



WHAT WERE SCHOOLS LIKE IN THE PAST?

KEY STAGE 1

Teachers' notes

I wanted to introduce my class of Year 1 children to the idea of history as detective work. My intention was to help the children to begin to develop some of the *skills* of the historian, by making comparisons and finding similarities and differences between their school now, their teacher's school (my school in the late 1960s), an old granny's school in the late 1930s, and a school of around 100 years ago.

I also aimed to take the children *imaginatively* back to the past, so that they would see past people and their situations as real.

These two lessons addressed the first two sections of the key stage 1 breadth of study for history:

- changes in their own lives and the way of life of their family or others around them (in this case, me)
- the way of life of people in the more distant past who lived in the local area or elsewhere in Britain.

Year group/class and teaching time

Year 1, 28 mixed ability children aged 5 or 6.

Two lessons, each lasting 45 minutes. The second lesson took place a week after the first.

Learning objectives

- To introduce the children to the idea of history as detective work.
- To help the children to make comparisons and find similarities and differences between schools now and at different times in the past.
- To develop the children's skills of observation through close examination of sources – objects and pictures from the past.
- To help the children to develop empathy with past children through storytelling.

Key questions

What can we find out about the past from clues (objects and pictures)?

How were schools in the past different from ours?

Resources

A collection of things from my childhood: old school photos, swimming certificates, piano and Brownie certificates.

Topic Book from the Ginn History Pack (1991) *Schools: Looking at life in the past*. Ginn & Company Ltd.

Two posters of children in class 100 years ago. Pictures of Victorian schoolrooms are included in most topic books about the Victorians

WATCH video about children at school 100 years ago.

The teaching: Lesson 1

Episode 1

Focus: *Investigating clues – looking at the teacher’s own things.*

I displayed the objects from my past on a table (old school photos, swimming certificates, piano and Brownie certificates) and asked the children to be junior detectives. Who could all these things have belonged to?

I asked them three specific questions:

Do all the things belong to the same person?

What do we know about this person?

How do you know?

The children worked out that all the things had the same name on them, and deduced that the photos were probably of that same person.

I asked them who they knew who could swim and play the piano and they guessed that it was me.

Episode 2

Focus: *Comparing school life now and then.*

I told the children what life was like when I went to school regarding school meals, milk, uniform, and so on.

Next we looked at the school photos and searched for similarities and differences in terms of uniform, hairstyles, clothes, size of class.

Episode 3

Focus: *Story and discussion about school in the more distant past.*

I now read the children the topic book: *Schools*, from the Ginn History pack. It is about 60-year-old Elsie revisiting her old school and remembering what it used to be like when she was a child.

We had a discussion to follow up the story. I asked the children:

What do you think are the biggest changes Elsie found?

Would she think her school was better in the past, or better now?

Would we rather be at our school now or at Elsie’s school then?

Reflection

The children were very interested in my personal things. They were observant and noticed lots of details. They responded especially well to

the idea that they were going to be junior detectives and were thrilled to discover that the mystery person was me!

They enjoyed the story of Elsie and we had a very lively discussion about what she felt. If there had been more time I could have extended the activity by getting the children to talk in pairs or small groups, write lists of similarities and differences, and make a diary of our day to compare with Elsie's day.

The teaching: Lesson 2

Episode 1

Focus: *Reading pictures – schools 100 years ago.*

To begin this lesson I wanted to take the class even further back in time, to visit a school 100 years ago. Again, the focus was on looking for both similarities and differences.

I displayed the two posters of children at school around 100 years ago. The posters showed children sitting in rows at desks with very serious expressions on their faces. The teacher was standing up in front of the class, pointing with a stick to a picture on a blackboard. The children all had slates on their desks.

We had a quick discussion about what we could see in the pictures, focusing on clothes, equipment, pictures on the wall, light fittings and furniture.

We then had a quick game of *I Spy with my little Eye* to encourage really close observation of the posters. The class were very observant and found lots of small but interesting details in the pictures.

Episode 2

Focus: *Storytelling – an imaginative journey back in time.*

I now told the children a story about two little children who came to this school 100 years ago. The school dates from late Victorian times, so the buildings are over 100 years old. The key features of the story are as follows.

The children are called Emily and Daniel, and they are friends. Emily's father is very ill so Emily has to help her mother, who takes in washing. Sometimes Emily is late for school because she has been collecting washing or helping her mother to lift the heavy coppers of hot water to wash the clothes in. Daniel has to share a pair of shoes with his brother so he can't always go to school. The teacher is very fierce, and canings and punishments are an everyday part of school life. Daniel is caned for letting his desk lid bang. Emily's teacher conducts a handkerchief inspection. The children have to recite their tables and copy letter Fs onto their slates in their best writing. At the end of the day, Emily is very happy because she was not late for school and had remembered to bring a clean handkerchief.

Episode 3

Focus: *Watching a video; discussion about past children's thoughts and feelings.*

After the story, I showed the children a WATCH video about children at school 100 years ago. The story had already prepared them for many of the things they saw in the video, including the social background of the children at Victorian board schools.

A very thoughtful discussion followed, where the children exchanged ideas about what the Victorian children would have thought and felt about school, and whether they liked their teacher.

Reflection

There was a very high interest level throughout the lesson. The I-Spy game helped to focus interest on the posters, which were black and white and not very visually stimulating.

The children were spellbound by the story and all breathed a sigh of relief that Emily had escaped punishment. When they watched the video, they were already prepared and could pick up references from the story.

The children were attentive for the whole lesson and, while the older children could have continued, for the younger and less able children the 45 minutes was about right.

Learning outcomes

The children:

- began to develop enquiry skills through working as 'detectives'
- made comparisons and identified similarities and differences between schools now and at different times in the past
- developed their skills of observation through close examination of sources - objects and pictures from the past
- entered imaginatively into the past and empathised with children then.

Nuffield Primary History project

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