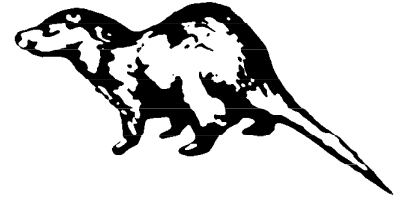


NUFFIELD PRIMARY HISTORY



HISTORY DETECTIVES: THE MYSTERY SUITCASE

TEACHERS' NOTES

The lesson was the first in a term's course on Invaders and Settlers for a class of 32 year 5 and 6 mixed age and gender pupils. The school is located in a small village on the edge of a small industrial town, with a kilometre of fields between it and the built-up area. Pupils are drawn from rural, village and urban homes.

We decided to introduce the course through the medium of a History Mystery. These always grip and enthuse the children, so we modified an old favourite: investigating clues about a child, in the form of a mystery suitcase of her possessions. This introduces skills, processes, and the concept of evidence in all its richness, using manuscript and printed sources, and artefacts in a multiplicity of forms. The children would work on the suitcase as detectives, trying to reconstruct information about the child from the evidence.

We were determined to treat history in the round, covering not only oracy, but visual and written literacy too. The latter took the form of two different genres: non-fiction reports and short stories.

Year group /class

Years 5 and 6. A class of 32 children, split evenly between the year groups. The children were benign: I had taught half of them the year before. Fred, the only potentially disruptive pupil, was involved, cheerful and co-operative throughout. All of the children were adequate to good readers and writers. Their private, personally chosen reading books showed that there were no weak readers. In terms of writing, a review of their composition books for literacy revealed an ability to write at length, accurately, grammatically and with a clear structure.

Teaching time

A one-and-a quarter-hour lesson, plus three-quarters of an hour of a second lesson.

Learning objectives

For the children to:

- develop a range of enquiry skills, refining the processes and skills related to an enquiry involving artefacts as evidence
- resolve the enquiry in the form of a piece of either non-fiction or fiction writing
- develop the inter-personal skills of working together: in pairs, small groups, and as a whole class, to build up knowledge and understanding. In this, to encourage (or foster) co-operation through designating specific, generic roles
- enjoy the lesson: to be enthused and involved, and take pleasure from learning.

Key question

- What can we learn about the owner of the suitcase from its contents?

Resources

Suitcase Report form.

Report or Story writing sheet.

Suitcase full of child's things – enough artefacts for there to be one for each pupil (I made up a suitcase from my daughter's things). The suitcase contained:

Letter, party invite, school report, French sheet, French club, postcard

'I am 6' sticker

Isle of Scillies brochure

Drawing, drawing of house worksheet, language sheet, drawing book, coloured stickers

Flowery dress, school uniform, coat, shoe, hair bands, bangle, hair clip, photo album, Cinderella book, 'Little witch's night book', maths book, maths work

recorder, music

skipping games book, skipping rope, Barbie doll, doll's dress, snap cards, tape

The teaching

The suitcase contains the evidence about a person. It can be made up and presented in a number of ways. In this case we said that the suitcase had been found and handed in to the police. As History detectives the children had to ask questions, and use the clues to answer them.

Episode 1

Focus: The dramatic opening – the policeman.

Involving the pupils immediately in a gripping drama which links straight into their own lives.

I walked in and took on the role of a policeman. ‘Hallo, hallo, hallo, what have we got here?’ A suitcase, etc. etc. As the policeman I accused the teacher, Linda, of having stolen it. She vehemently denied this. What should we do with the suitcase? The class were cast in the role of history detectives helping us in the investigation of the suitcase.

Episode 2

Focus: Pupils create and pool the initial questions.

In pairs the children came up with questions they would ask when faced with a suitcase like ours, and used their jotters to list them.

The moment had come to use the electronic whiteboard, but it would not turn on! So, back to the conventional whiteboard. Luckily I had brought some pens that worked. We fielded questions from the class:

What is in the suitcase?
 How and why is it here?
 How old is it?
 Who put it here?
 Do you think it is safe?
 Have you found out what is inside?

Episode 3

Focus: Opening the suitcase and investigating the contents.

We divided the class into seven groups of four or five pupils. Each group included a recorder, a reporter, a resources manager, and a responder. There was a fluent, confident reader in each group.

Despite fears of a bomb, there was a rush of volunteers to open the suitcase. Maria gingerly unlocked it, revealing the contents.

I took the suitcase around the groups, the resource manager in each case picking out two objects. We circulated the class twice, until the suitcase was empty.

Episode 4

Focus:

Working on the clues and building up a mental picture of the owner.

We gave the pupils a report form each: they filled this in using the clues.

With seven sets of clues on seven tables, we got the pupils to circulate in an orderly, clockwise manner. On the word *Change*, each group moved to the next table. Lots and lots of animated, on-task discussion. This part of the lesson continued until the seven groups had visited all seven tables, worked through all the clues and completed their sheets in terms of name, address and contents.

Episode 5

Focus: Developing questions.

The brainstorm list of points on the report forms turned into a list of new questions. So, we went round the class. Each table produced one question, and the responder then asked a pupil from another table (different gender) to come up with another question. The list of questions read:

- Does the owner have any hobbies?
- What is she like?
- What does she look like?
- What school does she go to?
- What is her school like?
- Does she have pets?
- Does she travel?
- Has she got brothers and sisters?
- Does she like toys?
- Does she go on holiday?
- Did she go to the Isle of Scillies?

Episode 6

Focus: The information network – answering the questions.

I realised that we could use the questions as the basis for an information network, using the information already on the pupils Report forms and the questions. This we built up on the whiteboard.

On the board we listed feedback about each heading, like this.

Toys: likes Barbies

School: learns French, good school report, year 1 pupil, Stoke Hill First School

Hobbies: likes skipping, plays, reads, likes drawing, music

Looks like: short brown hair, pale skin

Episode 7

Focus: Resolution – written work.

We wanted to be explicit about genre. We stressed to the pupils that we wanted them to concentrate on writing in relation to their authorial voice and intent, in relation to the intended audience. The pupils had the choice of either writing a report or their own creative short story. We went through the starters, connectives and topic areas listed on the writing sheet. We gave the pupils the freedom to write as they felt fit. If they wanted to draw up a plan, we gave them time to do so. Alternatively they could use the information they already had to plan their story or report mentally .

Using their sheets, the pupils spent the next half an hour in writing up their accounts of the owner of the suitcase. The extent, variety and relative sophistication of the writing was very pleasing – we had deliberately worked within two genres that the pupils had already extensively experienced.

Learning outcomes

The children:

- thoroughly enjoyed being history detectives
- developed their questioning and enquiry skills
- worked collaboratively in groups to pursue the enquiry
- wrote up the results of their inquiry as either a report or a short story, showing a good grasp of each genre.

Nuffield Primary History project

General editors: Jacqui Dean and Jon Nichol

Author of this unit: Jon Nichol

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