



ROMANS, ANGLO-SAXONS, AND VIKINGS: THE END OF ROMAN BRITAIN

TEACHERS' NOTES

In the previous term the year 3 class had been working upon Roman Britain with their class teacher. The teaching of *The End of Roman Britain* lasted for two lessons. The teaching focused on how a Roman town might have changed during the fifth century period of Saxon invasion and settlement. The two lessons led into a more detailed study of aspects of Anglo-Saxon England.

Through working on an artist's picture of a bustling Roman market place, the class developed ideas about the Saxon impact upon it from studying a contemporary Saxon poem, *The Ruin*, a difficult and challenging text. The poem described what had happened to a Roman town during the period of Saxon invasion and settlement. Clues in the poem suggest that it might have been written about Bath.

During the second lesson the focus was upon pupils creating their own poems about the destruction of a Roman town. In the first lesson the children had developed contextualised knowledge of how the Saxon invasion might have affected a Roman town.

In this lesson we were focusing much more closely upon the concept of genre, equipping pupils with the knowledge and understanding to both read and write poems in this particular form.

Year group/class

Year 3, mixed ability and gender. The class had a number of very able pupils.

Teaching time

Two lessons of one hour each.

Learning objectives

- To set the scene for learning about the Saxons through studying a picture of a Roman town at the end of the Roman period, and then seeing how the Saxon invasion might have affected it.
- To develop an understanding of the picture through questioning, the close observation of detail and the use of the informed imagination to bring the scene to life.
- To build up pupils' vocabulary through the medium of the 'I spy with my little eye' game.
- To promote literacy through the reading of a Saxon poem, demonstration of the poetic genre and pupil modelling of the genre with them writing their own poems based upon the picture and the Saxon poem.

Key questions

- How did Britain change during the period of Saxon invasion?
- How can we use the poetic genre to present our understanding?

Resources

A3 picture of a Roman town's market place/forum, one per pair/trio of children. Any picture of a Roman town forum will do.

The picture we used was a recreation of St Albans, a town that Boudicca had burned down. Our previous topic had included Boudicca, so this was a lucky coincidence.

Saxon poem, *The Ruin* – version A (simplified and shortened for pupil use. Used in the previous year, not in this lesson).

Saxon poem, *The Ruin* – version B (the original text, with activities for developing pupil understanding of the text at the word, phrase and whole text levels), enlarged to A3 size.

The teaching [Lesson 1]

Episode 1

Focus: Reading a picture – teasing out the picture's meaning using 'I spy with my little eye' game to build up vocabulary and insights into the scene.

We gave out the picture of Roman St Albans, one per pair/trio of pupils, and split the class into two teams, teams A and B.

One member of team A asked Team B to find an object in the picture beginning with a letter of the alphabet. 'I spy with my little eye something beginning with [a letter of the alphabet]'.

The members of Team B had three attempts to answer the question correctly. If they got the right answer they received one mark, if they failed, team A got the mark.

Sinead began with: 'I spy with my little eye, something beginning with L'. Annika from Team B gave the correct answer: lady. Team B got a mark.

The person who had answered correctly then asked Team A a question.

We kept the score on the blackboard

Great excitement and pleasure from the pupils during the playing of the game. Among the words chosen were: building, castle, city, cloud, dog, food, people, roof, stall, statue, temple, tent, wall.

Episode 2

Focus: Holistic impression of picture: title of the picture for a children's book.

I told the children that they had been given the picture to put in their books.

They had to think of a title and put it on top – this they did in pairs.

We listed the titles on the board, and talked about them. Titles included: Roman History, Roman Picture, Roman Feature, A town called Robeeta, Roman City Centre, Romans in History.

I liked Adam's best: 'Cracking City Centre'.

Episode 3

Focus: Getting deeper into the picture and bringing it to life.

I asked the children to put their fingers on two dogs in the picture and look for the lady with a cloak and two children.

Then I said, 'Imagine that you are one of the two children with the lady, watching the dancer'.

One of the children lives in the town, the other is a friend who has come from the country. You will be the guide to that child.

Working in pairs, in their drafting books they had to put down what they would see, hear, smell, taste, feel.

Pairs then reported back to the whole class: Josh and Kieran smelt the Roman baths, felt a cake, saw people dancing and watched a show, while Adam and Helena smelt drinks, fish and air, saw dancing, saw statues, buildings, and people watching.

Episode 4

Focus: Telling the story of the decline of Roman Britain through the child.

I told the class that one of the children in the picture's father is the commander of the Roman garrison. Rome is under attack from invaders. The commander has been told to leave Britain with his soldiers.

S/he keeps in touch with his/her friend, who lives on a villa in the country.

The Roman child hears about terrible happenings – the pupils mentioned killing people, breaking statues, tearing down buildings.

Fifty years later s/he sends his/her friend an Anglo-Saxon poem about what has happened to the city.

Episode 5

Focus: Listening to the poem; forming an impression of the poem.

We gave out version B of the poem, one copy of each per pupil. The text had been prepared with a vocabulary and room for recording three categories of words: buildings, feeling words and doing words (verbs).

We asked the class to shut their eyes and listen as we played a tape recording of the poem. During the reading we made sure that all eyes were shut and the children concentrated on listening.

When they opened their eyes they had to think of a title for the poem, first talking about it with their partner, then writing it on the top of their poem.

Next we went around the class, getting the children to read out their titles. These we listed on the board as a star diagram. Ideas included: Saxons attacking, Fall of the Romans, Death, People Dead on the Earth.

Break was now approaching, so we hastened to go through the poem again at the word and phrase level.

Episode 6

Focus: Text marking: – sharing the meanings of individual words and phrases.

We replayed the tape, telling the children to underline or highlight on their copies any words and phrases that they did not understand.

These we then went through in turn, getting the pupils who knew what the words meant to explain their meaning to the whole class. The children wrote down the meanings above the words on their copies of the poem.

The teaching [Lesson 2]

Episode 1

Focus: Extending the mental picture through working on categories of words.

The pupils were asked to work through the text in pairs, picking out words for each of the three categories (buildings, feeling words, doing words). These we pooled on the board, drawing up a list that the pupils copied onto their sheets. Feedback was both lively and constructive, the class was fully engaged in extracting the words from the text and in developing an understanding of what they meant. This was done both through whole class discussion and through referring to the list of word meanings.

We now moved on to working on ideas about the messages that each of sections A–D conveyed.

Episode 2

Focus: Pupils working upon the key ideas in the text, and seeing in sequence how they tell us what happened to the Roman city.

We split the class into groups of four; each group was given one section of the poem to work upon. So they could read properly, we made sure that there was one copy per pair of pupils.

We told each group that they had to appoint a spokesperson who would report back to the whole class.

Another pupil would be responsible for organising a group tableau of a scene from the paragraph. The group had to decide on a phrase or sentence that would describe what was going on in their section. They had to provide a tableau, a freeze frame of that scene.

This they acted out in front of the rest of the class, who had to guess what the scene was.

Episode 3

Focus: Transferring the information taken from the poem onto the picture.

The pupils were asked to mark on their pictures of the Roman town how it might have changed. They could write on the picture, or draw lines from features to the edge, where they would write down what had happened since the scene depicted in the picture.

We again played through the tape of the poem, making sure that the pupils listened to the words while looking at the picture.

The pupils worked in pairs on this activity, annotating their pictures.

Episode 4

Focus: The extent to which we can trust the poem as a source about Saxon Britain.

I told the pupils that a Saxon wrote the poem at the time the events described happened, and that it was one of the few pieces of evidence that had survived from the period.

Knowing what nationality the poet was, and when he wrote, could we believe what it said?

Laura said that the poem reminded her of the ruins of Bath, a Roman city that the Saxons had destroyed. Sinead argued that it could well be true because her book on the Saxons told her that the Saxons had ‘ruined a lot of Roman bits.’

Episode 5

Focus: Analysing the poem’s form.

We now returned to the form of the poem, working with the pupils on how the poet had expressed his ideas. As a class we discussed:

- the division of the lines into two balanced elements
- the use of alliteration to stress ideas.

On the board we demonstrated how the poem had been created, taking two lines:

Tumbled are the towers, ruined the roofs and broken the gate with its bars.

and

Slaughter was widespread and disease spread.

The children then picked out their own lines, which we discussed, showing how the poem was structured.

Episode 6

Focus: Writing poems using a specific genre.

I then asked the pupils to create their own poems of up to six lines, using this model.

They would use information from the poem and their annotated pictures.

The pupils then created their own short poems about what had happened to the town in the picture, St. Albans. In the writing we worked on four ideas:

The author – what would their reaction be as a visitor to St. Albans during the time when the poem was written?

The audience – they were writing the poem for other members of the class to read.

Content – what content would they select to convey the message that they wanted their poem to have, using their annotated picture and the information they had gleaned from the poem?

Genre – we would work within the Saxon poem genre.

Episode 7

Focus: The pupils' performance of their poems.

One member of each group was then asked to read out his or her poem to the class.

Learning outcomes

The children:

- developed an understanding of the poetic genre through writing their own poems in the style of the Saxon poem, *The Ruin*
- developed knowledge about the impact that the Saxons had upon Roman Britain
- developed an understanding of concepts such as invasion, conquest and settlement
- extended their oracy through questioning, pair, group and class discussion, the oral presentation of ideas and the performance of their poems in public
- practised social skills through co-operative pair and small group work, and through the whole class engaging in a word-game.

Nuffield Primary History project

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