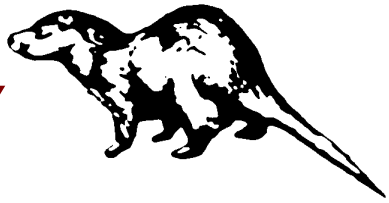
NUFFIELD PRIMARY HISTORY



LOCAL HISTORY STUDY /
BRITAIN AND THE WIDER WORLD IN TUDOR TIMES

THE DISSOLUTION OF A MONASTERY: HAUGHMOND ABBEY, SHROPSHIRE

TEACHERS' NOTES

The history topic for the summer term was the Tudors, and together with this we aimed to develop a Local History Study, based on the effect of the dissolution of the monasteries on Haughmond Abbey. History was to have extended teaching time through using the literacy hour to focus on reading and then to apply this to an historical context – a bit of an experiment to provide a possible model for this to happen across the rest of the school. I had drawn up an initial planning framework and would teach the first eight lessons, then a colleague would take over and follow the unit through. At the end of the term we would assess the strengths of the scheme before presenting it to the rest of the staff.

The children had been introduced to the topic through using a writing frame for a Fact Box (SATs model from Reading Test 2000). A commission from English Heritage had provided the spur to research and generate an historical index to help discover what had happened to the canons of Haughmond before and after the dissolution.

Literacy context

I felt able to apply lessons I had learned from the video clips of John Fines' teaching and the use of textbreaker strategies (see the Nuffield Primary History website 'Reading documents' in 'Teaching approaches') to enable children to access difficult and demanding texts. I had been exploring the idea of offering 'real' situations within the literacy hour to raise both verbal and written skills. Work on identifying types of questions to interrogate a text and raise understanding beyond the literal had also been a focus of reading strategy teaching. I set out to

create a series of teaching and learning experiences that would offer me an opportunity to explore the possibilities for developing the local history unit scheme of work and to make this particular area of historical research a meaningful and stimulating experience for both myself and the children.

Year group/class

Year 6, mixed ability and gender.

Teaching time

Two one-hour literacy hour lessons, plus a 30-minute plenary.

Learning objectives

For the children to:

• become familiar with using a textbreaker to access difficult and challenging texts;

• understand that spoken language and word usage may change over a period of time;

• understand that to be able to use an historical document as a source of evidence it is necessary to have a knowledge of specific vocabulary;

• be able to work in teams to pool knowledge and to produce a report for whole-class presentation;

• use evidence to offer a hypothesis about the 'suppression' quote.

Key questions

• Can we answer the commissioners' allegations as far as Haughmond Abbey is concerned?

• How reliable is this evidence?

Resources

Source 1 OHT of extracts from the introduction to: Halliwell, James Orchard (ed.) *The Poems of John Audelay: A Specimen of Shropshire Dialect in the Fifteenth Century*, Vol. 2, 1844.

Source 2 OHT of a verse of John Audelay's, from the above volume.

Sources 2–5 Four of John Audelay's verses, taken from the above volume, and presented in textbreaker form.

Source 6 Quotes from the Act of Suppression, 1536, taken from: *Dissolution of the Monasteries,* Piton Guide, Piton Pictorials, 1995, pp. 12 & 14, ISBN 0 85372 617.
8 paper copies in textbreaker format and 8 OHTs, one per group of pupils, plus one teaching copy.

The teaching [Lesson 1]

Episode 1

Focus: Introduction – review of previous fact-finding session on the dissolution; investigating the Act of Suppression of 1536.

After we had reviewed the previous lesson and discussed ideas about what the dissolution of the monasteries involved, we moved on to working on **Source 6** with its extract from the Act of Suppression giving reasons for closing down the *'little abbeys.'*

I divided the class into seven friendship groups, with each group sub-divided into pairs of 'buddies'. One member of each group was an observer, who would report on how well the group worked.

Each group was given a copy of **Source 6**, plus an OHT of it. They would use the OHT to present their translation/interpretation of the text to the class. I laid down rules on how the groups needed to work co-operatively on 'breaking' the text, producing their OHT translation and reporting back to the rest of the class.

I used an easel to model how the class should text-mark the difficult words and phrases in the source. They could then use their dictionaries and reference books to work out what the difficult words and phrases meant in their historical context. We then worked as a class through the text, using an OHT for shared reading.

Episode 2

Focus: Group work on deconstructing (breaking) the text.

Each group, both collectively and in 'buddy' pairs, now worked on its own copy of the text, marking the difficult and challenging words and phrases.

They completed the word banks, filling in the gaps on their textbreaker sheets through looking up the word meanings in dictionaries or reference books.

Each group used the vocabulary supplied, what it had discovered, and collective knowledge to make sense of and produce its own translation of the text.

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Episode 3

Focus: Report back and discussion; teasing out interpretations of the commissioners' motives.

Finally, each group reported back to the class its interpretation of the text, which served as the basis for the whole class discussion and debate.

The ensuing discussion about the motives of Thomas Cromwell in sending out the commissioners and the rather random nature of the visitations led the children to conclude that perhaps there were hidden agendas – Henry's autonomy, his need for money and a divorce being some of the topics raised. General feelings fell into two camps.

1 The commissioners were trying to please Henry and perhaps could have exaggerated their findings to justify closures. One pupil felt that Henry had asked Cromwell to 'dig up some dirt' on the monasteries at any cost to support his proposed actions. The general consensus was that perhaps some abbeys could have been lax about their behaviour and attitudes, but that further evidence was needed to confirm that all these little abbeys were practising *'abominable living'*.

2 The monasteries had slipped from the original idea of a prayerful community and fallen into *'manifest sin'*, and that the modern translation of the Act's text actually provided evidence of the kinds of things these lapsed monks were up to. This discussion also included some thoughts on the frailty of human nature. For instance, one pupil felt that a monk who had entered the monastery as a young child had perhaps as an adult experienced changed feelings and the lure of the outside world was proving too strong.

Reliability of evidence also became a debating point, which led nicely into the next episode.

Episode 4

Focus: Examining the key question: Do we think that this 'abominable living' was the case at Haughmond Abbey?

I introduced the historical figure of John Audelay, explaining about his life as a monk and when he lived at Haughmond Abbey (in the 15th century). John Audelay provided a counterpoint to the official reasons for the dissolution of abbeys like Haughmond.

I presented the children with one of the John Audelay verses (**Source 2**) on an OHT, reading it through with the class. The children also worked on the text using the textbreaker format for the source. The 'old-fashioned' verse font helped emphasise the idea of a different era, as did the 15th century vocabulary. The children were really enthusiastic about translating this next piece.

The pupils then gave the poem a title and marked on their copies words and phrases that they did not know or understand.

When each group had translated the text, they were able to use the text and what they had already discovered about monastic life to answer the questions posed on their textbreaker sheet.

Episode 5

Focus: Building up collective ideas – class discussion of the commissioners' views and John Audelay's poem.

The different groups compared views and listened to each other, a powerful tool for matching hypotheses and assessing reliability in historical sources. Some children responded at a literal level, deciding that perhaps he was dying, while the inference of remorse was picked up by other children and used as evidence of a colourful past.

Several children began to make links with the 15th century dates and use this fact to offer evidence that perhaps at Haughmond there had indeed been some '*abominable living*' going on, as asserted by Henry VIII's commissioners in the following century. But once more the child who earlier had brought the 'digging up dirt' theory to the debate triumphantly said that that supported her idea and that in the past this might have been the case, but that things may have changed for the better at Haughmond before 1536. This provoked further discussion – I felt that the children were becoming immersed in 500-year-old issues on a very personal level that transcended facts and dates from a text book.

By the conclusion of the session there was a growing feeling of protection towards the wayward Audelay and Haughmond Abbey which I hadn't anticipated at all in my initial planning. For me this was the most exciting part of the session. The children had used the texts to begin to develop a genuine empathy with the period under discussion and each child had had a chance to tackle a difficult text at his or her own level.

The teaching [Lesson 2]

Episode 1

Focus: Developing understanding of monastic life from reading Audelay's poems.

Working in their seven groups, the pupils now analysed different Audelay poems (**Sources 3–5**) using the textbreaker format.

I distributed the sources, with at least one text for each group. The pupils worked together to 'break'/deconstruct the text and then to respond to the differentiated questions.

The less able children were becoming more confident in approaching the texts and they worked particularly closely in their groups,

discussing and supporting each other's opinions. They offered suggestions of titles for their texts that reflected a deeper understanding beyond the literal.

The more able children were totally committed to translating the texts and began to work independently. Ideas were swapped and a healthy debate took place about interpretation in the context of the original quote from the Act. They used what they had discovered to discuss the 1536 commissioners' views, supporting their ideas with evidence from the verse texts, thus deepening and extending the understanding developed during the earlier lesson.

Other issues began to emerge for further research projects.
What were the actual expectations of the rules of the monastery?
Where did the money come from to extend and develop the Abbey?
What specific beliefs did the Catholic populace hold?

Responses to the questions posed on the textbreaker text were accurate and showed a good level of inference from the text.

During this episode I worked on guided reading with Group 7.
I focused on translating the text into a modern idiom, with the pupils working in 'buddy' pairs to tease out the literal meaning of the text. They were then able to offer ideas about what this would mean in answer to the allegations of Henry VIII's dissolution commissioners of 1536.

Episode 2

Focus: Plenary – using whole class discussion to extend knowledge and understanding of the dissolution of the monasteries.

I scribed feedback from the class on the easel, in order to generate a summative statement about evidence and relate this to the key questions. For revisiting the key questions, I used an OHT of Source 1, Halliwell's statement about John Audelay.

This generated statements from the children that there appeared to be evidence from the Audelay verses that there had indeed been laxity among the canons in the late 15th century.

We then discussed the reliability of the Audelay verses. The class felt that he had no hidden agenda and that as far as we could tell he was urging his fellow-priests to repent and turn back to righteous living as laid down by the rules of the Order of Augustine. The children felt that his poetry had given an accurate account of the *'abominable living'* that had occurred at Haughmond, but at an earlier date than 1536. Further research was deemed necessary to build up a picture of the interim years between the Audelay verses and the claims of the commissioners.

The less able children's verbal contributions during this plenary session were quite astute. One boy said at the conclusion of the session that he had really enjoyed the day and he wanted to find out more.

Learning outcomes

The children:

- accessed complex and difficult texts and resources to build up a picture of life within Haughmond Abbey before the dissolution of the monasteries;
- consolidated and extended their text interpretation skills through the use of a range of differentiated textbreakers
- raised and extended their level of awareness through using the skills developed
- developed skills of inference and deduction, particularly the more able.

Reflection

These lessons provided me with a wealth of thought and provoked further questions about adopting this sort of cross-curricular approach to the foundation subjects.

There was no doubt in my mind that this set of learning experiences had created opportunities for a much higher level of historical learning and interpretation than usual. It was thoroughly enjoyable for both myself and the children.

I feel now that I want to explore further the issues raised here and extend them further into my current practice.

Nuffield Primary History project

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