



Penrhys Pilgrimage Project
AS Level Education Resource:
the Pilgrim Journey



This activity explores the pilgrim journey from the middle ages to the modern day. It asks students to think about what was expected of medieval pilgrims in terms of the effort put in, and what their experience was like as they travelled. It also asks them to think about how and why this differed depending on a variety of factors.

Introduction

Pilgrimage is a common practice in most religions, though its form and practice varies. In most Christian traditions, pilgrimage involved going on a journey to visit a holy site of some kind (such as the burial place of a saint, a holy well, or a miracle-working image). This was usually done in the hope of benefitting from a miracle of some kind, or to give thanks for a miracle that had already happened.

Religious attractions

In the middle ages, when most of the pilgrimage sites worshipped today were set up, it was usual for the people in charge of these sites to manipulate them so that they provided pilgrims with a suitably sacred experience.

This manipulation could extend out to the pilgrimage route where smaller pilgrim attractions could develop to cater for a pilgrim's spiritual needs as he travelled, such as shrines or chapels. At other times, pilgrimage routes went one way or another in to include existing holy places, perhaps offering a number of alternatives for a pilgrim to choose from.

Do you think pilgrims took advantage of these offerings, or were motivated to travel a particular way to visit them? How important was it for pilgrims to visit other holy sites as they travelled?

Pilgrimage Movement

Traditionally, pilgrimage has been considered an activity that involves walking. This is perhaps because this means making the most effort, but it is also probably because our models for pilgrim behaviour come from the middle ages where there was little alternative. In reality, many pilgrims from this

period rode in carts or on horses, or sailed some of the way. Modern pilgrims might cycle, ride on horseback, drive or even fly some or all of the way, though it is still considered more effective to walk.

The difference between medieval and modern methods of travel, and the need to put the effort in to pilgrimage, has led to considerable debate about what matters most. Was the distance a pilgrim travelled the most important part of the journey? Or was the difficulty of the journey more important than the distance? For example, fifty miles was not as much of a problem for a healthy man travelling in summer as five miles would be for someone with a crippling disability. Climbing a hill, visiting a remote site, or braving a dangerous sea-crossing shows that you are willing to work hard or take risks to get to your destination.

What do you think matters more? Should pilgrims have to endure hardships for their pilgrimage to result in a spiritual reward?

Activity

Imagine that you had to explain the idea of pilgrimage and the journey a pilgrim takes to a holy well, statue, or shrine, to a group of younger students by developing a game.

You can use Penrhys as your model, another site that you might know like St David's cathedral or Bardsey Island, or make up a virtual pilgrimage landscape with your own holy sites and natural obstacles. You can decide whether you want to set the game in the medieval past or the present day.

- How would you do this as a game, either a board game or video game? How would you design the board/landscape?
- How would you create your pilgrim character or playing piece?
- What challenges would your pilgrim have to face?
- What would they be taking with them?
- Would they need anything on the way?
- Who or what would be there to help them?
- What would they see as they travelled?
- What happens when they arrive at their final destination? How had their journey and the landscape around them had an impact on the pilgrimage?

Think about what your pilgrim-players must do to earn points or lose them, and what might slow them down or speed them up.

You could have different types of pilgrim (young, old, sick, rich, poor), consider how they are travelling (on foot, by horse, by bicycle, or even by car), or think about the different dangers of obstacles they faced depending on the time of year they are travelling.

Suggested Resources:

The Cistercian Way <http://www.cistercianway.wales/> - has a number of suggested pilgrimage routes around Wales, including to Penrhys, which highlight the sights passed along the way.

The North Wales Pilgrim's Way <http://pilgrims-way-north-wales.org/index.html> recreates a pilgrimage route across North Wales. Under the 'Routes & Maps' tab you will find descriptions of each section of the pilgrimage which highlights religious sites on the pilgrimage route, as well as hills and woodland paths.

Google maps can help you trace out a route from one place to another, and identify things along the way that might be relevant to your pilgrim. You can also set the route so that you have one followed on foot, by car, or via public transport.

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