# CASE STUDY 3: RESEARCHING HISTORY

## TIME TRAVELLERS AND ROLE PLAYERS

— Zara d'Archambaud

## Introduction

'Ok children, time for history.'
Distant moans from the back of the class.

Would I be surprised by this reaction?

No, not if the teacher was diligently following the QCA guidelines for teaching history.

Yes, if the teacher had realised the potential of using drama to teach history and had consequently injected lessons with the life, passion, enjoyment and the relevance that drama can offer.

Unfortunately in far too many primary schools the teacher's subservient attachment to the QCA schemes of work, with its limited use of the medium of drama, has left many pupils feeling bored, disengaged and the passive recipients of information.

This is the reason why I decided to carry out an intervention project in 2002 as part of my MA in Education. I strongly believed that drama has the power to engage and motivate teachers and pupils in their teaching learning of history. Furthermore in engaging the pupils drama can develop the skills needed to access the history curriculum and make the learning real. In the current unrelenting, yet necessary, drive to raise standards in literacy, drama has the potential to make creative links between history and literacy and raise standards through enjoyment of learning rather than simply through being able to answer a Standard Assessment Tasks question.

## The Context for the Study

The study was carried out in a middle school and involved three Year 5 classes and their teachers. The school was situated in a culturally diverse area with approximately 50% of pupils claiming free school meals, over one third on the SEN register and standards below national expectations.

## The Intervention

The intervention involved an 8 week scheme of work based around The Aztecs. I worked alongside the teacher modelling the drama techniques and supporting the teachers to deliver them independently. Each lesson involved the drama techniques that are described in the approach section. Pupils and teachers were interviewed pre and post the intervention on their attitude and perception of learning in history.

## The Drama Approach

My approach to enhancing the QCA schemes of work is based around the Time Tunnel approach where the pupils can travel to any time in history and gather evidence using their history skills to build up an understanding of the time.

## Roles

During the lessons the teacher will either play the role of a Museum Curator or lead character from the period of history. The pupils will either play the part of Researchers of the Past (ROTP) or characters from the period of history.

It is important that the pupils are clear which roles they are in and are responding to. A scarf and ID badge can be used to signify the Museum Curator and ID cards for the Researchers of the Past.

This approach can be adapted across the QCA topics so eliminating the 'no time plan drama' argument. The majority of the approaches involve all the pupils and so discard the audience getting restless scenario and the 'I don't want to stand up on stage in front of everyone' excuse.

## The Process

Pupils go into role as Researchers of the Past

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Researchers of the Past are called to the museum (Adapt to suit needs e.g Aztec Museum, Museum of the Tudors)

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Researchers of the Past meet the Museum Curator who tells them about their assignment and that they must travel through the time tunnel to reach the period of history that will give them the opportunity to find out the information.

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Researchers of the Past travel back in time using the Time Tunnel. The time tunnel can be a constructed prop or linked arms to form an archway.

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Researchers of the Past arrive in the period of choice and set about gathering the information. *

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Researchers of the Past return to the museum with their information. The teacher in role as the Museum Curator then questions the Researchers about what they have found out. **



* The information that the Researchers of the Past (ROTP) gain whilst they are back in time can be gathered in various ways:

- ROTP observing the teacher in role then interviewing the character.
- ROTP hotseating the teacher in role.
- ROTP helping the character to solve a problem.
- ROTP asking the character for help on identifying artefacts, pictures, problems.
- ROTP becoming involved in a series of events (pre planned by teacher/teaching assistants/pupils in role).

** When the ROTP return back to the present day museum they can draw upon and apply the information in various ways:

- ROTP are questioned by the Museum Curator.
- ROTP set up a museum exhibition.
- ROTP work in action groups to address a problem or issue given to them by the character that they have met.
- ROTP write a newspaper article.
- ROTP create a play based on key events that they have observed. Thought tapping can be used to empathise with the character's feelings.

This approach gives the children a way to access and acquire information and skills other than watching a video or reading a book. It also provides the opportunity for the children to internalise and reflect on the information and skills needed in order to develop a richer level of thinking and learning.

## Applying the Principle

These are examples of how this process can used to enhance the teaching and learning of history as set out by the QCA guidelines.

| QCA | QCA suggested Activity | Dramatising the QCA |
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| Unit 7: Why did Henry V111 marry 6 times? What was Henry VIII like as a person? | Give the children a written description of Henry and ask them to underline the key descriptive words. Ask them to compare these words with what they have already heard about Henry VIII. | ROTP go back in time and meet Henry (played by the teacher). Children hotseat Henry with their pre written questions then take the information back to the museum. |
| Why did Henry divorce Catherine of Aragon? | Give the children a text with a simple description of Henry's problems, eg the need for a son, Catherine's age, the need for money. It should also include a few solutions. Ask the children to identify the problems. Help the children place the problems in order of importance and to suggest solutions and produce a grid with two columns: problems and solutions | ROTP go back in time and meet Henry who tells them about his problems. ROTP then go back to the museum and form action groups to find solutions to his problems. They can then return to Henry and suggest solutions to him. |
| Why did Henry marry six times? | Ask the children to suggest reasons why Henry married six times, eg need for alliances, falling in love, need for power, money. Ask them to list the reasons in order of importance. | ROTP plan a This is Your Life for Henry. They can gather the information from evidence in the museum or going back to visit Henry and other significant people. |
| Unit 9: What was it like for children in the Second World War? What was the World War? | Establish what children already know about the war. Use their responses, or provide a brief narrative, to introduce key information, including when the war took place, the main countries involved, why it started (Hitler's invasion of other countries and why Britain tried to stop him), how it was fought (invasion of other countries, mass bombings, sinking of ships using submarines), the names of leaders (such as Hitler and Churchill), and the defeat of Germany and Japan by the allied nations. | Explain to the ROTP that they will be going back in time to find out about WWII. They could be sent back with key information, words, names or questions. On their return they will be asked to create an exhibition in the museum.<br><br>Forum theatre could also be used to retell the sequence of events that led up to the war. Thought tapping could be used to find out more about what key characters might be thinking. |
| What was it like to be an evacuee? | With the children's help, produce a list of questions about evacuees. Ask the children to answer the questions using selected sources, eg photographs, extracts from novels, oral accounts, letters, memoirs.<br><br>Ask the children to imagine they are evacuees and to write a letter home or diary extracts. | Explain to the ROTP that they are going to build up their own profile of an evacuee. To help with this they will go back in time to meet some WWII children. Once they have established their own profile they will return to WWII to a town hall where they will be evacuated to the country.<br><br>This activity could also include Conscience Alley depicting the pros and cons of being evacuated. |

## Conclusion

After eight weeks of using the time tunnel technique with the children, the enthusiasm and quality of learning was very much evident. The drama helped the children to acquire knowledge but more importantly with understanding this knowledge. The benefits of using drama to teach history demonstrated by the post intervention interviews and ongoing observations can be grouped as follows:

- Drama helped reach pupils of all abilities.
- Drama improved historical understanding through empathy.
- Drama was motivating.
- Drama aided the quality of information recall.
- Drama helped pupils to question and problem solve.
- Drama improved pupil participation and had a positive effect on behaviour.

As a teacher and Headteacher I believe engagement is the key to effective learning. When I visit classes I look at the children and their faces, it is lessons where the children demonstrate unrestrained excitement and absorption in their learning that remind me why I went into teaching.

Drama has the potential to give children and teachers more of these lessons and change the answer to 'what did you do at school today?' conversation from the classic 'nothing much' to 'We have been learning about the Aztecs. We went back in time and met an Aztec, he was making one of those islands. What was it called…? Oh I know Chinampas. We helped them make their island on the lake because the god told us to. We had to put posts into the bottom of the lake and weave branches around them then fill it with mud.' (Year 5 pupil)

**Zara d'Archambaud** is headteacher of New Marston Primary School, Oxford.