

History

primary
subjects

issue two autumn 2008

Supporting gifted and talented children

'I speak from personal experience when I say that a passion for history often starts at a young age. My life-long love of history began in primary school with a project to study the planning and building of the new town where I lived. It brought my own community to life in a wholly new way, linking the past to the present.'

Lord Adonis, Schools Minister



It is a long way from a poor background as the son of a Greek-Cypriot postman to that of a life peer and junior minister in the British government. Yet Andrew Adonis is on record as having his youthful imagination fired by primary history, with a love of the subject that took him to Oxford and beyond. But how could we spot such a child in our own class today?



Identifying gifted pupils in history

Children gifted in history may:

- perform at advanced literacy levels for their age
- show particular skill at inference and deduction
- synthesise information well and draw inferences and conclusions from a range of sources of evidence
- use subject-specific vocabulary confidently
- establish, follow and contribute well to a line of enquiry both independently and in discussion, making relevant contributions and substantiating points with evidence
- understand complex source materials and challenge content with growing independence
- demonstrate extensive general knowledge, including a significant amount of historical knowledge which they can easily recall
- develop with ease a chronological framework (schema) for existing and new knowledge
- derive a strong sense of period from study
- be intrigued by the similarities and differences between different people's experiences of times and places and other features of the past
- thrive on controversy, mystery and unpicking evidence
- without prompting, refer to prior learning, spot irrelevance and anticipate future connections.

Some examples of giftedness in primary history learners

A Year 6 pupil, researching World War II, compares it to wars studied previously and also to World War I, which has not been studied at all.

A Year 5 pupil very quickly organises cards with possible causes of an event into different types of cause, discarding irrelevant cards and creating new ones to be added to the original set.

Unprompted, a Year 4 pupil brings to a class discussion about Elizabeth I details from the life of Queen Victoria, recalled from key stage 1.

A Year 3 pupil takes the lead on producing a group display on the Roman army, researching additional material and organising his classmates well to complete an excellent display.

On her own initiative a key stage 1 pupil puts 'teddy bears' into a search engine as part of a history topic. She downloads various images and edits and labels her collection into a booklet in chronological order.

Unlocking their gifts

'Focus on expertise, on mastery of the subject'

Professor Deborah Eyre, former director of the National Academy of Gifted and Talented youth

How can we give these gifted and talented pupils rich learning opportunities to encourage mastery in primary history?

Enquiry questions

These overarching key questions drive the learning activities of a lesson or sequence of lessons and suggest learning objectives and outcomes that help pupils to answer the questions. Activities should prompt open-ended questions that encourage higher order thinking and get pupils asking sophisticated questions of their own.

Challenges to pupil thinking

Challenging pupils, at every point of the learning, encourages them to understand that much historical knowledge is provisional and that there are several possible answers or solutions to an historical question or problem.

Using rich, authentic resources

Going beyond the standard two-page spread of a textbook, or handing out a worksheet, will stimulate children's curiosity and fire their imagination. It means giving children access to real or reproduction artefacts which they can handle and analyse; total immersion in a small selection of fascinating resources to study in depth; well-organised visits to historic sites and museums and skilful use of visitors to the classroom.

Cognitive conflict

Cognitive conflict, where a pupil's ideas can be challenged, extended and possibly modified by debate with their peers and teachers, should be built into sequences of learning. For example, in your assessment for learning you can include Shirley Clarke's 'talking partners' concept¹.

Mastery learning

Pupils experience history as a body of knowledge (factual content) but more importantly as a discipline shaped by subject-specific concepts and processes (National Curriculum 'knowledge, skills and understanding'). For example, you might ask a Year 4 child 'Was Henry VIII a good or bad king?' and the pupil might reply 'Bad, 'cos he killed two of his wives', thus answering an historical question by reference to evidence. Obviously, if you were to ask David Starkey the same question, the answer would differ greatly in depth and understanding, but the pupil and David Starkey are united in being able to answer by reference to historical evidence – an essential component of the history discipline. You are drawing the pupil into a historical community of enquiry.

¹ www.shirleyclarke-education.org

Examples of practice

Enquiry question: What is true about our local stories? (key stage 1)

As part of a local history project, pupils contribute ideas to teacher-scribed fictional stories based on local legends and museum artefacts. Such stories might represent reworkings of local folk tradition and could be told by a local storyteller (local museums sometimes have such people on their contact lists). After the storytelling, pupils could pose questions to a local historian about the authenticity of historical details included in the stories.



Local folk storyteller, Raymond Greenoaken.

Enquiry question: Which toy is the odd one out? (key stage 1)

Display three types of toy differing in age, size and type. Prompt pupils to suggest which one might be the odd one out and explain the reasons for their choice. In further discussion, compare pupil answers and allow them to change their minds and justify this change. You can buy original and reproduction toys, or borrow them from a museum under a loan box scheme. Alternatively, appeals to parents and grandparents can attract local artefacts for use in this activity at no cost.

Enquiry question: Could the Great Fire of London have been stopped from spreading? (key stage 1)

Give pupils 'cause cards' which describe/illustrate various causes of the Great Fire of London – for instance, the dry summer of 1666, the initial inaction of the Lord Mayor, etc. During discussion they arrange these in order from short- to long-term cause, then discuss which cause cards could be taken out and might have prevented the spread of the fire. If your school is within travelling distance, the Museum of London has reopened an exhibition on the Great Fire which would make an excellent initial visit or follow up.



Enquiry question:
Which period of history is the most important to us today?
(key stage 2)

Give upper juniors a range of categories for judging the importance of historical periods they have studied at key stage 2, e.g. technology and inventions, language, form of government, etc. Different groups prepare presentations for different periods, selecting evidence to support the case that their period is the most important. The presentations are given to their peers and lead into a balloon debate on the most important period. As the answer is open-ended, this activity encourages cognitive conflict and higher order thinking.

Enquiry question:
How can we recreate the Field of the Cloth of Gold?
(key stage 2)

Using a rich array of contemporary evidence (both monarchs actually wrestled with each other and vied for

who could provide the most magnificent hospitality!) pupils study the events surrounding the meeting in 1522 of Henry VIII and Francis I at the Field of the Cloth of Gold. As this was a meeting of English and French monarchs, teach pupils some of the activities at court (e.g. dancing) in French. Round off the enquiry with a role play in which pupils recreate the meeting with some activities using rehearsed French.

Enquiry question:
How can we market our local history?
(key stage 2)

Ask pupils to complete a study of the history of their local area, comparing original sources of evidence with its environment today. They prepare a heritage trail, promoting historic details and ignoring any downsides to the area. These trails may be presented to the class and individual pupils 'hot seated' about the effectiveness of the trails as marketing material. This kind of activity mimics the way that history can be used to market the heritage of a local area and invites pupils to question how this is done

Enquiry question:
How do we know how the Romans lived?
(key stage 2)

Prior to a visit to a museum or historic site with evidence of Roman life on display, pupils undertake mock archaeological digs with real or reproduction Roman artefacts buried in sand trays. Pupils participate in discussion about what they can infer from what has been uncovered and discuss how their views have been confirmed or changed by the museum visit itself. This activity taps into popular TV programmes such as *Time Team*, which have done so much to widen the public appeal of archaeological methods of historical investigation.



Left: Fragment of an engraving of The Field of the Cloth of Gold, engraved by James Basire in 1774 from an oil painting in the collection of George III of England.



History news

Web resources

There are resources, some of them free to download, on the Historical Association website (www.history.org.uk) for supporting gifted and talented pupils in primary history, for example:



Thinking about questions to ask a sailor who knew Christopher Columbus, an example of practice from a key stage 1 Water topic. Over three weeks, children studied this famous explorer who 'discovered' America in 1492. It shows how Year 2 children can be primed to ask higher order questions about an historic figure.

Dramatising Boudicca and the Celts shows how drama can be used to encourage higher order questions and cognitive conflict. Primary pupils play villagers of the period who receive conflicting messages from adults in role as a Roman messenger and Queen Boudicca. They debate and decide the best course of action.

The Dramas of History, written by national expert Luke Abbott, explains the use of the drama pedagogy 'Mantle of the Expert', developed by the renowned Dorothy Heathcote. Pupils are cast as members of a 'company' who have to develop solutions for a 'client' and become 'expert' in their role through the use of dramatic imagination. This approach lends itself well to history, particularly the development of historical imagination and problem solving.

Mastery learning

One way of meeting the needs of gifted and talented pupils can be to direct them towards resources for learning that were created for older pupils. The National Archives publishes excellent resources on its Learning Curve website (www.learningcurve.gov.uk), including a recent interactive exhibition on World War Two. This has been devised for key stages 3 and 4, but what is to stop you using it with younger pupils if their reading and understanding allow them to access the materials.

The exhibition provides animated maps and commentary on each of the main theatres of war with a range of resources '... that few people other than academic scholars will have seen before.' These have been carefully chosen for their historical significance and for their potential interest and accessibility to students. For example,

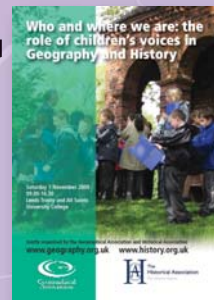
The Historical Association
59a Kennington Park Road
London SE11 4JH
tel 020 7735 3901
fax 020 7582 4989
www.history.org.uk



investigation asks 'Why did Britain win the Battle of Britain in 1940?' Pupils are given a range of source material, some of it marked 'Top Secret'. They have to prepare an outline of a TV documentary on the Battle of Britain, deciding how much time to devote to the programme to different factors that emerge from the sources. This methodology imitates the work of professional historians and represents an example of 'mastering learning' for gifted and talented primary pupils.

Who and where we are: the role of children's voices in geography and history

Trinity & All Saints University College, Leeds
Saturday 1 November 2008
One way of encouraging gifted and talented pupils is by listening to their voices, reflecting on their own learning (metacognition), and devising their own questions and lines of enquiry. Gifted and talented pupils can add real value to the concept of 'pupil voice'.



The keynote themes at this conference, organised jointly by the Historical Association and the Geographical Association, are 'Past, Present and Future: Influencing Whole School Policy' (Professor Simon Catling), 'The Primary Curriculum' (Professor Robin Alexander) and 'Lessons from Research upon History Teaching for the Gifted and Talented' (Professor Jon Nichols).

Interactive workshops include 'Citizenship through history, with a case study' and 'Local studies – England's Past for Everyone'. Book online at www.geography.org.uk/events/gahaconference.

BBC Active History Age 7-11

BBC Active are publishing a series of resource packs that extend primary history topics based on QCA schemes of work. The first available are *Victorian Britain* and *Romans in Britain*. The range of stimulating resources compatible with interactive whiteboards include up to 45 video clips of related BBC TV footage. As well as accessing original sources and providing a useful search engine function, the video clips can be linked to an onscreen notebook suggesting activities and questions. Unlimited user licences can be installed for £99.99 on the school network. To explore and order visit www.bbcactive.com/schoolshop.



Heritage Explorer

On the Heritage Explorer site (www.heritageexplorer.org.uk) teachers of primary history can access historic photographs and images free of charge. The archive of over 360,000 images includes views of daily life, aerial photography and modern shots of listed buildings. Supporting information and a range of teaching ideas are included.

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