



## CHILDREN IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR BRITAIN SINCE 1930

### Teachers' notes

The school is a voluntary-aided primary in Liverpool. For our half-term history unit we investigated the lives of children in the Second World War.

I wanted to identify ways in which ideas based around literacy concepts could be used during history lessons, and vice versa, with the aim of extending literacy through history. I began by identifying the key literacy genre I wanted to introduce the children to (recount-writing, specifically diary-writing).

Then, using the QCA scheme of work as a starting point, I thought about how I could incorporate the recount genre into the history planning.

**History:** The Year 6 class undertook a range of activities. They examined photographic evidence; read a range of topic books about the war and the Blitz; watched a film about Merseyside during the war; listened to and questioned a grandmother who had been a child in the war; and visited the Stockport Air Raid Shelter.

**Literacy:** The class novel was *Goodnight, Mr Tom*, and at the end of each day the class listened to an audio-taped episode from the novel. During guided reading the class read newspaper reports about air raids on Liverpool, paying particular attention to people's comments to encourage empathy. We also read and discussed extracts from Anne Frank's Diary during guided reading sessions. Linked to this, in drama we looked at 'Dealing with being excluded', bringing in a PSCHE element. We incorporated other cross-curricular elements too: in art the class completed observational drawings of war artefacts, and the children used ICT to search websites (e.g. the Imperial War Museum website) for information about aspects of World War II.

The three lessons described came at the end of the topic, and here we united history and literacy completely.

## Year group/class and teaching time

Year 6, mixed gender and ability, 26 children in the class.  
Three 45-minute sessions.

## Learning objectives

**History** - for the children to:

- develop understanding of how the bombing involved and affected ordinary people
- to select evidence about the experiences and feelings of children during air raids from a wide range of information sources, and to communicate their understanding through a war diary based upon evidence.

**Literacy** – for the class to:

- write short diaries in the recount genre, using vivid descriptive language, and demonstrating empathy with children in World War II.

## Key questions

What do you think would have happened during an air raid?

What do you think you would have felt, seen, smelt and done during an air raid?

What evidence can we use to help us write a reliable diary account?

## Resources

Large (A3) sheets, post-its, planning sheets, felt tip pens.

We had used the following resources earlier in the history unit. During the three lessons described below, the class drew on their learning from these resources:

Story: Michelle Magorian's 1981 novel *Goodnight, Mr Tom* (Viking Press). We used the book itself, a video of the 1998 ITV film version *Goodnight Mister Tom*, starring John Thaw, and an audio-recording of the book. The video/DVD is available from Amazon, or can be watched online: see [www.itv.com](http://www.itv.com).

Topic books: on the war and the Blitz.

Artefacts: many brought in by parents.

Photographs: supplied by the Local Authority (Sefton).

Video: *Merseyside at War*, supplied by the Local Authority.

Oral history: Laura's grandma visited the class to share her experiences.

Visit: we had a class trip to the Stockport Air Raid Shelter.

## The teaching [Lesson 1]

**Episode 1** *Focus: Thinking about diaries; imagining an air raid.*

We began by revisiting earlier learning. I asked the children: 'What makes a good diary account?' Here we drew on the diary mind-map that we had completed during an earlier literacy hour. I told the class that in today's lesson they would begin writing their own diary accounts, and this would be linked to our history topic work.

We had visited the Stockport Air Raid Shelter the previous day, so I next asked the children to close their eyes and imagine how it must have felt to be there during a real air raid. I then asked them to think of three things they had learnt from the visit to Stockport, and to share their thoughts with the person sitting to their left. Judging by the buzz of conversation they had learnt a lot!

To help the children who find imagining difficult, we now watched a short clip from the ITV film *Goodnight Mister Tom* – the episode where Mr Tom heard the air raid siren in London. Using the film clip as a stimulus, we discussed:

- what the children saw; e.g. the air raid warden (What were his responsibilities?)
- the sounds they heard
- Mr Tom's feelings, linking these to the feelings the children had had the previous day in Stockport.

The children's responses drew on the film, the Stockport visit, and also on Laura's grandma's experiences. Some children also selected information from other sources looked at in class (books, newspapers, photos, artefacts).

## Episode 2

*Focus: Using the senses; language self-assessment; beginning diary-writing.*

I put the class into mixed-sex pairs, and each pair wrote on post-it notes words and phrases that they could have heard, smelt, felt and done as they entered the air raid shelter after the siren had sounded. The class loved doing this, and filled scores of post-it notes.

Each pair then chose their favourite words/phrases and stuck them onto large sheets of A3 paper I had pinned to the wall. Once the A3 sheets were full, I challenged the class to look hard at their words and phrases and to think about which were likely to be the most authentic. These were the words/phrases they should consider including in their air raid diaries.

I now modelled to the children how I would begin my diary. Next I set the class, in their pairs, to write the beginnings of their own diaries. This they did for around 15 minutes.

In the plenary, each pair swapped work with another pair, and discussed what they could improve and what they liked.

## The teaching [Lesson 2]

### Episode 1

*Focus: Editing first drafts of Blitz diaries.*

The session began with recapping what we had completed in the previous lesson. I then modelled how to edit, because I had noticed that some children had found this difficult.

Then we watched another extract from the *Goodnight Mister Tom* film, this time covering being inside the air raid shelter. Afterwards we again had a class discussion about what they had seen in the film clip. This helped the children to articulate what they could see, feel and infer, and formed a valuable preparation for writing.

### Episode 2

*Focus: Using planning sheets.*

After our discussion, we prepared for writing the next instalment of the air raid diaries. Instead of using post-its, the children jotted down ideas straight onto planning sheets. Today I made the paired children swap roles, so that it wasn't the same child always writing.

The children wrote for twenty minutes. This gave me the opportunity to work with two struggling pairs for ten minutes each.

## The teaching [Lesson 3]

### Episode 1

*Focus: Discussing feelings; using evidence to justify answers.*

Today we moved on to stage three of the diary narrative: leaving the air raid shelter. As before, we began by watching a film clip, this time of Mr Tom leaving the air raid shelter.

Then, sitting in a circle, the children took it in turns to say what emotions Mr Tom must have been feeling, and used this as a starting point to discuss how a child would have felt. The children had to justify their conclusions by referring to historical information.

We related this discussion back to the senses the children had recorded on their planning sheets in the previous lesson.

### Episode 2

*Focus: Completing diary accounts.*

I now talked about what I would include in my diary and modelled my ending to the class. The children now spent about 15 minutes completing their air raid diary accounts.

### Episode 3

*Focus: Plenary – judging the reliability of diary accounts.*

In the plenary, the children read aloud their diary accounts and provided one another with constructive criticism. The children had to state where they had selected their information from, and whether they thought it was reliable.

I was pleased to see that the children also noticed how different many of the accounts were. This clearly helped them to understand that not everyone had the same story to tell of the war – that interpretations, perceptions and experiences of events could vary.

### Learning outcomes

The children:

- developed an understanding of what it was like to experience an air raid
- were able to move imaginatively into the past and see it through the eyes of those who lived through the war
- completed diary accounts in the recount genre containing relevant and authentically-based historical information.

### Reflection

I spent more than the allocated time on this one area of the QCA topic, and I was glad that I had. The benefits were immense, as the children really got their teeth into the topic. They read around the subject, brought in books from the library and researched on the internet.

The topic also improved home-school links: grandparents were willing to share experiences and parents brought in artefacts they had at home.

The link to historical fiction also proved to be invaluable. The children found it easy to cross-reference the fiction with evidence they had found in the primary historical sources. They absolutely loved trying to pull historical sources to pieces: ‘Is it reliable, though?’ was definitely a favourite phrase.

Dividing the learning into three short lessons was worthwhile; it enabled the children not only to take their time with their writing, but also to decide upon what information they wanted to include. On reflection, I should have let the children choose their own working partners. Perhaps someone would have liked to work on his/her own, or in a same-sex partnership. However, as this topic was done near the beginning of the year, it did break down gender barriers in the class.

Finally, letting the children explore a range of evidence in a variety of ways - visual, auditory and kinaesthetic – also proved to be beneficial. Some children found the trip to the air raid shelter most helpful, others the visit from a grandparent, and yet others preferred watching the *Goodnight Mister Tom* video extracts or reading books. My structured approach worked – what was great was that no child ever said: ‘I don’t know what to write’, and their short diary accounts spoke for themselves.

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