



INVESTIGATING HENRY VIII

BRITAIN AND THE WIDER WORLD IN TUDOR TIMES

Teachers' notes

The school is a rural village primary school comprising 220 children within eight classes. My class is a mixed Year 4/5 whose history topic for the term was the Tudors, with an allocation of twelve hours teaching time. The lesson described here took place some way into the topic. Consequently the children already had a relatively detailed background knowledge of this historical period through a stimulus visit to Shrewsbury, an investigation of everyday Tudor artefacts, and the use of secondary sources for research.

From an early stage, Henry VIII had captured children's interest and imagination. The lesson was designed not only to raise questions about accepted opinions and historical interpretation, but also to build upon the questioning approach which the children had used to interpret the artefacts, and which had proved so successful.

Increasing children's abilities to raise and answer questions is an area which I believe to be an essential skill with both cross-curricular and wider applications, and one which I am keen to develop further. Although the texts used in the lesson were challenging, they were presented as short quotes designed both to focus the children's attention and not appear overwhelming.

The lesson required the children to consider carefully their own opinions about Henry and anything that they knew about him. This was followed up by a literacy lesson in which they used the evidence to express a point of view regarding Henry's suitability for kingship and, ultimately, a whole class role-play which involved the children in conducting a mock trial of Henry VIII and his actions.

Year group/class and teaching time

A class of 27 children, Years 4 and 5, of very mixed ability.

One hour and a quarter.

Learning objectives:

For the children to:

- investigate Henry VIII's character
- use source material to develop questioning skills
- develop the skill of interpreting evidence.

Key questions

What was Henry VIII really like?

How can we find out?

What can we learn from the evidence?

Can we trust what the evidence tells us?

Resources

KWLW table (What: do I **K**now, **W**ant to know, have I **L**earned; and **W**here did I learn it from) – adapted from NLS.

Two sets of comments about Henry, one positive, the other negative.

(The comments were taken from the following resources:

Siliprandi, K (1995) *Henry VIII*, Wayland, ISBN 07502 1448 1, pp. 6,7

Hebditch, F (1995) *Tudors*, Evans, ISBN 0237 51455 9, p. 7

Junior Focus (1995) *Henry VIII pack*, Scholastic.

Lacey, R (1996) *The life and times of Henry VIII*, Weidenfeld, ISBN 0 297 83163 1)

A1-sized copy of a Holbein painting of Henry VIII.

One quote about Henry VIII using Tudor spelling, blown up to A3 size

The teaching

Episode 1

Focus: Brainstorming ideas about Henry VIII – children's opinions [10 minutes].

I wrote 'Henry VIII' on the board, giving no other verbal or visual clues. I gave out the KWLW table and asked the children, working individually, to write in the first column anything they knew about him. After five minutes I told them I would like them to record in the 'Where I learned it from' column how they knew this information.

The children found this task easy and, almost without exception, enjoyed the opportunity to write a great deal of invective against Henry! They mainly came up with opinions about his appearance and his use of punishment, indicating that their knowledge came from a relatively wide number of sources.

Episode 2

Focus: Discussion of our current views about Henry, and how these have been formed [10 minutes].

Using the board, I wrote down words and phrases which the children used to describe Henry, as a record for later in the lesson.

We then focused upon how we knew this about him and discussed whether we could trust the sources of our prior knowledge to give a true picture of Henry.

The children suggested questions to investigate further, and from this came a general consensus that they wanted to know if their poor opinion of him reflected what he was really like.

We discussed how we could find out, and the children suggested that we needed more evidence. I told them that we were going to use source material from the time, and asked them why they thought this might be useful.

Episode 3

Focus: Introducing source material – discussion and modelling [10 minutes].

I displayed the A3-size quote about Henry, containing some challenging spellings. I set mixed ability pairs to try to interpret its meaning. They were asked to say what they could learn about Henry from the quote and feed back to the whole class. The majority of children worked at the literal level, but some were able to take it a stage further, raising questions about Henry's duties as King.

As a whole class, we discussed what we had found out from studying the quote and the importance of using evidence to support our opinions.

I now modelled on the board how to highlight the parts of the text which gave information about Henry, and recorded this information on the flip chart.

Episode 4

Focus: Working on the source material to interpret the evidence.

I split the class into three mixed ability groups and, within these, paired children of differing ability for support with reading and to enable them to share ideas with greater confidence. Each group's task was to interpret one of the source packages, establishing what it told them about Henry in terms of his character, behaviour and public opinion.

Group 1 had the positive sources. These consisted of two sides of written comments about Henry, together with a brief description of who had made each comment.

Group 2 had the negative sources. Two sides of comments about Henry and by Henry.

Group 3 had a copy of Holbein's painting of a middle-aged Henry. The children had used paintings as source material before, and were used to looking for clues.

I didn't tell Groups 1 and 2 that they had either positive or negative comments – both groups believed that they had source material of a similar content and nature.

They recorded what they had learned about Henry from the sources on a sheet of paper.

Episode 5

Focus: Plenary - sharing ideas about Henry, how opinions might have changed and the validity of the sources [15 minutes].

I hoped that the children would be surprised by their results, so I asked them to feed back in groups, starting with Group 2 (negative comments), then the painting group, followed by Group 1 (positive comments). The report-back allowed the children to demonstrate what they had learned from the sources and to consider different perceptions. We examined an OHT of a selection of each group's comments as they fed back, together with the painting.

The children were surprised by the differences in their findings, prompting one child to ask if they were all about the same person.

We then discussed why we should have such different views of the same person, which raised questions about source reliability. The class noted the fact that most of the negative comments had been produced by foreigners. The children suggested reasons for this, including the following:

'They were jealous that we had such a good king...'

'They didn't like him making himself head of the English church, when it should have been the Pope ...'

'They didn't like the way that Henry was so rude about the foreign wives he married ...'

Eventually, one child who finds it difficult to express himself in writing suggested that it was 'because they felt safer and Henry couldn't behead them, so they could say what they wanted.' This observation in turn raised questions about whether these negative comments were closer to the truth because they were spoken by foreigners, or whether the fact that the people quoted were less likely to have met Henry meant that they were less likely to be accurate, being based more upon rumour than upon fact.

Subsequently, the children decided that the majority of positive comments had been written by English citizens, which meant that Henry

was more likely to hear what had been written and would hopefully reward their loyalty. From this discussion we were able to produce a set of questions which should enable the children to interpret source material more skilfully in the future, namely:

Who said/wrote/created it? Why did they? Who was it for?

To conclude the lesson, we had a class vote to establish whether Henry was in fact a better person than we had originally believed. Our results showed that about one third believed he was!

Learning outcomes

The children:

- worked in small groups to interpret evidence which was often quite challenging
- felt confident to share ideas in a whole class situation
- learnt to question their initial interpretations of the past
- learnt to question the validity of evidence
- used evidence to support a point of view.

Reflection

I felt that the lesson achieved most of what I had intended, and that in this respect it had been successful. I was particularly pleased with the enthusiasm of the children, and with the discussion about why there was such a discrepancy in the nature of the evidence presented in the feedback.

The questions which followed demonstrated that the children had gained a basic understanding that evidence needs to be looked at in the context in which it has been produced. The class also demonstrated that they were operating at a level that enabled them to make deductions and, at a simple level, inferences.

With hindsight I would probably have reduced the number of comments to enable them to focus upon one or two in greater depth, rather than a range in less detail. When the children were working independently, I found that they were interpreting the comments mainly at the literal level, and when they did make deductions they were less inclined to write these down because they didn't feel 'safe,' and lacked the confidence to commit their ideas to paper.

I feel that it would have been more beneficial to devote longer to the discussion of the evidence and make notes on these ideas, rather than on reading the evidence at the literal level, although this remains a valid exercise.

I was happy with the progress made by children of all abilities.

They worked well in mixed ability pairs and groups and all the children were able to access the evidence through working with a partner.

In future I would make greater use of *text breakers to provide further support, and would provide a recording sheet for children with special needs to provide them with a more structured approach.

The class discussion enabled children of above average ability to present their ideas and explain their reasoning and, through questioning, their thinking was extended further.

**For text-breakers see the Nuffield Primary History website:
Teaching methods > Reading documents*

Nuffield Primary History project

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