



Changemakers at the Abbey – teachers' notes

Thank you for downloading this resource. We hope that it will be a useful teaching tool during your visit to Westminster Abbey.

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1) The Coronation Chair: Suffragists and suffragettes

Do you think causing damage is a good way to protest for a cause? **You may wish to facilitate a discussion with your group on this. Damaging important objects can bring a lot of attention as the act is often 'newsworthy' and gets people talking about it. However, damaging something important might create criticism and negative perceptions of a cause or organisation, and might detract from the message and aims of the protest.**

You could discuss with your students that activist groups are still using this form of protest today, including at Westminster Abbey. For example, in 2013 paint was sprayed on a painting of Queen Elizabeth II by a member of *Fathers 4 Justice*, and in 2025 *Just Stop Oil* spray-painted a message on the grave of Charles Darwin. Famous artworks have also been targeted in recent years at other locations.

The main difference between the suffragist and suffragette campaigns were the tactics used to raise support for their cause. The suffragists acted within the law and protested peacefully by writing letters, putting up posters and organising petitions. The suffragettes, frustrated by the lack of progress, thought that direct action would make the government listen to them. Their slogan was 'Deeds not words'.

Her memorial at the Abbey states that Dame Millicent Fawcett 'won citizenship for Women'. There is also a statue of her in nearby Parliament Square, which you may wish to visit with your students. It was Parliament Square's first monument to a woman, and also its first sculpture by a woman artist.

The Coronation Chair was built on the orders of King Edward I to hold the captured Stone of Scone, the coronation stone of Scotland. The chair has been used in coronations since 1308. King Charles III was crowned on the chair in 2023. You can find more information about the Coronation Chair [here](#).

2) Lord Shaftesbury and Baroness Burdett Coutts: Social reformers

Number these causes in order of importance to you, 1 being the most important and 6 the least. Why is your number 1 the most important? What do others in your group think? **You might like to facilitate debate in your group about which of these causes are most important to the students and why. You could also remind students that in the Victorian period many children did not have access to education and were forced to work from a young age, often in dangerous conditions. They didn't have the same laws that we have today to protect people at work, and additionally the NHS did not exist to provide free healthcare. Does this information change the importance of any of these causes for your students?**



The word philanthropy comes from Ancient Greek and means “love of humanity”. Often philanthropists are rich and generously give their own money to those in need. Angela Burdett-Coutts was known as ‘the richest heiress in England’ and Richard Branson is a well-known modern example of a wealthy philanthropist. But great wealth is not necessary for helping people. You might wish to discuss with your students how they can make positive change without having a lot of money.

Angela Burdett-Coutts inherited her fortune from her grandfather, a famous banker. She gave generously to many charities, schools, hospitals and to the Church of England. She worked to address many social issues including poverty, access to education and cruelty to animals, and co-founded an organisation that later became the National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children (NSPCC). In recognition of her work, Queen Victoria gave her a peerage. She is buried in Westminster Abbey.

Anthony Ashley-Cooper, 7th Earl of Shaftesbury, was a politician and social reformer. He campaigned for many issues including better working conditions, education, housing reform, animal welfare and the limitation of child labour. Because of his, he was known as ‘the poor man’s Earl’. His statue in Westminster Abbey was partly funded by pennies given by the poor children of London who Shaftesbury had worked to protect.

3) Nelson Mandela: Activists

What are the words that encircle his memorial stone? **Forgiveness and reconciliation.**

Why do you think these are important when trying to make positive change? **You may wish to facilitate a discussion around this with your students. Mandela chose to forgive his oppressors rather than continuing to fight with or punish them. He once said that ‘forgiveness liberates the soul, it removes fear. That’s why it’s such a powerful weapon’. Through reconciliation he hoped to address and correct the injustices of the past and work together to build a peaceful future.**

This is a narrow walkway for visitors so please stand to the side where there is more space once you have looked at the stone. Mandela’s memorial stone was placed just in front of the altar in the nave. You could ask your students why they think this might be. There is also a statue of Mandela nearby in Parliament Square, which you might like to visit with your students.

Between 1948 and 1991, South Africa imposed the apartheid system where people were segregated by the colour of their skin. Apartheid means ‘separateness’. The white minority held all the power and wealth, while the black majority lived in oppression and poverty. Mandela (born Rolihlahla Mandela) spent much of his life leading the opposition to apartheid and because of this was imprisoned for 27 years. In 1994, after his release, he became the first black President of South Africa, as well as the first to be democratically elected. He then faced the enormous task of uniting a country torn apart by fear, anger and violence.

4) Scientists’ Corner: Discoverers

(Isaac Newton) made many other important scientific discoveries. Look at his memorial and see how many you can find. **Students might spot:**



- **A telescope and planets:** He invented a new, more accurate reflecting telescope to look into space and also explored the orbits of planets.
- **A prism:** By using a prism he observed that clear white light is made up of seven visible colours (the colours of a rainbow).
- **A pile of books:** Newton's statue leans on these books to represent his work and writings on divinity, chronology, optics and mathematics.

Students might also notice metal being placed in a furnace, and a pot of coins. Although not a scientific discovery, this shows that Newton was Master of the Mint, responsible for producing coins.

The equation inside it is one of his important scientific ideas. Can you finish it? $T = \frac{\hbar c^3}{8\pi G M k}$. This equation is **Hawking radiation** which expresses the idea that black holes are not entirely black but emit a glow (called thermal radiation).

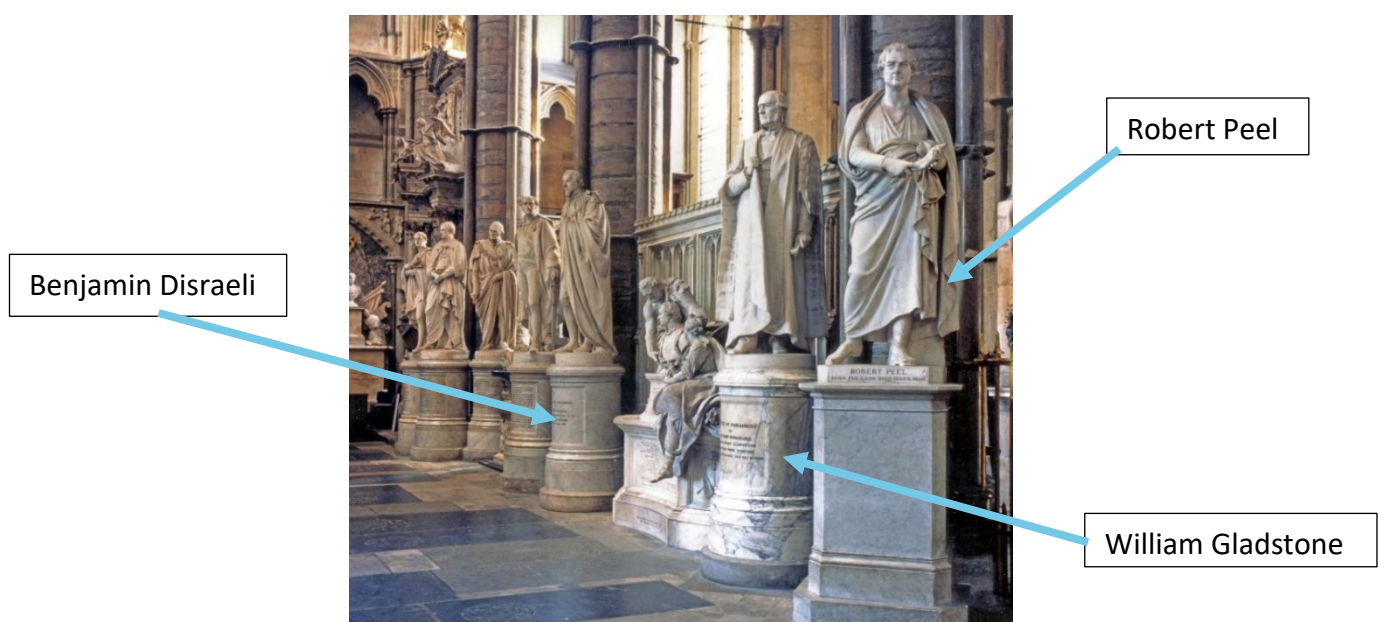
Think about your special talents. What would you like to be remembered for? Design your own memorial (like Newton's) to highlight your achievements. **Encourage students to think about the things they enjoy doing or are good at. This doesn't have to be activities, hobbies or school subjects; it could be positive traits such as kindness or being a good friend. Ask students what they want to be or achieve when they grow up. Would this influence the design of their memorial?**

As Scientists' Corner is often crowded you may wish to move your students to a different space before asking them to complete this last task. It could also be carried out back at school.

5) Statesmen's Aisle: Lawmakers

Stand by the blue rope to the left of the High Altar in front of this row of statues. Although you won't be able to go up close to them, it is possible to identify the memorials from the rope.

Can you find these prime ministers? Tick them off as you find them.





How can we impact what happens in Parliament? What could you do if you don't agree with the rules set by our politicians? Write down three ways you could make change. **Students might write:**

- **Voting.**
- **Peaceful protest.**
- **Writing letters to politicians or leaders.**
- **Running for office (local council, MPs etc).**
- **Signing petitions.**
- **Raising awareness by talking to people.**
- **Raising money for organisations.**

To help students think about this question you might want to remind them of the different types of rules they have to follow. For example, there is the rule of law (which is also one of the [British values](#)), but they might also have specific rules at home or at school. Often classes have their own class rules and sometimes students and teachers come up with them together at the beginning of the year. What could they do if they thought the rules at school were unfair? For example, do they have a School Council?

You may wish to look more closely at the statue of Robert Peel, which is nearest to the rope. Peel founded the modern police force, the Metropolitan Police. This is why police officers today are sometimes known as “bobbies” or “peelers” in tribute to him. He was also a founder of the modern Conservative Party.

It's important to note that many of these prime ministers governed during the height of the British Empire. Policies they enacted that were beneficial for people in this country sometimes had a negative impact on people in other countries.

6) Poets' Corner: Abolitionists

Do you have a cause that is important to you? Write down some ideas here that you could turn into a poem. **Encourage students to think about something important to them or their lives e.g. protecting the environment, fighting poverty, ensuring everyone has access to something like education or technology. Students could write down a few key words about their cause or how they feel about it.**

Students could use these notes as a starting point for a creative writing task back at school.

Elizabeth Barrett Browning's name can be found at the bottom of the floor stone of her husband, Robert Browning, near the grave of Geoffrey Chaucer. The memorial to Granville Sharp is a stone tablet on the wall, near the floor stone to Lord Byron. Please note that this memorial depicts a small image of an enslaved man in chains. This is the Wedgwood anti-slavery medallion, which was an abolitionist symbol. The image may cause distress.

Elizabeth Barrett Browning was a Victorian poet who used her work to campaign for, and bring attention to, many causes including the abolition of enslavement. Despite her family benefiting financially from enslavement, she actively opposed it and wrote two poems – *A Curse for a Nation* and *The Runaway*



Slave at Pilgrim's Point – highlighting the horrors experienced by enslaved people. This may have led to a rift between Elizabeth and her father. Her writing also helped influence reform in child labour.

As a lawyer, Granville Sharp represented enslaved people in legal cases in the late 1700s. Hearing their personal experiences helped make him a passionate abolitionist and he was a founding member of the Society for Effecting the Abolition of the Slave Trade. They met with the politician William Wilberforce, who agreed to argue their cause in Parliament. In 1807, after a huge campaign, Parliament abolished the transatlantic slave trade. However, it was only in 1833 (after Sharp's death and during Elizabeth Barrett Browning's lifetime) that enslaved people were granted their freedom in the British Empire.

If you are interested in this topic, there are many [abolitionists](#) buried or remembered in the Abbey. You could also visit St Margaret's Church, next to the Abbey, where you can see memorials to the black abolitionists Olaudah Equiano and Ignatius Sancho.

7) The cloisters: Pioneers

Think of someone who inspires you, the way Aphra Behn inspired Virginia Woolf. Write their name in the flower. **You could ask students to discuss this in pairs. They might be inspired by people in their lives, such as family members, friends or teachers. Or they might be inspired by famous people that they look up to such as musicians, athletes, actors, TV personalities, writers or activists.**

Aphra Behn was a playwright, poet and spy in the court of King Charles II. Her most famous work is *Oroonoko*, which tells the story of an African prince who is sold into enslavement.

In this case, a pioneer is someone who is the first to do something and paves the way for others in the future.

8) The Great West Door: Martyrs

Discuss as a group: Can you think of something small you could give up to help others? **This might include donating personal items such as clothes or toys to charity shops or to others who are less fortunate. Students could give up their time to help others, for example by volunteering or doing charity work. They might give up their seat on a train or bus for someone who needs it more than them. They might even give up experiences for someone with less access to those opportunities.**

The statues of the Modern Martyrs commemorate ten Christians from the 20th century who gave up their lives after being oppressed or persecuted for their faith. They are, from left to right:

- **St Maximilian Kolbe** (from Poland) was a priest who volunteered to be killed in place of his fellow prisoner in Auschwitz concentration camp, 1941.
- **Manche Masemola** (from South Africa) was killed by her parents in 1928 because they refused to accept her Christian faith.
- **Janani Luwum** (from Uganda) was Archbishop of Uganda who challenged the brutality of military dictator Idi Amin and was murdered in 1971.



- **Grand Duchess Elizabeth** (from Russia) was a Christian nun, who was killed during the Bolshevik Revolution in 1918.
- **Dr Martin Luther King Jr** (from the United States of America) was a Baptist minister and civil rights activist who was assassinated in 1968.
- **St Oscar Romero** (from El Salvador) was Archbishop of San Salvador. He was assassinated in his church whilst celebrating mass, after speaking out against social injustice and violence during the Salvadoran Civil War in 1980.
- **Dietrich Bonhoeffer** (from Germany) was a Christian theologian and pastor who spoke out against the Nazi regime and helped Jewish people escape Germany. He was killed in Flossenbürg concentration camp in 1945.
- **Esther John** (from Pakistan) was killed in 1960 due to her efforts in Christian evangelism.
- **Lucian Tapiedi** (from Papua New Guinea) was a Christian teacher and evangelist, killed during the Japanese invasion in 1942.
- **Wang Zhiming** (from China) was a Christian leader killed during the Chinese Cultural Revolution in 1973.

You can find out more about the Modern Martyrs [here](#).