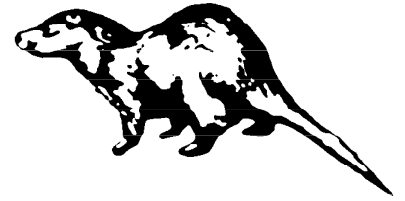


NUFFIELD PRIMARY HISTORY



LOCAL HISTORY: GRACE DARLING

TEACHERS' NOTES

The Year 3 cohort in the school has a wide spread of historical knowledge and understanding. However, the children had limited experience of evidence-based learning in key stage 1. Evidence-based tasks undertaken in Year 3 so far have shown a lack of understanding in the use of observed evidence to support their own conclusions; instead many children bring their own previous personal knowledge to these investigations, without looking at the clues in the evidence. I am increasingly observing collaborative and co-operative skills, but so far these are not widespread throughout the class.

I taught a short history topic on Grace Darling, using a painting as the main focus, to encourage evidence-based learning. The painting depicts Grace and her father rowing towards the rocks where the remains of the *Forfarshire* are resting, with the lighthouse in the distance.

The speaking and listening elements of the English National Curriculum were the main vehicle for the historical learning, as the children investigated the Grace Darling story through group and class discussion to investigate, select, sort, explain, justify, report and evaluate.

Year group/class

Year 3, 29 pupils with a wide range of abilities.

Teaching time

Three lessons, approximately one hour per lesson.

Learning objectives

For the children to be able to:

- closely observe a source of historical information
- record what has been seen in a way that is useful to others
- communicate what they have seen to other people
- use observations to support ideas and answer questions about a source of evidence
- begin to evaluate the reliability of a source of evidence.

Key questions

- What is evidence?
- Who uses evidence and why do they use it?
- What can you see and what does it tell you?
- How reliable is it?

Resources

Postcards of the painting: 'Shipwreck at Sea'. The painting appears in: Montgomery, W A and Weightman, M S (1999) Grace Darling.

The painting is also reproduced on the website:

http://www.whom.co.uk/squelch/doc_13.jpg

(Alternatively, bring up the search engine Google, click on Images, then ask for Grace+Darling. Four pages of pictures associated with Grace Darling will appear. Shipwreck at Sea is on the fourth page)

Picture frame sheet, enlarged to A3

Large copy of 'Shipwreck at Sea' for class use

'Using Evidence' activity sheet

Information taken from books and leaflets about Grace Darling, obtained from the Grace Darling Museum in Bamburgh

Transcript taken from the original newspaper report, published 15th September, 1838

Photographs and postcards showing Bamburgh and its environs

(Some of these, and additional pictures of Grace Darling, can be downloaded from the Google link described above).

The Teaching

The overall theme was: observing, questioning and using evidence.

Lesson 1

Episode 1

Focus: What is evidence?

We started with a teacher-led discussion around the questions:

- What is evidence?
- Why do we need it?
- Which people use a lot of evidence and what kind of job do they do?

The questions prompted a discussion, initiated by children who had experiences of burglaries, about the police finding the evidence to prove that a person had been involved. They also mentioned that different kinds of evidence were needed because people might say things that were not true – good thinking!

Episode 2

Focus: Using a picture as a source of historical evidence.

I now introduced the main activity of the lesson, telling the children that they were to be ‘history detectives’. The children were divided into small groups. I gave each group a postcard of the painting ‘Shipwreck at Sea’, and the A3 picture-frame sheet. Each group stuck its postcard into the frame in the middle of the sheet.

I now reminded the children about the difference between looking superficially and observing closely (we had practised this in earlier lessons, in relation to observing details of houses we could see from the classroom window). In the case of the picture on our sheets, we decided that a person who was just looking would see two people rowing their boat in a stormy sea. The next step was observing, taking a more detailed look to find out what was there in the picture, almost itemising what could be seen.

So, I asked the children to look very very carefully at the painting, then to take it in turns to tell the others in their group something that they could see in the picture. They could write their observations in the space around the painting. Much discussion and busy writing followed.

One child was convinced that the ship was the *Titanic* and that the rock in the painting was the iceberg it had struck. I questioned her

gently on a one-to-one basis, leading her to focus on the evidence in the postcard. She came to realise that she could not know for sure that it was the *Titanic* because there was no conclusive evidence in the picture to substantiate her opinion. She had changed her thoughts for herself without her original interpretation being belittled.

Episode 3

Focus: Sharing and recording what we have learned.

Each group now joined another group, and these bigger groups each discussed what they had observed in the painting.

Now we went back to the original smaller groups, and each group told the class about one item they had seen in the picture. I recorded their observations on the board.

Lesson 2

Episode 1

Focus: Introduction; using evidence.

I began by reviewing what we had done and learned in lesson 1.

I explained that when historians look at a piece of evidence they need to look carefully at what they can see. They then need to decide what the piece of evidence is telling them, and what it is about. So, again we are going to act as ‘history detectives’ questioning a piece of evidence.

Episode 2

Focus: Answering questions about the evidence (the painting).

I told the class that we were going to answer questions to help us find out more about what was happening in the painting. I wanted the children to learn to ask their own questions, but felt that first I should model suitable questions.

I gave out the ‘Using Evidence’ activity sheet, one per small group. I read through the questions on it with the children and pointed out the two spaces left at the bottom for them to add extra questions of their own, if they wanted to.

I reminded the children that for each question they needed to look in the picture for the evidence to support their answers. Each group chose a scribe to record their answers and set to work.

Episode 3

Focus: Plenary to discuss and debate questions, answers and evidence.

The whole class came together to discuss their own questions and mine, the answers to the questions and their evidence to support each answer.

When groups presented good examples of answering questions, and supporting these answers with evidence from the painting, it helped other children to refocus on the picture as a source of evidence. On the whole, the children did well. For example, they could tell me what time of day was shown in the painting and support their thinking by referring to the colour and mood of the sky.

They did find this activity more difficult than making observations (lesson 1). Many wanted to bring in their own concepts of shipwreck rather than working from the evidence in the picture to answer the questions. One group decided that the boat was rowing away from the wrecked ship (answer) because the ship was on fire (evidence). More observant groups said that the rowing boat was going towards the wreck to rescue people (answer) because it was facing the rocks (evidence) where the people were stranded. These contradictory answers prompted a discussion where we referred back to previous science work on forces and water resistance, and led to the children realising that the streamlined bow shape would be facing in the direction the boat was travelling – the people had their backs to their destination.

Not all the groups had used the space at the bottom of the ‘Using Evidence’ sheet to pose their own questions. Some groups repeated questions they had already answered, but most asked at least one helpful question, with answers supported by evidence drawn from the picture.

Here are some examples of children’s questions, answers and evidence:

- Was there birds in the picture? Yes – I have seen them at the top.
- Is the boat sinking? Yes – the edge of the boat is smashed back.
- Is the sea rough? Yes – the waves are high.
- Why are the people on the rocks?

The people don’t want to get washed away – you can see it.

- Are the people scared or not? Scared – the water is very wavy.

- Is the lighthouse far away? Yes – the picture of the lighthouse is little.
- Is the ship sinking? Yes – the ship is tipping right over.

At the end of the plenary we discussed other questions that the class wanted to ask, but that the picture itself could not answer. The children's questions focused on where the picture had come from and who the people in the boat were. The class decided that to answer these questions they needed other sources of evidence. This was really pleasing, as it showed that modelling questions had worked – and led us nicely into the next lesson.

Lesson 3

Episode 1

Focus: Telling the story of Grace Darling.

I told the children that the painting they had been studying was a copy of an original, painted to commemorate the brave rescue by Grace Darling and her father over 100 years ago off the Farne Islands, just off the coast at Seahouses in Northumberland.

I then told them the story of Grace Darling.

Episode 2

Focus: Beginning to evaluate the reliability of a range of sources of evidence.

Now I asked the children what evidence they would expect to see if the story was true. I introduced them to the various forms of evidence available in class. For example, I read extracts from an 1838 newspaper report of the event. The children found this tedious because of its length and elaborate language.

I also told them what can be seen at the Grace Darling Museum in Bamburgh: letters, newspaper cuttings, paintings, advertisements for the *Forfarshire*, clothes, the coble, plates from the *Forfarshire*, a lock of Grace's hair – and in the churchyard a family grave and monument. I had pictures of most of these to show them. Unfortunately we were not able to visit the museum itself.

We discussed the meaning of 'reliability'. The discussion included looking at dictionary definitions and the children recounting personal experiences. At the end many of the children were able to recognise

that the most reliable pieces of evidence were those which were ‘first-hand’, that is, from people who were there at the time.

They also decided that the Grace Darling rescue really did take place because some of the sources of evidence were reliable, and also that there were so many relevant ‘second-hand’ pieces of evidence available telling the same story.

Episode 3

Focus: Report-back on the reliability of different sources of evidence.

I now divided the class into small groups, giving each group a selection of evidence. I asked each group to discuss how reliable they thought their sources of information were.

Afterwards, the children gave reasons for and against the reliability of each type of evidence. I scribed their judgements on the board.

Learning outcomes

The children were able to:

- closely observe a source of historical information
- communicate what they observed to other people
- use observations to support ideas and answer questions about a source of evidence
- collaborate in groups, and clarify ideas through discussion and debate
- begin to evaluate the reliability of different sources of evidence.

Reflection/evaluation

Organising the children in small mixed ability groups worked very well, with a lot of evidence of co-operation, collaboration and involvement by everyone within the group, regardless of ability.

The work produced during and at the end of the sessions shows a need for further structured teaching and learning about observing and using evidence. It is not something that children do naturally. They need to be taught how to use what is in front of them, rather than using what they already know, where that is not supported by the evidence before them (as with the girl who thought the wreck was the *Titanic*).

My future work on observing and using evidence will include reinforcement through similar activities on different topics, using other

forms of evidence, as well as me modelling how evidence can be used to support viewpoints and answers to questions.

I will also use this teaching and learning style across the curriculum in other subject areas besides history, where programmes of study require children to give reasons for their answers.

Literacy

Curriculum constraints meant I had to restrict the Grace Darling history work to three lessons. However, I did manage to incorporate some work linked to this topic within the literacy hour. I asked the children to use the information they had found from the evidence, and to write a newspaper report about the rescue. The calibre of writing produced was better than that achieved in previous work. What was also noticeable was that some children who usually worked at a lower level than others did far better in their writing about Grace Darling. The gaining of knowledge through active involvement and taking some control of their own learning in history provided the children with both information and motivation to achieve well in literacy.

In future I will intertwine the two subjects to a greater extent.

Nuffield Primary History project

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