



THE GREAT FIRE OF LONDON AT KS1

Approach 2

This is one of series of alternative approaches to the Great Fire of London which you can download from www.primaryhistory.org . For suggested improvements to this lesson see the Evaluation at the end.

The teaching took place in the Summer term after SATs, and lasted for seven lessons. It took the form of an action research project using Nuffield Primary History approaches. Throughout, I evaluated my own teaching and the children's learning. The lessons progressed through the following stages: establishing previous knowledge; gathering information; using information; practical activities including design and drama; assessing knowledge; evaluation.

My own class was not doing history during the Summer term, so I arranged to teach the topic of the Great Fire of London to a colleague's class. My aim was for the children to 'do' history and learn to ask historical questions. Along with promoting historical enquiry, I wanted to foster the development of the children's speaking and listening abilities.

Class/Year group and Time

Year 2, mixed gender and ability. Seven lessons, after SATs.

Learning objectives

For the children to:

- learn to ask good historical questions, so developing their historical enquiry skills
- learn to develop their general questioning skills
- develop their speaking and listening skills
- develop their search skills on the Internet.

A personal learning objective is to achieve an insight into the way I shall develop my teaching of history in the future.

Key question

What was the Great Fire of London?

Resources

Video: Magic Grandad about Samuel Pepys: 500773 BBC ‘Famous People 1’ (available from www.trumedia.co.uk/v21_primary_bbc.htm#history)

Internet access

Writing frame, newspaper-style

Large cardboard boxes or pieces of cardboard

Buckets

The teaching [Lesson 1]

Episode 1

Focus: Questioning: ‘What was the Great Fire of London?’

I began by asking the class the key question: ‘What was the Great Fire of London?’ My intention was to draw on any knowledge the children might already have about the Fire.

I collected all their responses, which basically referred to a big fire as mentioned in the question. I then explained that by the end of the study we should have gained a lot more knowledge about the Fire.

Episode 2

Focus: Picturing the past – watching a video; reviewing knowledge about the Fire.

We now sat down to watch the Magic Grandad video about Samuel Pepys.

After the video, I asked the children what they now knew about the Great Fire. Much more, as expected, with the burying of Pepys’ cheese and wine being the most vividly remembered images.

The teaching [Lesson 2]

Episode 1

Focus: Speaking and listening – recalling, sharing and collating knowledge.

I began the lesson by repeating the question from the end of Lesson 1: What do we now know about the Great Fire of London? The whole class sat in a circle, and I asked them to share with the rest of the class one thing that they remembered from the video. I encouraged them to think of something that had not been said by another person. We then collated what information we had, as follows.

We know that it was a fire that happened in London.

It was very big.

It burnt nearly all of London.

It burnt people and birds.

The wind blew the fire further.

Episode 2

Focus: Posing questions; discussing sources of information.

The next step was to ask the children what they would like to know more about. We compiled a list of questions about the Fire:

How did it start?

How did it stop?

How did the fire get so big?

How many people did it kill?

What was the date and when did it happen?

What happened to the cheese?

What happened to the diary?

What did the people of London do?

What happened to the treasure and the papers that were buried?

Where did he bury the papers?

Where did Mr Pepys get buried?

Who rebuilt London?

We then talked about eye-witness accounts and other ways of gathering information. One child mentioned that we could access the Internet to find further information, which led us nicely into the next lesson.

The teaching [Lesson 3]

Focus: Using the Internet to gather information.

This lesson involved small groups of children accessing the Internet, as we did not then have the facility for the whole class to use computers at the same time.

There were some children who were fairly confident in the use of the Internet. I used those children to guide the others. The remainder of the children received my support.

Of course, we did not have immediate success, which highlighted the pros and cons of using the net. However, the children did find quite a lot, which we printed out.

The teaching [Lesson 4]

Episode 1

Focus: Extracting information gained from the internet.

In this lesson we used the information we had gathered from the Internet. I put the children into able/less able pairs to ensure that the reading would not be too difficult.

I then asked the pairs to read the printouts from the Internet, and to find three new pieces of information about the Fire.

The children highlighted the pieces of information and then each pair reported its findings back to the class. I acted as scribe and wrote the further information onto the whiteboard.

Episode 2

Focus: Assessing the information for relevance.

We then worked together to either accept or disregard the information given, ensuring that all the children's contributions were valued. I did this to highlight to the children that we do not necessarily need all information when gathering evidence – that a degree of selection is needed.

I constantly referred them back to their questions (displayed on the wall) to enable them to look for specific, relevant evidence.

The teaching [Lesson 5]

Episode 1

Focus: Examining the evidence collected.

We reviewed and discussed the evidence we had collected and selected together.

Episode 2

Focus: Preparing to write as a reporter.

I then asked the children to take on the role of a newspaper reporter alive at the time, and to write an eye-witness account of the Fire. We discussed how they should write in the first person, using 'I'.

I gave a newspaper writing frame to each child and encouraged them to use all the information they had. For the rest of the lesson, the children wrote their accounts of the Great Fire.

The teaching [Lesson 6]

Episode 1

Focus: Designing Pudding Lane.

A fun lesson! The children worked in pairs to produce either a shop or a house on Pudding Lane. I encouraged them to think about the materials the houses were made of. However, some of the houses did not reflect the period of the Fire at all!

The children made the house fronts and we set them out in the hall in a row, as we thought they would have looked in 1666. The children really enjoyed organising the street.

Episode 2

Focus: Drama – acting scenes from the Fire.

We now acted out a variety of scenes which may have happened in Pudding Lane the day before the Fire. This also gave the children the opportunity to use the digital camera to record some of the action.

We also went outside and re-enacted the passing of buckets along the line, from the river to the burning buildings.

Episode 3

Focus: Role play – questioning the inhabitants of Pudding Lane.

One boy with behaviour problems was so fired up that he decided to be a reporter interviewing the inhabitants of Pudding Lane after the Fire. He had a clear idea about what he wanted to achieve and the class responded to his questioning very well. This positive involvement by the boy was a contrast to the previous lesson, where his frustration at not being able to write at a high level had resulted in lack of interest and problematic behaviour.

During this lesson the children gained a lot of understanding into the Fire, and they all had the opportunity to participate at a high level, unlike the written task.

The teaching [Lesson 7]

Episode 1

Focus: Assigning roles for hot-seating.

In this lesson, three children took on the roles of people we had learnt about during our research. I asked the class whom they would like to talk to from the time. The children chose: Samuel Pepys, the baker, the Mayor of London.

We then chose the three children to take on these roles.

Episode 2

Focus: Hot-seating in role.

One by one, the three characters sat in the hot seat while the rest of the class asked them questions. The children responded extremely well to this, and the questions they asked demonstrated clearly the amount of knowledge they had gained. They were still very concerned about Samuel Pepys' cheese and wine!

The hot-seating was an excellent tool to assess the level of understanding the children had gained about the Fire. It also highlighted misunderstandings, and showed me how I could have developed the learning further.

Learning outcomes

The children:

- definitely developed their historical enquiry skills over the seven lessons
- also developed their general questioning skills
- practised and developed their speaking and listening skills in several contexts
- practised their search skills on the Internet.

Evaluation

I have enjoyed carrying out this action research a great deal. I feel it has broadened my own historical understanding. It has enabled me to recognise the value of encouraging the children to carry out historical enquiry within a practical framework of teaching and learning. It has extended my knowledge of the use of ICT as a tool to support learning and to access further information.

When carrying out this project again there are areas I would develop or change. Most importantly, I would leave the showing of the video until the end of the project. In my opinion, this would enable the children to access the Internet information at a 'less informed' level, and thus add greater importance to the enquiry element of the study. Next time I would also carry out the drama hot-seating before the writing of the newspaper report, as the children would then have had a better sense of the concept of 'eye-witness'.

I would have liked to have given the children a greater length of time to develop their writing skills, such as producing a diary, writing interview questions, and producing a newspaper report with greater input. Some of this could easily have been incorporated into the literacy hour, and this would have given me the time to demonstrate to the children how to write in the report genre. I feel this would have been achievable if I had been teaching my own class.

I also asked the children to evaluate the topic. The response was not what I had hoped for, but was what I had realistically expected: that the majority of the children enjoyed the video the most. They did, however, also say that their understanding of history had been developed and that they had enjoyed the whole topic a great deal.

Nuffield Primary History project

General editor: Jacqui Dean

Author of this unit: Helen Baldwin

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