



THE MYSTERY OF THE MISSING CAKE AT KEY STAGE 1

I wanted to create a history mystery similar to those written for key stage 2 (see the KS2 'Mystery of the Missing Cake'), where the children become detectives, practising enquiry skills that lie at the heart of history. The challenge was to devise activities and materials suitable for children in the early years.

History is about people, so I thought about characters that Year 1 children might know and would be able to relate to (e.g. Winnie-the-Pooh, the Mr Men, Teletubbies).

Fortunately I had soft toys of some of these characters, so we did preliminary work on their distinctive features: I brought in a bag with the soft toys in it, and sat the children on the carpet at my feet. As I pulled each toy out of my 'special' bag, the children discussed his or her character. They then recorded their understanding of the characters through differentiated work (drawing, dictating to a scribe or writing).

The story of the crime

My next challenge was to invent a mystery using the toy characters. The previous term the children had baked a cake and iced it. Building on this experience, I created a story in which one of the characters baked herself a birthday cake. She put it on a table beside the open window to cool, but later, when she came to fetch it to ice it, it had disappeared. The question for the children was: *Who stole the cake?*

The suspects

I then introduced eight toy characters, saying they had been in the area at the time. Using their knowledge of the characters, the children had to reason which of the eight characters might have been the thief.

Child detectives

The mystery worked wonderfully well in stimulating the children to use the connective 'because', and in developing the processes of reasoning from the evidence. For instance '*It could not have been X, because he would not have stopped rushing!*' said Tom.

These five- and six-year-olds soon went beyond 'because'. The demands of hypothesising extended their reasoning, and they were soon using conditional tenses (if ... then) with ease in their spoken language.

Work in class

After the discussion about who might have done the deed, I gave the children differentiated work for recording the story and their answer to the question of who stole the cake.

For example, Jed, one of the most able children, wrote his own version of the story, then completed a sentence saying who he thought was guilty, and why.

Nazia and her group were given a brief text of the story printed as a book for them to illustrate. The group read through the story with the classroom assistant, then drew their pictures to illustrate each page. They then each wrote a conclusion about who had stolen the cake, or had it scribed by the classroom assistant.

The children enjoyed creating their books and showed them off proudly.

Learning objectives and outcomes

All three lessons were taught within the framework of the literacy hour.

The mystery provided a genuine context for extended speaking and listening, reading and writing. At the same time the children were learning some of the skills and processes of history: questioning, enquiry, interpreting evidence, using and applying existing knowledge, hypothesising, reasoning, deducing and remembering the plot of the story.

The children also developed personally and socially as they considered the theft victim's feelings and how we could restore his happiness. Viewed in this way, as skills, processes and attitudes, it is possible to see how important history can be to the early years curriculum, and how children's cognition can be accelerated through engagement with challenging and stimulating activities.

Copyright restrictions prevent us from identifying the specific characters used with the children.

Nuffield Primary History project

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