

## Did the changes during the years 1500 to 1900 really cause people to 'redefine themselves'?

**TASK:** Read the story of the unit, to find out more about what we're going to study in the next six lessons. Then, answer the questions at the bottom of the page (use a separate piece of paper).

During the years 1500 to 1900, there were significant changes in Britain - in fact, 'Britain' did not even really exist in 1500, as England became part of Great Britain when it united with Scotland in 1707.

In 1500 kings and queens had **absolute power**: this meant that they could listen to their advisers if they wanted to, but ultimately they were able to make all of the big decisions. By 1900, **Parliament** had been introduced, and this meant that decisions were made by people who had been **elected**.



In 1500, monarchs and **landowners** were very influential, as the landowners were given land by the kings and queens in exchange for their loyalty. Ordinary people were mostly farmers, and they farmed the land on behalf of their landowners. As **elections** were introduced, it was only male landowners who had the right to vote. By 1900, a greater number of men had been given this right - but women still could not vote.



As time went on, people's **ideas and beliefs** changed, too. In 1500, most people in England were **Catholic** - but there was a gradual shift, as **Protestantism** became more common. This was partly due to the influence of Henry VIII, whose 'break with Rome' in 1533 allowed him to divorce his first wife, as the Pope's influence in England was reduced.



By 1900, religious beliefs had also come under attack from new **scientific ideas**. Charles Darwin's book *On the Origin of Species* described the process of evolution by natural selection, which suggested that humans had not been put on earth by God - but had evolved over many thousands of years. These new ideas caused some people's religious beliefs to change - or even to disappear.

There were also changes in **art, language, literature** and **architecture** - many of which were influenced by a European-wide movement called the **Renaissance**. This movement saw artists and writers take inspiration from ancient Greece and Rome, as they developed new styles and approaches.



Finally, people's **knowledge** of the world expanded considerably, as lots of **voyages of discovery** were undertaken by sailors and explorers. By 1900, new sea routes and continents had been discovered; and new connections and trade links had been established between Britain and many other parts of the world.



**TASK:** Answer the questions below:

- 1: What does 'absolute power' mean?
- 2: How did the introduction of Parliament change things?
- 3: How did voting rights change between 1500 and 1900?
- 4: Which monarch had a big impact on changing religious belief in England?
- 5: What impact did Darwin and other scientists have?
- 6: Describe how the Renaissance impacted on England.

