



## VICTORIAN BRITAIN: BRUNEL AND CLIFTON SUSPENSION BRIDGE

---

### TEACHERS' NOTES

The class was taught in a small rural school in Devon with 45 children on roll. The school has very limited history resources, consisting of *A Sense of History* published by Longman, the BBC pack *Invaders* and the *Book Project for the Victorians* by Fiona Reynoldson. The school has no programmes of study but certain topics are covered during specific terms. The term's topic was The Victorians.

To use the history text within the literacy hour the lesson was divided into similar sections to those suggested in the National Literacy Strategy. The focus for the lesson was a picture, used as a text.

The literacy hour genre was non-fiction. In it we studied a specific Victorian, Brunel, and his effect on Victorian Britain. This we introduced through a pictorial text. The Victorian world comes to life through the picture, providing an insight into a Victorian designer's inventiveness.

We subsequently linked the picture to an information text so as to gain a greater understanding of Brunel, and his relative success and impact.

**Year group / class** Year 5/6, mixed age, ability and gender.

**Teaching time** One hour – the literacy hour.

#### Key questions

- When do you think that the bridge was built, and why?
- Who designed the bridge?
- What sounds, colours and smells would you experience on visiting it?

## Learning objectives

- To understand Brunel's design and the Victorian environment surrounding it, through working on the picture of the Clifton suspension bridge.
- To use the picture and historical facts to bring the scene alive.
- To develop in pupils an understanding of the newspaper report genre through creating their own reports.

(NLS Year 6, Term 1, non-fiction writing composition: 16 'to use the styles and conventions of journalism to report on e.g. real or imagined events.')

## Resources

The picture of the Clifton Suspension Bridge, blown up to A4 size.

## The teaching

Investigation of a picture through whole class discussion, creating word banks that the pupils then used to write an account of the bridge in a newspaper genre form.

### Episode 1 (8 minutes)

*Focus: Questioning. The pupils sat in groups with a copy of the Clifton Suspension Bridge picture blown up to A4, one picture between two pupils.*

The pupils were asked:

What can you see?

When do you think that the bridge was built, and why?

What colours, sounds and smells would you experience if you walked with the ladies in the picture across the bridge?

### Episode 2 (7 minutes)

*Focus: Creating the word banks for later writing.*

The nouns and adjectives given in response to the third question were put up in columns on the board.

The pupils then wrote them down in their word banks.

### Episode 3 (15 minutes)

*Focus: Whole class discussion.*

The children participated in a discussion about the Clifton Suspension Bridge and its designer, Brunel. In order to do this the pupils relied on their previous knowledge of the Victorians, and compared the bridge with ones that they knew.

**Episode 4** (20 minutes)

*Focus: Bringing the picture to life; writing a newspaper report.*

Our next step was to bring the picture to life.

So the pupils were asked to write in the genre of a newspaper report for the local paper on the grand opening of the Clifton Suspension Bridge.

I asked the pupils :

What does a newspaper reporter require?

We brainstormed, listing the ideas on the board.

The pupils then used their word banks to help set the scene, thus bringing the event to life.

**Episode 5** (10 minutes)

*Focus: Resolution – reporting back to the whole class.*

Some of the pupils then read their completed reports to the rest of the class.

Next the pupils discussed Brunel and his famous inventions, and tried to think of other famous Victorians, leading into the following lesson on Florence Nightingale.

I then made up the reports into a newspaper for the school library.

**Learning outcomes**

- Oracy: the pupils were able to discuss cogently as a class both the picture and the nature and role of Brunel.
- Detailed observation: answering the questions about the picture required close, detailed observation.
- Genre understanding: the newspaper work deepened understanding of this genre form, and engaged pupils in extended writing, using their informed imaginations.
- Public performance skills: the reading of the newspaper account required the pupils to perform in public and present their ideas.
- Vocabulary: the lesson extended the pupils' vocabulary through **pooling and discussing** words.

**Nuffield Primary History project**

**General editors:** Jacqui Dean and Jon Nichol

**Author of this unit:** Anna Davies

School of Education, University of Exeter, February 2000

© Nuffield Primary History 2000

downloaded from [www.nuffieldfoundation.org/primaryhistory](http://www.nuffieldfoundation.org/primaryhistory)