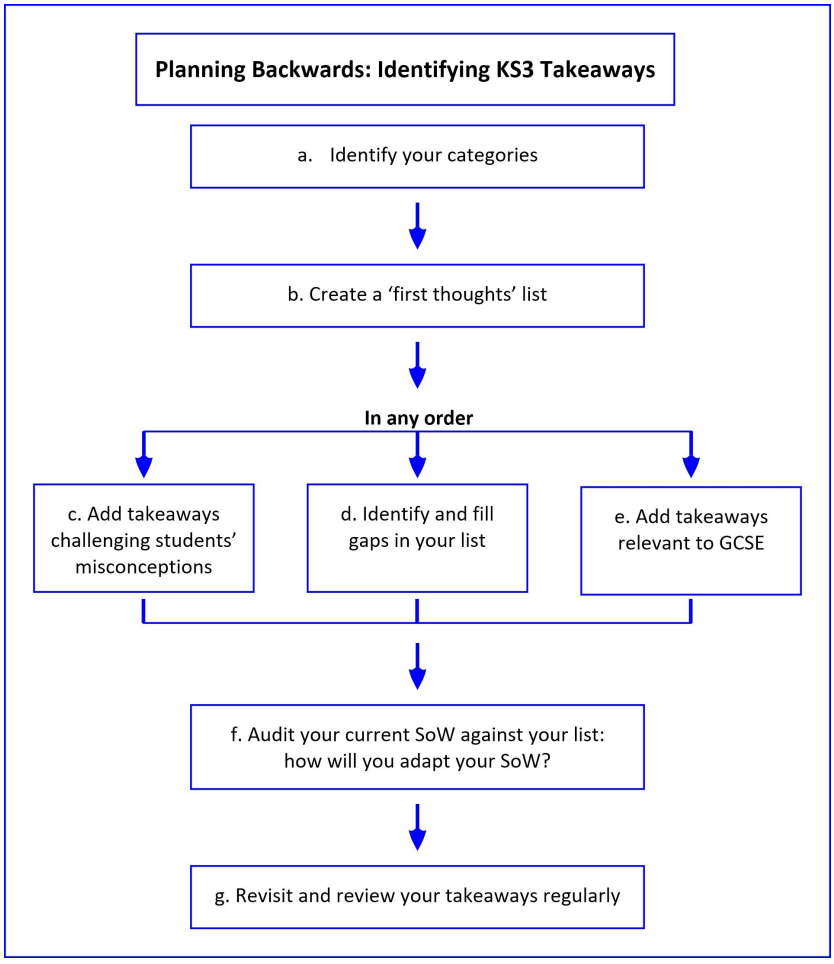
4. Planning backwards: How to use takeaways in planning a KS3 scheme of work



To Identify the most significant takeaways you need to plan backwards by asking 'what is most important for students to learn from KS3 as a whole and from individual units and enquiries?'. Planning backwards (rather than chronologically forwards from a list of events, people and topics) is much more likely to create a coherent and successful course.

Such planning is inevitably a lengthy task involving lots of discussion so is not to be rushed. It benefits from a relaxed mindset – "we'll create a first draft this year but not worry if it's less perfect that we'd like. It'll need reviewing each year anyway to improve the list and how we use it over time."

What's the starting point? It isn't, I suggest, taking your existing topics and creating a list of takeaways from them. The key phrase is 'planning backwards' so this is one possible strategy.



Note: A larger version of this diagram is included on the last page.

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Hence:

a. begin by identifying the categories of takeaways you think are most important (see section 2 and 3 above.
b. create an initial 'off the top of your heads' list of the understandings you'd like students to take away from the end of KS3 (think about two audiences – the students who will not do History again and those who will take GCSE History). Make sure you cover all your categories and think about how you want to weight them.

Now test that list and add to it by discussing issues (c) to (e) in whatever order works for you:

c. identify students' most likely misconceptions about the history they will study in KS3. Add to your list takeaways which challenge those misconceptions or students will continue to hold them.
d. identify gaps in your list – e.g. are some categories under-represented? Think about what else you want students to take away from each year of KS3 or each period they study and will re-use later – and add those to your list. This involves identifying links across KS3, thinking about comparisons (similarities & differences) and exploring changes and continuities.
e. identify takeaways from KS3 in readiness for GCSE. For discussion of this issue see 'How can KS3 support teaching about the Middle Ages at GCSE and A level?' by Dale Banham and myself in *Exploring and Teaching Medieval History* at

   https://www.history.org.uk/secondary/resource/9290/exploring-and-teaching-medieval-history-in-schools

Finally:

f. relate your list of takeaways to your existing scheme of work – what can you change in the short-term to improve your scheme? What needs longer for planning but will be worth doing next year or the year after?
   (And, if you're brave, ask yourselves – if you're never going to refer back to content you teach later in their KS3 curriculum (or GCSE or A level) why are you teaching it?)
g. Revisit and review your takeaways regularly in the light of the experience of teaching

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For anyone wanting to explore possibilities for takeaways about the Middle Ages see Appendix 2 for ideas. I also recommend starting with pages 6 to 11 of *Exploring and Teaching Medieval History* in particular where historians explain what they see as the most significant features of this period.

> https://www.history.org.uk/secondary/resource/9290/exploring-and-teaching-medieval-history-in-schools

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5. Concluding thoughts



a) One reaction I've had to writing this is to realise what an enormous list of takeaways could be produced for any period – which just goes to show how confusing it can be for students who are on the receiving end of a vast amount of information. Therefore it's essential that teachers help students come to terms with which takeaways are most valuable to remember by discussing this at the end of an enquiry or unit of work. There's absolutely no value in having a list of takeaways which isn't explicit and shared with and thought about by students. See examples of end of enquiry tasks in Appendix I to this article.

b) Another approach to auditing your takeaways is to identify whether students are developing a balanced sense of human achievements and experiences over time or whether the topics they study present an unduly negative portrayal of the people of the past (perhaps because there's a vast amount of warfare in their curriculum)? Will an imbalance undermine their faith in human nature and builds cynicism about individual people, governments and humanity's capacity to care for others? Are there more positive takeaways you want to add to the list?

c) Identifying takeaways means that students' residual learning – what's left in the longer term when much is forgotten – is less likely to be 'accidental' learning. Of course, there's no guarantee that students will remember your chosen takeaways (the one piece of information I definitely remember from my O level in 1968 is that King Louis Phillipe of France was very proud of his ability to cut ham into extremely thin slices) but this approach increases the chances of them retaining what Gervase of Canterbury described as 'those things which are clearly worthy of remembrance'.

d) Discussing takeaways is a great opportunity to have fun debating and discussing history! And as any list of takeaways should be reviewed regularly in the light of teaching, there's regular scope for more discussions!

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Further Reading



If you have made your way this far you may be interested in *Planning for Residual Knowledge*, a blog by **Josh Vallance** which explores planning for residual knowledge and also is brave enough to suggest some possible takeaways for the early modern period

https://mrvallanceteach.wordpress.com/2021/02/07/planning-for-residual-knowledge/

I've referred above to students revisiting takeaways during courses – for discussion of the principle of spaced learning see the Part 1 – Memory of '*Helping History Students Communicate Effectively'* in the 'Raising Attainment' section of the website here:

https://thinkinghistory.co.uk/Issues/attainment/index.htm

APPENDIX 1: Activities inviting students to consider which takeaways they think most important.

People Like Us? – Choosing Your Takeaways (on p.16)

https://thinkinghistory.co.uk/MedievalBase/downloads/Section2ST.pdf

What Mattered to People? – Choosing Your Takeaways (on p.16)

https://thinkinghistory.co.uk/MedievalBase/downloads/Section3ST.pdf

Telling Your Big Story – Choosing Your Takeaways(on p.14)

https://thinkinghistory.co.uk/MedievalBase/downloads/Section4ST.pdf

The Wars of the Roses – Choosing Your Takeaways(on. p.26)

https://thinkinghistory.co.uk/ActivityBase/downloads/WoRY7pp24-26.pdf

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Appendix 2: Possible takeaways from studying the Middle Ages at KS3

This is a very provisional list constructed for *Exploring and Teaching Medieval History* and NOT NOT NOT intended as definitive! I shall be reviewing all this later in 2021 but for the moment the list may help prompt ideas.

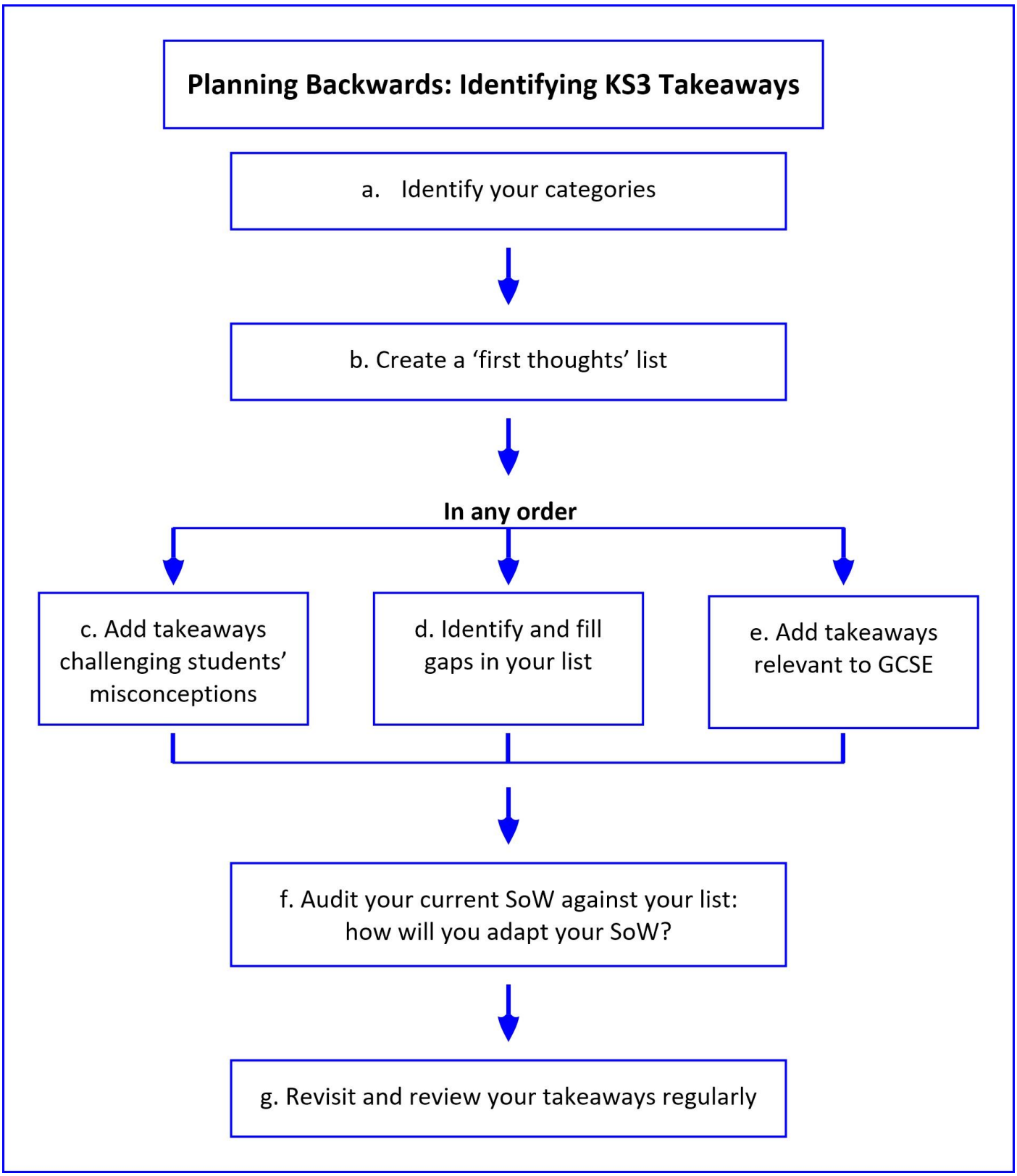
- People's quality of life was greatly affected by the quality of the harvest, which in turn depended on changes both in climate and in the weather. Successive harvest failures could lead to great hardship and the danger of starvation for some.
- The population grew quickly until the early 1300s, then fell by up to 50% with the onset of the Black Death. These changes in population affected prosperity and freedom. In the fifteenth century living standards for many were higher than over the next three centuries.
- Life-expectancy and health were similar in this period to other periods apart from that since the late nineteenth century. People tried to safeguard their health, especially trying to improve public health in periods of plague.
- Ideas about science and medicine were very different from ours but were detailed, carefully-studied and logical in terms of the world-view of the period, scholars sought new ideas and universities developed.
- Christianity was the official religion in Britain though its ideas were sometimes questioned. Ideas of heaven, hell and purgatory had a great influence on many people's actions. The Church's holy days determined working patterns and created many opportunities for rest and community activities.
- The Church in England was part of wider Christendom, under the authority of the Pope, and was very wealthy. Abbeys played a significant part in trade and in providing care for the poor.
- The vast majority of people lived in villages and were agricultural workers, hard physical work shared by women and children. Many towns grew or were founded in the early part of this period.
- Women were regarded as under the command of their menfolk though in practice individual women ran businesses or their husbands' estates and gave their husbands advice on many issues.
- Britain was closely connected to the rest of Europe through trade. England's strong links with Scandinavia were ended by the Norman Conquest. After this, French culture and

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language had a major influence in England and politics was strongly affected by disputes and wars with France.

- England was the richest and most powerful part of Britain and English lords gradually took over Wales but had little impact in Ireland. Scotland fought successfully to remain independent.
- Wars were chiefly fought for the King's glory and to defend his lands and power. Crusades against non-Christians in the Middle East and Europe continued unevenly throughout this period.
- Monarchs were seen as God's representatives and remained central to government, being expected to defend their people from enemies and disorder at home and from abroad.
- Monarchs were expected to consult their nobles about important decisions before taking the decisions themselves. Magna Carta and parliaments began as attempts to ensure kings did consult nobles and others.
- Nobles were very reluctant to rebel but sometimes did when their own positions were threatened by the uncontrolled actions of kings. Kings were usually only deposed in the last resort.
- Government was increasingly complex with detailed records.
- The commons were increasingly well-informed about political events and expected kings and nobles to provide defence, peace and prosperity. They became confident and well-organised enough to protest when feeling threatened by poor government.
- People were just as intelligent (or not!) as in later centuries and shared many emotions and ideals with people today. By the 1400s literacy levels were rising and printing developed.

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Planning Backwards: Identifying KS3 Takeaways
a. Identify your categories
b. Create a 'first thoughts' list
In any order
c. Add takeaways challenging students' misconceptions
d. Identify and fill gaps in your list
e. Add takeaways relevant to GCSE
f. Audit your current SoW against your list: how will you adapt your SoW?
g. Revisit and review your takeaways regularly

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