



## THE AZTEC EXPERIENCE: WORLD HISTORY

### TEACHERS' NOTES

The school is a one-form entry combined school. History is highly regarded and its time allocation has not been reduced since the advent of the numeracy and literacy hours. The project for the summer term in Year 6 was the Aztecs. The children were introduced to the topic by means of a story: *How the Aztecs came to the valley of Mexico*. A comparative study was done of the current structure of British society and that of the Aztecs. The pupils also used an extract from an anonymous conquistador as a source in order to draw pictures of an Aztec man and woman.

The next lesson, described here, focused upon history providing a context for literacy and making the history more meaningful for the pupils. The lesson was based on the literacy hour format, but continued later in the day. The text used was a brochure for advertising a holiday. The lesson consisted of demonstration and modelling of the holiday brochure genre, and the transfer of understanding of the generic form into an historical context. This took the form of the pupils producing their own brochures giving information about life in the Aztec capital, Tenochtitlan.

#### **Year group /class**

Year 6, 34 pupils of mixed ability and gender.

#### **Teaching time**

One hour within the literacy framework and one hour outside the framework

## Learning objectives

### Literacy

#### *Text level*

- Review a range of non-fiction text types and their characteristics.
- Use appropriate style and form to suit a specific purpose and audience.
- Secure control of impersonal writing.

#### *Sentence level*

- Revise language conventions and grammatical features of a range of text types.
- Revise and use the impersonal voice and passive voice.

#### *Word level*

- Practise use of independent spelling strategies.
- Demonstrate use of extended vocabulary in own writing.

### History

Understand features of daily life in the Aztec capital, Tenochtitlan.

### Key question

What was everyday life like for the Aztecs?

### Resources

A range of recent advertisements for holidays – one might be made into an OHT

#### **Publications we found useful:**

Webster, C. (1998) *100 Literacy Hours*, Scholastic, 9 780 590 539180

Place, R.(1992) *Exploration and encounters*, Ginn, 0 602 25147 8

Defrates, J. (1998) *What do we know about the Aztecs?* Macdonald Young Books, 0 7500 2349 X

Wood, T. (1992) *See through history: The Aztecs*, Reed International Books, 0 600 57285 4

## The teaching [Lesson 1]

*Focus: Introducing the genre – looking at a selection of holiday brochures.*

The children gathered at the front and we looked at different holiday advertisements. We discussed their purpose, focusing on the persuasion aspect. I asked the children to identify different methods that the text used to entice the reader. They came up with three categories: the pictures, the descriptions, and the facilities available.

We then focussed on an advertisement for a summer camp, looking at it as a class on the overhead projector. We discussed similarities in presentation and style to the other holiday advertisements. I asked the questions:

- Does it sound exciting?
- Would you like to go?
- What aspects particularly appeal to you?

## Episode 2

*Focus: Shared reading – examining the use of persuasive language in the summer camp brochure.*

We now focused on the language in the summer camp advertisement.

Together we compiled a list of all the persuasive words and phrases in its text.

We discussed how the words in the list try to persuade the reader.

We reviewed our understanding of the language conventions of persuasive texts:

- opening statement followed by a series of arguments and a conclusion
- written in the simple present tense
- use of discursive connectives.

We looked for examples of these in the text.

## Episode 3

*Focus: Highlighting adjectives in the text.*

We discussed the list of persuasive words we had compiled and looked more closely at the types of words the advertisement had used. The pupils were able to tell me that they were descriptive words, and some of them were able to tell me that they were called adjectives.

## Episode 4

*Focus: Group tasks – modelling advertisements based on the shared reading.*

I divided the class into three groups and asked them to write advertisements, following the conventions we had identified earlier.

The first group was asked to write an advertisement for a summer holiday activities club for older children; the second group was asked to write a simple advertisement for younger children to attend an after-school club; and the final group was also asked to write an advertisement for younger children to attend an after-school club, but with a focus on persuading their class-mates to attend as helpers.

## The teaching [Lesson 2]

*Focus: Writing a brochure inviting pupils to visit the City of the Aztecs.*

During the afternoon, we looked at a range of sources about the life of the Aztec people.

I invited the pupils, in groups, to create brochures that could be used in a tourist information bureau or a travel agency to try to persuade people to come to Tenochtitlan. They were to glean information from the Aztec sources and produce their advertisements using the conventions learned during the literacy hour session of the morning.

This was an enquiry-based activity, with the pupils using their sources to extract relevant information to use in their brochures. It required the pupils in each group to pool what they had learned.

The creation of the brochure meant that each pupil had to transfer a knowledge of the brochure genre from the earlier experience to the historical situation.

## Learning outcomes

### History

The children gained:

- understanding of everyday life in Tenochtitlan
- practice in engaging with historical evidence to develop their understanding
- understanding of how the past can be interpreted and presented in different ways.

## Literacy

The pupils were able to:

- identify many of the conventions used in the advertisement and were quite perceptive in identifying possible difficulties in small print or asides
- identify adjectives in persuasive texts.

## Citizenship

- The pupils worked co-operatively, sharing ideas, negotiating, developing a joint product and sharing the enjoyment of engaging in a fun activity.

## Reflection

Although the pupils were able to pick out the persuasive words and phrases, I am not convinced that the majority totally grasped the concept of adjectives and I believe that more work is needed in this area.

The group sessions were too short, and the children were definitely not able to create work of a high standard. However, it did allow them to practise some of the conventions.

During the afternoon session, I was surprised when many of the children seemed a little unsure of the task I had in mind, despite all the preparation that had gone into it. It was interesting that they found it difficult to transfer the skills from the morning literacy exercise to the historical task in the afternoon.

The children needed longer than the hour to complete the task properly. This I later gave to them and I was pleased with the results.

The brochures did identify well those children who needed extra practice in using the present tense and sticking to it, and others who are still unsure about how to use formal language properly.

### Nuffield Primary History project

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