

THE QUEEN'S SPEECH

School years traditionally began in early September. The State Opening of Parliament was a month or so later. When teaching government and politics I would often begin with the State Opening. Today I would use a video. Then I mostly had to paint pictures with words. Which is better? I don't know. Often young people had seen snatches of a State Opening on the telly so that could help.

Imagine the Queen in a wonderful coach coming from Buckingham Palace to the House of Lords. Dressed magnificently and, wearing a crown, she would sit on a throne, yes a throne. To her left and to her right sat lots and lots of Lords, also dressed both magnificently and very expensively.

In the doorway, having been summoned by Black Rod (always useful to have an interesting aside to talk about when teaching), are standing, dressed in ordinary clothes and led by the Prime Minister and Leader of the Opposition, the members of the House of Commons. It is as though they are trying to get a look-in and to overhear what the Queen is going to tell them her government is going to do in the next parliamentary year.

So, let us produce a rank of importance in that picture. Who is top? Who is second? Who comes a poor third?

The next few lessons would, I hoped, strip off a few layers of mystery. The idea was that when the actual State Opening took place at least some of my kids could become teachers to their families: to their mums and dads and their bothers and sisters. I think it empowers young people when they get to do that and parents and siblings look at them with respect.

Did my teaching plans always work? Of course not!

Today I remember a wonderful response to a CSE Government and Politics question I had set about the possibility of approving, or not, people taking what we then referred to as Direct Action. The respondent (officially called a 'a candidate') wrote about the Miners' Strike. If, by some miracle, I was back in a position to set such questions about the recent protest in Bristol against the Policing Bill, about the Vigil for Sarah Everard, for example, would, I wonder, would I be allowed to do that? Might I be labelled as (what a word) an 'extremist'?

What were those words of Barry Goldwater? "Extremism in defence of Liberty is no vice." I seem to remember that 'Goldwater' is German for urine.

A final question to the class: who writes the Queen's Speech?

Cliff Jones 22nd. March 2021

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