

# PETERLOO



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## Lesson Summary

This session introduces students to the Peterloo Massacre that happened in Manchester, England in 1819, and asks them to examine the causes of the day's historic events. Students are encouraged to think about the importance of banners and political symbolism to protest movements, and are introduced to Percy Shelley's poem *The Masque of Anarchy*.

## Learning Objectives

- To find out about what happened at the Peterloo Massacre.
- To learn about the reform movement, which the demonstrators at Peterloo were a part of, and the changes in society which had made this movement possible.
- To think about the influence that Peterloo had on people at the time in Manchester, England, and future generations who fought for equality and the vote.
- To think about the roles of symbols such as particular clothes, flags, images, and colours, in protest movements.

### United Nations Sustainable Development Links

No Poverty  
Zero Hunger  
Reduced Inequality

### Curriculum Links

History	Citizenship
English	Art and design

### British Council Core Skills

Critical Thinking and Problem Solving  
Creativity and Imagination  
Collaboration and Communication  
Citizenship



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## Activity one: Outline and background

**Requires:** Slides 2-8, Worksheet source 1, whiteboard, marker

**Preparation:** Print outs of worksheet 1. Slides 2-8 are ready to be displayed.

Show slides 2-6 and explain the context, build up and events of Peterloo. Ask students to make notes on what they think are the key facts and ideas.

Then ask them to read the brief extract in Source 1, form pairs and answer the following questions, which can be written on the board.

After they have discussed these in pairs, ask them to come back together to compare answers:

- Why did so many people attend the Peterloo demonstration?
- What kind of demonstration was it planned to be?
- Why do you think the protest became violent?
- Why did the Peterloo Massacre become an important issue for so many people?
- Was it right that the protestors didn't defend themselves against the yeomanry's violence?

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## Additional information for teachers about the background and events leading up to the Peterloo Massacre

### Slide 2: (Context: Conditions in the Early 19<sup>th</sup> Century)

- Manchester was home to the weaving and cotton industries. Workers who spun cotton had traditionally done their work at home, but throughout the 1700s the invention of new machines led to the growth of larger factories, where more cotton could be spun in a shorter amount of time.
- Increasingly workers were paid less for the work that they did, and people lost their jobs.
- Britain had spent the years between 1803 and 1815 fighting France in the Napoleonic Wars. This led to more economic hardship.
- New Corn Laws introduced in 1815 meant that bread became much more expensive.

### Slide 3: (Context: Radicalism and Reaction)

- In 1789, the French Revolution sent shockwaves across Europe and in 1793 they executed the King of France, creating a French Republic. Millions gained the right to vote, and the privileges of the previous rulers were abolished.
- In Britain, voting was restricted to rich landowning men, and millions of people did not have a voice in parliament.
- British workers and parts of the middle classes became increasingly interested in the ideas of the French Revolution, terrifying the wealthy elites in Britain. The elites formed the **Yeomanry**, a military body which was to be used to attack radical movements developing amongst the poor.
- Without the ability to vote, people used other means to protest. The **Luddite** movement of saw bands of workers destroying the hated new machines.
- In 1817 a group from Oldham tried to organise a 'hunger march' to London, where they would present a petition to the Prince Regent asking relief from poverty. Each marcher would bring a blanket, both to sleep under at night, and to show that they were weavers, earning them the name, '**Blanketeers**'. Several of the leaders were young- John Johnson was just 17 and John Bagguley just 18.
- 1818 saw many strikes across Manchester and attempts to form a general union for workers of every industry. However they were often ineffective, and many workers instead looked to the vote as a means to end their poverty.



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## Slide 4: (Build-Up)

- With the young leader John Bagguley in prison, Manchester radicals asked Henry Hunt to come and address a meeting for them, to promote the cause of reform. Hunt was a well-known speaker whose fiery rhetoric and dramatic nature could draw large audiences.
- Hunt was opposed to any hint of violence from the protestors' side on the day, and encouraged the organisers to ensure that the demonstration would be unarmed.

## Slide 5: (Events of the Day)

- Processions of several thousand people arrived. People were wearing their best clothes and marched in ordered formations.
- Many carried colourful banners and flags, and flagpoles were adorned with the Phrygian Cap- a symbol of the French Revolution.
- In total there were some 60-80,000 people present.
- William Hulton, watched the scene and decided that the protest had to be broken up. He ordered the Yeomanry to arrest the leaders of the demonstration.
- The Yeomanry charged on horseback, swords drawn, into the crowd. They became stuck in the mass of people, and began to hack with their swords at those around them. The Fifteenth Hussars, a regular army force, were sent in to assist them. The protest leaders were arrested, and those carrying flags and banners were targeted.
- Protestors fled in panic, leading to further crushes. In total 18 people died from their injuries, and over 650 were injured.

## Slide 6: (Aftermath)

- After the Peterloo Massacre, many people were horrified by what they saw. Eyewitnesses wrote articles for national newspapers. People wrote poems, drew pictures, and sang songs about the massacre across the country.
- People protested against the actions of the government- over 100,000 demonstrated in London, and some 40,000 people demonstrated in Newcastle.
- The government, passed a series of laws called the **Six Acts** which banned radical meetings, increased the price of newspapers, and allowed the government to crack down on speech which they didn't like
- Many of the leaders of the protest were imprisoned after Peterloo.
- Despite the repression, many future protest movements would refer to the Peterloo massacre to inspire their supporters. These included protestors who fought for the right to vote.



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## Activity Two: Masque of Anarchy

**Requires:** Slide 10

**Preparation:** project slide 10

- Project the slide with several stanzas from the 'Masque of Anarchy' poem by Shelley. (Slide 10)
- Pick four students, and ask each to read a stanza aloud.
- Ask the group:
  - How is Shelley suggesting that protestors respond to state violence?
  - Why do you think this poem was not published until over a decade after Peterloo?
  - Who is 'ye' (you) here? Who are 'they'?
  - If Shelley was to write this poem today, what event(s) do you think he might write about?

## Activity Three: Creative Writing

**Requires:** Worksheet source 2.

**Preparation:** Print worksheet source 2. Pens and paper available for students

- Ask students to read the extract by Olivia McFadden, which won the Radical Read creative writing competition (source 2 from the worksheet).
- Then encourage students to imagine that they attended the Peterloo demonstration as a protestor. Using the sources that they have read, and other information that they can find, ask them to write a letter detailing the events of the day, to John Bagguley, who is currently languishing in jail.
- Invite students to think about conveying:
  - The events of the day (who, what, when, where, why)
  - How they felt during the events
  - What they think will happen next, and what they hope will happen next.

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## Activity Four: Banners

**Requires** - worksheet sources 3-6, A3 paper, art materials.

**Preparation** - Print the worksheet sources and template, ensure that there are enough paper and pens for each small group of student

- Ask the students to split into small groups. Within each group ask each student to read a different source about the banners of Peterloo look at the images of the original and recreations (sources 3 - 6 on the worksheet).
- Ask them to imagine that they are a group of protestors marching to St Peter's Fields in 1819. Based on what they know, ask them to design a banner for the event.
- Ask them to think about-
  - What its message should be
  - What symbols it will use, and why
  - How to make it visually eye-catching

Choose the most effective designs and create some large banners for display using either textiles or printing techniques.

## Partner School Activities

If you are working with a partner school you could:

- Exchange copies of their letter writing and photographs of banners.
- Find out if there have been examples of historic protest movements within each other's countries. What were the protests about?



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## Source 1

### An Historian's View on the Importance of Peterloo

*"The enduring influence of Peterloo lay in the sheer horror of the day's events....*

*Ten years later it was an event to be remembered, even among the [elites], with guilt. As a massacre and as 'Peter-Loo' it went down to the next generation. And... in its way a victory ... the right of the public meeting had been gained. Henceforward strikers or agricultural workers might be ridden down or dispersed with violence. But never since Peterloo has authority dared to use equal force against a peaceful British crowd."*

**EP Thompson - the Making of the English Working Class**



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## Source 2

*This is an extract of creative writing authored by Olivia McFadden, age 14. It is written from the perspective of a protestor at Peterloo.*

## Welcome To The End

Peacefully...we stood there. With a sense of ambition and determination, wishing to arise and let the public be informed of the problems with poverty. And that's when it all went wrong.

It began on an undeniably beautiful summer afternoon. On the day of 16<sup>th</sup> August 1819 we scraped ourselves off the streets of Manchester to join together in hope of voicing our opinion. For years we've been slaves to the system of hard labour, hoping that one day, one day, we may be thought to be just as important as every other man or woman to cross our path. Elated to think that tomorrow maybe we will have the ability to vote. Tomorrow, maybe, we will all be equal. Tomorrow maybe there will be less poverty. Was that too much to ask? Well...I guess it was.

It started off great, our banners were amazing, and herds and herds of people began to crowd around us, listening to us and joining in. We argued that extending the vote to working men and women would lead to better use of public money, fairer taxes, an end to restrictions on trade which damaged industry and many more positives.

However not once did violence cross our minds and you'd think that that would've been pretty easy to understand but for some peculiar reason the Government and higher classes failed to identify this. Their glaring eyes followed our every move. As if, in a way, they were strangely intimidated.



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## Source 2 cont

1819, a year of industrial depression and high food prices. The 60,000 of us gathered in the Square of St Peter, not one person was armed and all behaviour was wholly peaceful. Arrests set in motion immediately after the meeting had begun. Innocent men, women arrested for simply voicing their opinion.

What happened to free will? What happened to human rights? What happened to human worth? Well...us, the lower classes don't deserve that. If you didn't wear big, flashy clothing, you weren't worthy.

If you didn't own a big house you weren't worthy. If you weren't rich and wealthy, you guessed it, you weren't worthy. The privileged classes were alarmed by the size of the crowds because in their minds, who cares about the poor people? No negotiation. There was no reasoning.

The government's first initiative was arrest, capture or murder! Herds of drunken guards charged towards us. Immediately we all stood tightly surrounding the children and that was our only defence mechanism. The guards rapidly rode in on horses, carrying enormous deadly swords hitting anything in their path. In ten minutes the whole square was cleared, except for bodies that was. I'm not sure of the numbers of statistics but around 500 people were injured and 11 killed. Whereas all the leaders they were convicted for a few years in prison.



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## Source 3

### *An Historian's View on the Importance of Banners*

"Many of those who bled on the field of Peterloo did so while protecting the flags and caps of liberty which they had laboured over and which they had carried with them, as symbols of democracy, on their long march from Manchester's satellite towns. The mottos inscribed on these flags included 'Liberty, Strength, Unity.'

As the yeomanry approached the hustings to arrest Hunt, the crowd was seen to 'link arms' and to 'form a solid body', in order to defend their leaders and to safeguard the many banners mounted upon the stage. Edmund Dawson lost his life defending a cap of liberty, made in his hometown of Saddleworth, while Mary Hays and two-year-old William Fildes were killed in the crush which resulted from the attempts of the cavalry to cut down and 'demolish' the flag-staves of the radicals."

**Joseph Cozens – 'The Making of the Peterloo Martyrs, 1819 to the Present', in Quentin Outram, Keith Laybourn (eds), *Secular Martyrdom in Britain and Ireland: From Peterloo to the Present***



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## Source 4

### **Samuel Bamford, a Radical leader, describes the march to St Peter's Fields from Middleton**

First were selected twelve of the most comely and decent-looking youths, who were placed in two rows of six each, with each a branch of laurel held presented in his hand, as a token of amity and peace; then followed the men of several districts in fives; then the band of music, an excellent one; then the colours: a blue one of silk, with inscriptions in golden letters, "Unity and Strength," "Liberty and Fraternity"; a green one of silk, with golden letters, "Parliaments Annual," "Suffrage Universal"; and betwixt them, on a staff, a hand-some cap of crimson velvet with a tuft of laurel, and the cap tastefully braided, with the word "Libertas" in front. Next were placed the remainder of the men of the districts in fives.

**Samuel Bamford, 'Passages in the Life of a Radical' , 1864**



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## Source 5

*Flags Flown at the 2014 Peterloo Memorial, Based on Descriptions of the Originals*



Photo by Catherine Booth

<https://nickypenttila.com/getting-the-details-right-peterloo/#.XFwVdIX7TIU>

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## Source 6

*The Last Remaining Banner from the Peterloo Massacre. One side reads 'Unity and Strength. 1819' The other side reads 'Liberty and Fraternity'- a slogan of the French Revolution*



<http://www.gmmg.org.uk/our-connected-history/item/peterloo-banner/>

## THANKS TO FUNDERS AND PARTNERS:



MANCHESTER  
CITY COUNCIL



Supported using public funding by  
**ARTS COUNCIL  
ENGLAND**



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