

CASE STUDY 6: DRAMATISING BOUDICCA AND THE CELTS

A CASE STUDY FROM THE CLASSROOM

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Introduction

The story of Boudicca lends itself equally well to both history and drama. As a key part of work on 'The Romans', it is an example of how history and drama when used together can contribute to children's understanding of sources of evidence and how these can be used to achieve greater understanding of the daily lives and the likely views and opinions of people living in the distant past. Children can also begin to understand how contradictory accounts of people and events arise. They can communicate their understanding through the use of dramatic techniques.

This article outlines some ideas on ways of linking drama and history, which were explored in a series of drama sessions run in a Manchester school. The sessions used an historical context to engage children's imagination. We have identified five lessons to give a flavour of the kind of work

that can arise from linking history and drama. The lessons bring to life the thoughts and feelings of Celtic villagers when confronted with the prospect of a major war against the invading Romans. A class of Year 5 children re-enact key points in the events leading up to war using a number of dramatic techniques.

Much of the dramatic activity requires children to act in role, and the roles change frequently. It is useful, therefore, to have some sort of 'cue' to facilitate these changes in role to help the lessons run smoothly; lighting is suggested here.

Context of the lessons

The children are first told that they are going to do some 'time travelling', starting in a museum, looking at some ancient objects from Celtic times, and then travelling back to see what it might really have been like to live in those times.

They are also going to have the chance to meet the great Celtic Queen, Boudicca.

The classroom is arranged like a museum for the beginning of the lesson, with artefacts, replicas and pictures of artefacts arranged on tables around the room.



LESSON 1

Objective:

History:

- Historical enquiry Find out about the events, people and changes studied from an appropriate range of sources of information, eg artefacts, pictures, accounts.

Activities:

The teacher explains that the children are in a museum, and they are the curators, the people in charge of the exhibits.

The children act in role as museum curators, examining the artefacts, and speculate as to their purpose or use.

Plenary:

They present their theories at a 'research meeting'.



LESSON 2

Objectives:

History:

- Chronological understanding
Place events, people and changes into correct periods of time.

Literacy Framework: Traditional stories:

- Group discussion and interaction
Plan and manage a group task.
- Drama:
Perform a scene making use of dramatic conventions.

Activities:

Children examine a picture of a Celtic village. They describe it and compare it to a modern day village, looking for similarities and differences. They consider how long ago such a village would have existed and use a timeline to trace back to the Celtic period.

The teacher lowers the lights in the room and asks the children to imagine what life might have been like for the people who live in a Celtic village like the one they have just seen. She explains that they are now travelling in time back to the age of the Ancient Celts. The teacher adopts the role of a fellow villager, who welcomes the tribe into the meeting hall. The children are encouraged to take on the role of Ancient Celts, surrounded by some of the things they would have used in everyday life.

The objects are sorted into groups according to their function, ie all the domestic objects are grouped together separating out those used for cooking and those used for other things, such as jewellery, combs etc. Other objects are sorted into sets of tools or weapons.

The teacher organises the children to work in groups and allocates each group one of the objects.

In groups, children talk about and enact the moment when the object was lost. For example, a child may be eating from a bowl, which is dropped on the floor when she runs to her mother. Or perhaps a tool might be broken, and thrown with other useless objects onto a rubbish heap. The children decide on various different scenarios, which they rehearse together.

Plenary:

Out of role, the group views the enactments using the criterion of likelihood. They give critical feedback to each group.

LESSON 3

Objectives:

History:

- Historical enquiry
Find out about the events, people and changes studied from an appropriate range of sources of information, eg artefacts, pictures, accounts.



Literacy Framework: Traditional stories:

- Group discussion and interaction
Plan and manage a group task.

- Drama:
Perform a scene making use of dramatic conventions.

Activities:

Children examine further pictures of Celtic villages:

- In groups, children establish 'families', deciding on the role of each person in the group.
- Each family creates a tableau of life in the village, for example, feeding the cows, milking, digging, washing clothes, scraping hides, sewing, cooking, etc.
- Each 'villager' speaks his/her thoughts in turn as they carry out their jobs.
- In the same groups, each family creates a short sequence of still images representing a typical day in the life of the village.

Plenary:

Each group then adds a narrative to their sequence and presents their work to the rest of the class.

LESSON 4

Objectives:

History:

- Historical interpretation
Recognise that the past is represented and interpreted in different ways.

- Historical enquiry
Find out about the events, people and changes studied from an appropriate range of sources of information, eg artefacts, pictures, accounts.

Literacy Framework: Traditional stories:

- Group discussion and interaction
Plan and manage a group task.

- Drama
Perform a scene making use of dramatic conventions.

Citizenship

- Preparing to play an active role as citizens
Why and how rules and laws are made and enforced, why different rules are needed in different situations and how to take part in making and changing rules.

Introduction:

The teacher raises the issue of conflict. She outlines some of the situations which might cause conflict within the village or with neighbouring villages and tribes. For example, food might be stolen, or cattle taken away by neighbours. The teacher poses the question, 'How does the village make decisions?' She explains that this is the problem which the class needs to solve in their roles as Ancient Celts.

Activities:

- Again, in a dimmed room, the children assume their roles in order to become once more the Ancient Celts.
- The children establish a ritual for turn-taking at meetings. For instance, they may use an object which is passed from person to person which gives them the right to speak.
- The teacher sets up a village meeting; villagers share news and stories.
- The meeting is interrupted by a 'stranger' (Teacher in Role as a messenger from the Romans), bringing news of the arrival of the Romans and a warning about a very evil woman called Boudicca. The messenger reads out to the meeting a description of Boudicca and a warning sent to their village by the Roman governor:

There is a most dangerous enemy near to your village, who goes by the name of Boudicca. She is very clever and more intelligent than you would expect a woman to be. In stature she is very tall. If you have the bad luck to see her, her appearance is terrifying. As she glances towards you, her eyes are most fierce and her voice is harsh. You can recognise her easily, by her immense size and the great mass of the tawniest hair which is so long that it falls to her hips. Around her neck wears a large golden necklace. She wears a tunic of colours over which a thick mantle is fastened with a brooch. She is now usually seen grasping a spear to aid in terrifying all who have the misfortune to see her. You are urged not to let this woman into your village or to listen to her.

After the stranger's departure, the villagers discuss what they should do if Boudicca does come to the village.

Plenary:

They vote and a decision is made.

LESSON 5

Objectives:

History:

- Historical interpretation
Recognise that the past is represented and interpreted in different ways.

Literacy Framework: Traditional stories:

- Group discussion and interaction
Plan and manage a group task.

- Drama:
Reflect on how working in role helps to explore complex issues.
Perform a scene making use of dramatic conventions.

Citizenship

- Preparing to play an active role as citizens
Why and how rules and laws are made and enforced, why different rules are needed in different situations and how to take part in making and changing rules.

Activities:

The class re-assembles in role as Ancient Celtic villagers. They resume their discussions about Boudicca and what they think of what they have heard.

- A message comes from a neighbouring Celt, who rushes into the meeting out of breath – the Great Leader is about to arrive.
- The villagers make preparations, according to their view of Boudicca.
- Boudicca (Teacher In Role) arrives. The villagers receive her and sit down to listen to what she has to say. They are impressed by her fine clothes and royal appearance – signified, perhaps by a cloak:

I am Queen Boudicca of the Iceni people. We are good, honest people, who work hard like you and have much to lose from these evil invaders, the Romans. I do not come just as a Queen however. I come as one who has had terrible wrong done to me and to my family. I have seen my own treasures stolen by the Romans, treasures and lands that were left to me by my dear dead husband. I have been whipped and beaten, and so have my daughters, in front of our own people.

But we have fought against them so well that now these brave legions are hiding in their camps, afraid what might happen next. They will not be able to stop us in our armies of thousands when we charge and beat them. We have right and justice on our side, for we need revenge for what they have already done. We must fight them to win or die in the attempt.

- Boudicca (TIR) sweeps out of the meeting and the villagers begin to talk about her. They discuss what she seems like, compared with what the Roman messenger said the day before.
- The villagers realise that Boudicca brings prospects of war. They discuss what they should do. Will they support Boudicca or not? A vote is cast and the decision made.

Plenary:

- The children think about their decision; were they right? Should Boudicca fight the Romans?
- On the eve of the battle, if they could give advice to Boudicca, what would it be?
- The children form a 'Conscience alley' – two parallel lines of children. As Boudicca walks down the 'alley' created, the children – still in role as villagers – whisper their advice to her. Afterwards 'Boudicca' can tell the group of the decision she has made: to fight. 'Prepare for battle!'
- The villagers position themselves to wait for the Roman attack. In small groups children create freeze frames showing the Celtic villagers at readiness.
- As the villagers 'look down from their fort', they hold their freeze frames and speak their thoughts aloud.
- The villagers continue to hold their freeze whilst the teacher reads the account of the battle. (see appendix)

As a conclusion to the series of lessons, the children consider how acting in role helped them to think about the problems faced by the Ancient Celts.

What learning takes place in activities like these?

As can be seen, these activities relate to specific requirements in the history curriculum, the Framework for Literacy and the curriculum or Citizenship.

In the first lesson, the children are using the skills of historical enquiry to solve the problem of what the artefacts might be and what they might have been used for. They are developing skills in source analysis through asking and answering questions, while at the same time practising their dramatic skill of role play. Lessons two and three develop their sense of chronology; they are travelling back in time and the teacher could emphasise this point through the use of devices to illustrate the 'distance' they are going, such as a timeline or a line of string carefully scaled so that they can 'measure' back to the Celtic period. They are extending their sense of period, through the work with pictures of reconstructed villages and through the use of drama, their historical imagination.

Lessons 4 and 5 begin to introduce notions of decision-making and conflict resolution, issues related to citizenship education. The children are also introduced to the idea of different versions of Boudicca, along with the decision about whether to take her side or not. Throughout the series of lessons, the children have ample opportunity to communicate their historical understanding through drama and speaking and listening. The children who took part in these lessons found them thoroughly enjoyable because they were both inclusive in their approach and motivating for all who took part. They are not likely to forget their experiences of Boudicca and Celtic life.

Appendix

The teacher can choose which battle to read about at the end depending on the effect they wish to produce, since Boudicca won several battles, but of course, lost her final one. The following websites contain some different brief accounts:

The final battle

www.romans-in-britain.org.uk/
www.bbc.co.uk/history/historic_figures/boudicca

The battle of Colchester

www.24hourmuseum.org.uk

The sacking of London

www.24hourmuseum.org.uk

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