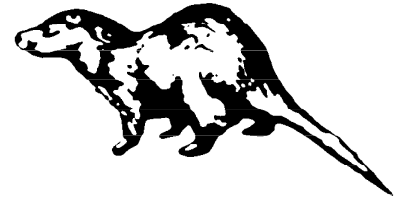


NUFFIELD PRIMARY HISTORY



ROMANS, ANGLO-SAXONS AND VIKINGS IN BRITAIN

THE ROMAN ARMY – SPY!

TEACHERS' NOTES

The lesson was the third 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 had introduced the course three weeks earlier with a mystery suitcase ([link](#)) and continued with an investigation into Celtic Britain ([link](#)), where the children had written travel brochures about Celtic Britain. When I arrived in class, the travel brochures were on display!

This week we would visit Caesar's camp before he invaded Britain in 55 BC. I wanted the children to get a clear and full picture of what the Roman army was like, before we worked on Caesar's short-lived invasions of 55 and 54 BC and the Claudian conquest of 43 AD. So we decided to move through time and space, using a magic cauldron and an invisibility cloak, to visit both Caesar's camp and a Roman battlefield. The battlefield was the one shown in the opening scenes of *Gladiator* – I only decided to use it when I learned that Peter Connolly was the historical consultant. Peter is a genius who has spent his life recreating in visual form what the Roman army was like, so I could be certain that it was an accurate reconstruction.

The key idea of the lesson was that the children would be spies, and that as spies they would report back to Caradoc on what a Roman army was like and how it would fight.

The lesson was fully in line with the National Literacy Strategy, even down to the detail of using film as a genre.

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 the children were adequate to good readers and writers.

The teaching was based on a previous scheme of work, including ‘Celtic Britain: the land the Romans conquered’ . We decided to take the existing Scheme of Work, and modify it in the light of changes during the past three years. We also looked closely at the QCA Scheme of Work, and were able to relate our planning to the pattern it suggested – indeed, it was almost identical. In terms of our own planning, our own SoW and QCA’s fitted in perfectly with the school’s brief.

The school asked us to focus on three linked elements:

- the substantive concepts of migration, invasion and settlement for the whole period from Romans to Normans – Celts, Romans, Anglo-Saxons, Vikings, and Normans – with a focus on the middle three.
- the integration of literacy within the context of history and related curriculum areas.
- the use of ICT to the full in a natural way, both in the context of exploratory and expressive learning, that is, as a tool for children to find out about the topic and to express what they had learned.

Teaching time

One hour forty minutes, split between a forty-minute and a one-hour lesson.

Learning objectives

- To develop an understanding of the nature of Roman warfare, and the problems that a Celtic king might face in fighting a Roman invasion force.
- To develop this understanding through using the resources for this lesson, the battle scene from the film *Gladiator*; and a pack of colour pictures.
- To develop the ability to extract and organize information from these sources, and to present it in the form of a written report.

Key question

- What was the Roman army like, and how did it fight?

Resources

- 1 The Roman Army – Spy! (the story of Emma and Dylan)
- 2 and 3 The Roman Army: Spy sheets 1 and 2
- 4 Spy Report: Caesar’s Army
- 5 Report genre frame

Video: the battle scene from the start of the film *Gladiator*

Nine pictures of contrasting aspects of Roman military life. These were laser-printed on A4 paper and laminated. Such pictures can be taken from topic books, monographs, postcards or downloaded from the internet.

Photographs of ‘Roman soldiers’ can be found at: www.roman-empire.net/army/army.html

The teaching

The children were to act as spies both during the battle and on a visit to Caesar’s camp.

Episode 1

Focus: Introducing the lesson – getting the children into the frame of mind to engage fully in the spying activity.

We started the lesson with a recap on what had happened last week. I told the children that Dylan and Emma were going to find out about the Roman army. To do this the class would need to read through *The Roman army – Spy!* first. They would read silently, and we would then discuss any ideas and problems.

This we did, with a lively discussion on the problem that the first paragraph raised – how Caradoc might deal with the issue of the Roman invasion. We talked about problems like this in the world today. The pupils supported the idea of sending hostages and bribing Caesar with money.

Then we moved into the main body of the lesson – the children’s trip to both the Roman battlefield and Caesar’s army. But first we needed to come up with the questions we would ask in order to find things out and make our report to Caradoc. I had sorted out a list of questions (given on the Roman Army *Spy sheet 2*) but also provided a blank sheet (*Spy sheet 1*) as the first page for the pupils’ own questions.

Episode 2

Focus: Spy questions.

We asked the pupils in pairs to come up with questions. We then went around the class. A pupil contributed a question, and then asked a pupil on another table for his or her question. Ben was the most original, raising the issue of finding out about strategy, and giving a very clear and full account of what the word meant! The pupils' list read:

1. How many soldiers did they have?
2. What types of weapons did they have?
3. Where will the soldiers attack first?
4. How many weapons?
5. What did the soldiers wear?
6. What armour did the soldiers have?
7. Where are the soldiers fighting?
8. What strategy is planned?
9. What explosives did the soldiers have?
10. How did the soldiers camp?

Episode 3

Focus: The battle scene, Gladiator.

Now was the time to play *Gladiator* using the electronic whiteboard. Miracle of miracles – it worked brilliantly, just like being in a cinema. Lots and lots of fine detail. Vivid colour, sound, stupendous action. We stopped the video every minute or so to focus on the specific aspect of military life that it showed. The pupils were entranced, fully engaged in the film. The only dark spot was one pupil's comment that it was an age 15 film. We pointed out we were only showing an extract suitable for their age range, and took comfort when we discovered that two-thirds of them had already seen the film!

Episode 4

Focus: Researching the army.

We now wanted the pupils to add to their spy sheets, using information from the pictures. So, we split the class into nine groups of three or four pupils. Each group had three copies of a single picture. They had to use this to find answers to the questions (theirs and mine) on their Roman Army *Spy sheets*. They would move on the word '*Change!*' to the next set of picture clues.

This we did quickly and effectively – a technique we had introduced in the ‘Mystery suitcase’ lesson three weeks before. There was lots of on-task talk and involvement, working on the spy sheets. We only had time for four sets of clues before break.

Episode 5

Focus: Writing the report.

Break went on a long time as an assembly followed, in which it seemed that every child in the school received an orienteering certificate! But, back to work with 45 minutes to complete the lesson. We wanted to make sure that the report was as fully and carefully structured as possible. I did not have a ‘model’ report to demonstrate and analyse – I assumed that they had already worked extensively on this particular genre.

We were conscious of the need to provide triggers for the field of the report – its content. (The *Spy Report: Caesar’s Army* has trigger words and smart words to help in the writing.) The final section was designed to make the children think clearly about how to use their information.

We decided next to go through what was involved, so we worked out the structure of the report genre on the blackboard. This covered three elements:

- setting the scene
- details of what we would write about
- the advice we would give to Caradoc

In working out the report genre’s framework, we stressed tenor throughout, identifying the authorial perspective, and how the writing would be directed towards a specific, clearly and fully defined audience. For details see the ‘Report Genre Frame’ (Resources 5) which we worked out with the class.

A sense of audience: we discussed who the children were writing for, and the point of view from which they were writing. They all realised that they were writing for Caradoc, as his son Dylan or daughter Emma.

Episode 6

Focus: Writing.

The pupils then wrote their reports, using the *Spy report: Caesar’s Army* sheet and the Report Genre Frame to guide them.

Learning outcomes

The children:

- gained a detailed understanding of the Roman army, its weapons and fighting methods
- were able to use and synthesise a range of sources to construct their understanding of a past situation
- developed skills in questioning and discussing evidence
- deepened their understanding of the report genre: they organised a plethora of information to write well-structured, vivid and accurate reports.

Reflection

This was a bubbling, enthusiastic and driving piece of teaching which culminated in the pupils' written reports. It was interesting using carefully structured supports for the pupils' literacy at each stage, engaging them in a whole range of modes of expression, with a stress upon questioning, discussion, reading of a text, exposition, engagement with a visual stimulus, and writing in both expressive and transactional modes.

Nuffield Primary History project

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