

History – Year 8

Curriculum Intent

In Year 8, students build on the historical skills and chronological understanding developed in Year 7 to explore how power, empire and ideas have shaped the modern world. Through the study of exploration, civil war, empire, slavery, industrial change, crime and punishment and the fight for rights, students deepen their understanding of cause and consequence, change and continuity, and historical interpretation. Across the year, students are encouraged to consider different perspectives and lived experiences, helping them to develop a more critical and informed understanding of Britain's past and its global impact.

What Students Will Study Across the Year

Autumn Term – Tudor and Stuart Exploration

Students begin the year by returning to themes first introduced in Year 7, building on their earlier study of the Tudors and their growing confidence as rulers. They explore why people migrated and explored during the Tudor and Stuart periods, linking earlier ideas about invasion and expansion to overseas exploration. Students examine the motives for exploration, encounters with the wider world and the impact of English settlement on Indigenous peoples. Case studies such as Roanoke, the Mayflower and Pocahontas are used to explore interpretation, diversity and the early consequences of English colonisation.

Autumn Term – Power and the English Civil War

Students then turn their focus back to England to examine what was happening at home while exploration and expansion were taking place overseas. They explore how the Stuart family, who ruled after the Tudors, struggled to control a country shaped by Tudor expansion, rising wealth and religious change. Through disagreements between the Stuart monarchs and Parliament over power, taxation and religion, students examine the causes and consequences of the English Civil War, the execution of Charles I and the rule of Oliver Cromwell. This unit helps students understand how royal power was challenged and how Parliament emerged stronger.

Spring Term – The Transatlantic Slave Trade

Building on their understanding of early exploration and colonisation, students then study the Transatlantic Slave Trade to see how exploration developed into a global system of exploitation. They examine how slavery operated, how it reshaped ideas about race, and Britain's growing role in the trade, including local connections to Plymouth. Students also consider the experiences and resistance of enslaved people, before examining abolition and debating why the slave trade eventually came to an end.

Spring Term – The British Empire

Students then broaden their understanding of empire by examining how British rule expanded and was experienced across the globe between 1700 and 1900. Linking back to earlier units on exploration and slavery, they study colonisation in India, Australia, Ireland, China and Africa, exploring how experiences of empire varied and why interpretations of the British Empire differ. The unit encourages students to think critically about power, resistance and legacy, and how empire continues to shape the modern world.

Summer Term – Crime and Punishment in Victorian Britain

Students return to Britain to explore the impact of empire and industrialisation on life at home during the Victorian period. They examine how rapid urban growth, inequality and social change contributed to rising crime and fear, and how the state responded through developments in law, policing and punishment. Through case studies such as Whitechapel, students investigate how crime was reported, how the media shaped public opinion, and how historians use evidence to challenge myths and misconceptions about Victorian crime.

Summer Term – The Suffragettes and Women's Fight for the Vote

Having explored crime, punishment and policing in Victorian Britain, students move on to examine how these systems were used to control protest and maintain order in the early twentieth century, by studying the

campaign for women's suffrage in the early twentieth century. They consider how the state responded when women challenged the law, linking Victorian ideas about justice, authority and punishment to the treatment of Suffragettes. This transition helps students understand why the suffrage campaign became more militant, and how debates about law, order and rights continued into modern British democracy. Students end the unit by debating whether the Suffragettes should be seen as terrorists or freedom fighters.

Assessment and Progression

Year 8 students are assessed through extended written answers, source analysis and end-of-unit assessments that focus on explanation, analysis and judgement. By the end of Year 8, students will have strengthened their understanding of empire, power and protest, preparing them for more complex studies of modern history, conflict and society in Year 9.
