



Human Rights Education: stand up for your rights.

MAGNA CARTA

- 1- Read the following text. (15 minutes)
- 2- **Highlight the key words and search on the web the meaning of the words you don't know.** Which is the most important clause? (15 minutes)
- 3- **Search on the web the meaning of "rule of law" and explain the link** between this expression and Magna Carta. (10 minutes) (Always cite the source!)
- 4- Prepare a brief presentation to explain the class the historical importance of Magna Carta. (10 minutes)

By 1215, thanks to years of unsuccessful foreign policies and heavy taxation demands, **England's King John was facing down a possible rebellion by the country's powerful barons.** Under duress, he agreed to a charter of liberties known as the Magna Carta (or **Great Charter**) that would place him and all of England's future sovereigns within a rule of law. Though it was not initially successful, the document was reissued (with alterations) in 1216, 1217 and 1225, and eventually served as the foundation for the English system of common law. Later generations of Englishmen would celebrate the Magna Carta as a symbol of freedom from oppression, as would the Founding Fathers of the United States of America, who in 1776 looked to the charter as a historical precedent for asserting their liberty from the English crown.

THE DOCUMENT AND ITS LEGACY

Written in Latin, the Magna Carta (or Great Charter) was effectively the first written constitution in European history. Of its 63 clauses, many concerned the various property rights of barons and other powerful citizens, suggesting the limited intentions of the framers. The benefits of the charter were for centuries reserved for only the elite classes, while the majority of English citizens still lacked a voice in government. In the 17th century, however, two defining acts of English legislation—the Petition of Right (1628) and the Habeas Corpus Act (1679)—referred to **Clause 39, which states that "no free man shall be...imprisoned or disseised [dispossessed]... except by the lawful judgment of his peers or by the law of the land."**

In 1776, rebellious American colonists looked to the Magna Carta as a model for their demands of liberty from the English crown. Its legacy is especially evident in the [Bill of Rights](#) and the U.S. Constitution, and nowhere more so than in the Fifth Amendment ("Nor shall any persons be deprived of life, liberty or property without due process of law"), which echoes Clause 39. Many state constitutions also include ideas and phrases that can be traced directly to the historic document.

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Source: <http://www.history.com/topics/british-history/magna-carta>