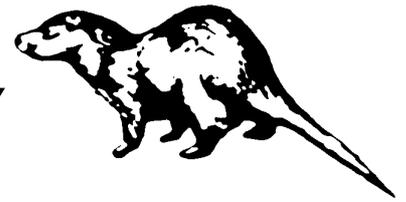


NUFFIELD PRIMARY HISTORY



SAMUEL PEPYS AND THE GREAT FIRE OF LONDON

TEACHERS' NOTES

The two sessions described here were the second and third in a seven-week unit looking at the plague, the great fire of London and Samuel Pepys as a famous person. The teaching took place weekly, for half a morning. In the first session the children had posed their own questions about the fire; we had told the story of the fire from Samuel Pepys' perspective; the children had role-played trying to put out the fire with hooks, squirters and buckets of water; and they had examined pictures of said equipment and of London before and during the fire.

Here in the following two sessions, we take the investigation further, through: the reading of genuine historical sources, both pictorial and written; debating causation; and sequencing. The children communicate their understandings through structured writing, individually and in groups.

Year group/class

Year 2, mixed ability, 29 in the class (18 are boys, many of whom are immature, poor listeners).

Teaching time

Two lessons of approximately one hour each.

Learning objectives

For the children to:

- engage with and analyse real historical sources
- read texts, both written and pictorial, effectively
- gain an insight into causation through debating reasons for the spread of the fire
- extend their literacy through a contextualised writing task in the form of a diary account.

Key questions

- How did people react to the fire, and why did it spread so quickly?
- What can we tell about Samuel Pepys from his portrait?

Resources

Samuel Pepys' diary, extract (OHT, plus one copy per pair of children)

OHT of picture: *A London street in the fire*

Question cards: *Why did the fire spread so quickly?*

Reasons sheet

Portrait of *Samuel Pepys*

Diary frame: *The Great Fire of London*

Sheet of sentence strips

The teaching [Lesson 1]

Episode 1

Focus: Shared reading; getting inside the text; using an original source.

The previous week we had compiled a list of the children's questions about the fire. Their first question was: 'How did the fire start?' We had then told the story of the fire through the eyes of Samuel Pepys, concentrating on his personal experiences. We had not told them how the fire began.

So today we would try to answer their question. Samuel Pepys had written in his diary how the fire had started. Would they like to read what he actually wrote? Solemn nods all round.

We put the extract *Samuel Pepys' Diary* on the overhead projector, and gave the children copies, one per pair.

Together we read it aloud. Now we know *where* the fire started. We filled in the details of *why* and of the baker's family's escape over the rooftops.

Next we set each pair to fill in the table below their text. For the last category, 'interesting words', we asked the children to look for words that made the writing sound alive and helped them to see a picture of the fire in their minds.

Sorting categories like this has a double benefit: the children keep returning to the text to find items, so become increasingly familiar with it; and it is useful for word level work – in this instance proper nouns and interesting words.

After five minutes we pooled their table entries, explaining words like Lieutenant, and discussing how the interesting words and phrases they'd identified made them feel. Their list:

fling, heart full of trouble, rage, quench, mighty high.

What else is Pepys saying? We reread the last two paragraphs of the diary extract. The children were shocked at his claim that no-one was trying to quench the fire. Was Pepys right? Can we find any other information that comes from the time?

Episode 2

Focus: Reading a picture – playing ‘I-spy with my little eye’.

Yes, we had a picture. We put up the OHT of *A London street in the fire*. What could they see?

To get the children observing closely and using accurate vocabulary we began with a game of ‘I-spy’, then moved on to talk about the items people were trying to save. What was important to them? How were they getting their goods away? Why was the woman in the window lowering something in a sheet rather than flinging it out?

We decided that Pepys’ description was spot on, when compared with the picture – both were telling the same story about people’s reactions.

Episode 3

Focus: Debating causation – why did the fire spread so quickly?

Time to put our thinking caps on. We posed the question: ‘Why did the fire spread so quickly?’ Again the children worked in pairs. We gave each pair a key question card, a sheet of possible reasons, and a pair of scissors.

Their task was to decide which were the most important reasons, that is, to rank them.

This worked well, with much discussion and argument, and a range of decisions made. Most thought wind and dryness were the key factors. Some had divided the reasons into two rows: ‘very important’ and ‘not so important’.

Afterwards we talked about their choices. We posed questions such as: If it had been raining, would there have been a fire? If no wind, would it have spread so far? ‘They’re all important, aren’t they?’ said Cordelia. Yes, clever girl – the reasons are interconnected.

The children then stuck the reasons into their books, in their order of preference.

The teaching [Lesson 2, after a two-week break]

Episode 1

Focus: Concepts of fame.

We gathered the children on the carpet and began by asking: Samuel Pepys is a famous person to us, but was he famous in his own time? ‘No,’ chorused the children.

Quite right, although he was quite important: he had a senior position in the navy office. We explained how crucial the navy was in wartime, and how England fought with Holland during Pepys’ time.

Next question: What makes people famous?

We pooled the children’s answers on the flipchart:

- inventing things
- writing books
- being an actor
- being a pop star
- being a scientist
- do kind things
- rescue someone
- being in the royal family.

Great, but how do we *know* about them? They can’t be famous unless everyone has heard of them, like Posh Spice and David Beckham. Have you all heard of them? (Yes, of course.)

Right, well *how* do you know? We compiled a second flipchart list:

- the news
- newspapers
- films
- television
- radio
- comics
- magazines
- posters
- books
- live shows

Could we have found out about Posh and Becks through the media on this list? The children scanned the list closely. Yes, through every item.

Episode 2

Focus: Being famous in the past – how was it different from nowadays?

Our next question: ‘Could Samuel Pepys have become famous by any of these methods?’ Back to the list went the children’s eyes. We discussed each medium in turn. The class decided: No – none of these means

seemed likely, and most of them did not exist in his day (they were impressively accurate in their assessments). The only faint possibilities, they decided, were books, posters or live shows.

So, in Pepys' time, how did people come to hear about you? How *did* you become famous? 'They could make announcements in the town,' suggested James. Yes, well done.

We now introduced the idea of portraits. As there were no photographs, people would have their portraits painted instead. Only royalty and wealthy, important people could afford to pay to have their portraits painted.

Episode 3

Focus: Providing a framework for reading/analysing portraits

Back to the present. Do you all know what the lottery is? (Yes, of course.)

I have an important announcement: one of you is the winner of this week's lottery – with a £10,000,000 jackpot. Ryan, it's you!

We called Ryan up to the front and told him that photographers from television and the national newspapers were coming round the next day to take pictures of him. He would be on every news broadcast and every front page in the country.

Now, Ryan, your family and everyone who knows you will see this picture. You will probably keep it in your family photograph album, and one day your children and grandchildren will look at it. So, how do you want to be remembered?

We asked him, in turn:

What expression will you have on your face? (smile or look serious, full face or profile?)

What clothes will you wear? (smart or casual, hat?)

What about your body pose? (sit or stand, position of arms, legs?)

What props and background would you like? (the cheque, bike, toys, pet, your house, countryside?)

We wrote each category on the board as we went along, to re-use with the Pepys portrait.

Ryan responded with aplomb, striking a proud pose for the cameras, metaphorically wearing a smart jacket and tie, gameboy in hand. Much merriment all round.

Episode 4

Focus: Analysing Pepys' portrait.

The children now had a framework for analysing portraits from any era. We gave out *Samuel Pepys' portrait*, one per pair.

It's an unpromising picture, black and white and rather fuzzy, having been blown up from a small illustration in a book. However, it was the only one I could find that included useful props for analysis.

We examined it in terms of each of the four categories (face, clothes, body pose, props/background). The children did well, deciding that he was trying to look important and serious, was wearing expensive clothes and wig, was showing he was a writer because his hand was resting on his diary (no alternative suggestion to the diary was tolerated), was showing he liked music because there was a guitar on the table. There was some dispute about the meaning of the ship in the background – it shows he travels a lot, it shows he likes ships, it shows he works for the navy. All good suggestions.

Episode 5

Focus: Writing a diary of the fire (structured account; sequencing).

Back to our desks. We asked: 'Do you think you could write a diary of the fire like Samuel Pepys did?'

The children were confident that they could. We gave a quick resumé of the main events of the fire, as it was three weeks since they'd had the story.

We gave out the diary frames, *The Great Fire of London*, one per child, to support their writing. We told them they could draw pictures in the spaces under the days.

To the struggling writers we gave the sentence strips to cut out and paste onto the frame.

The children set to and wrote or pasted their diary events, illustrating them in lurid colour.

Over the following five days the children, in groups, each wrote one day's diary entry on the computer. They worked from their individual diary accounts and decided collaboratively how to pool these – which aspects from each child's work to include.

Learning outcomes

The children:

- began to gain an understanding of concepts such as fame and media.
- engaged with, compared and analysed real historical sources.
- read texts, both written and pictorial, effectively.
- gained an insight into causation through debating and ranking reasons for the spread of the fire.
- wrote structured sequential non-fiction accounts in the form of diary entries (*NLS, 2.3: Writing composition: to write non-fiction texts, using texts read as models for own writing*).
- developed their ICT skills through writing word-processed diary entries, and pasting flame icons onto the bottom of each entry.

Nuffield Primary History project

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