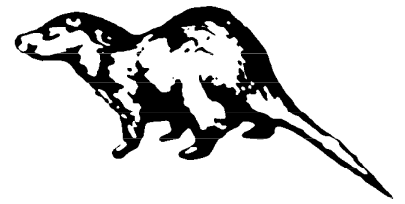


NUFFIELD PRIMARY HISTORY



Britain and the wider world in Tudor times

A TUDOR TEMPEST

TEACHERS' NOTES

The pupils attend a large primary school where the classes are vertically grouped. The history focus for the summer term was the Tudors, although SATs three weeks into the term meant that the history emphasis was lost in the last couple of weeks. Work on the Tudors began with explorations of the Tudor family tree; ascertaining what we knew already and posing interesting questions that we hoped to find answers for.

The literacy focus was the study of a Shakespeare play. We aimed to produce and perform a version of Shakespeare's *The Tempest* and to research the traditions of the Elizabethan theatre. In the second half of the term we researched costume typical of the time, and designed and made costumes for the final performance of *The Tempest*. As a starting point for our costume design, a costume designer from the Royal Shakespeare Company brought costumes typical of the Tudor period for the children to try on. Examples of sketch designs were also shared with the children, which informed their future planning style. The actual play was performed at Stokesay Castle [Shropshire] in July. Although this is not a Tudor building, it was felt that it would create a suitable atmosphere in which to perform (and provide an indoor option if it rained!)

[I attended the performance: it was stunning, the personal highlight of the year. Jon Nichol]

Here we describe the first three lessons where Shakespeare's *The Tempest* was introduced to the children.

Year group/class

A mixed Year 5/6 class of 33 children, with a wide ability range.

Teaching time

Three one-hour lessons which took place over three weeks, following immediately after the SATs.

Learning objectives

The key **literacy objective** was to read and appreciate an abridged version of *The Tempest*, looking closely at the language and the dramatic devices used, in preparation for a culminating performance at the end of term.

Historical objectives were for the children to gain:

- an understanding of the Elizabethan theatre
- some understanding of the enduring appeal of Shakespeare's plays – the humour and the excitement: not simply through studying a text, but by bringing it alive.

Key question

- What's all the fuss about Shakespeare?

Resources

Props – climbing frame, jester's hat, bottle of wine and a blanket

Various percussion instruments

Storyboards

Multiple copies of *The Tempest* (abridged)

Tudor topic book collection

The teaching [Lesson 1]

The first activity was to introduce the plot of *The Tempest* through a story-telling session (inspired by John Fines). All children were involved in bringing the story to life, by taking on the part of a character, being a musician or being part of a chorus.

Episode 1

Focus: Introducing the play through story-telling and enactment – children re-creating the storm scene in the play.

The children were led into the hall, having not been told anything of what we were to do. Already the children were curious. In the hall, the climbing bars had been assembled (this was to be the rigging for the ship in the opening storm) and several percussion instruments were available. When the children and I were seated on the floor, I told them that I was going to tell them a story, a story about an almighty tempest that resulted in a shipwreck. We discussed our understanding of the word ‘tempest’. But first, we had to summon up the tempest ourselves.

We began gradually by using our voices and bodies to build up the sounds of the wind, rain and waves. As this was building, I handed some children musical instruments to add to the crescendo.

Now I placed selected children in key positions. Murray, who was Prospero, was positioned at the back of the hall, behind the assembled group of children. He was unseen, but all seeing. He was accompanied by Sarah, in the role of Miranda. On the ship’s rigging were the sailors and the members of the court of the king of Naples. They clung on desperately, peered into the distance, shouted at each other above the storm, pulled in the ropes, said their prayers and then seemingly drowned as the storm subsided. The scene ended with them stranded on the island.

Episode 2

Focus: Working in enactive, story-telling and re-constructive mode – the eight scenes of the play.

The children sat down, closed their eyes and imagined the island. With my help, Prospero explained to Miranda how they came to be living on the island, and who the men on the ship were.

I had split the play into eight key scenes, all of which we explored in the remainder of the lesson, using the props where appropriate:

1. The shipwreck, introduction to Prospero and the island
2. Caliban
3. Ferdinand and Miranda fall in love; Ferdinand is set tests
4. King Alonso and his men; the plot to kill the king
5. Trinculo, Stephano and Caliban; drinking
6. The masque; goddesses and spirits
7. Caliban, Trinculo and Stephano attempt to kill Prospero
8. Reconciliation.

On the whole the session was a success. There was a lot to fit in; I had to do most of the talking and I needed my notes, which I didn't want to have. However, all the children were involved at some stage and a good pace was maintained. The children were encouraged to speak some of the actual lines from the play, especially well known lines such as, 'Be not afeared, the isle is full of noises'.

I knew it was a success because afterwards the children made comments such as:

- That was the best lesson.
- The shipwreck was dead cool.
- I didn't know Shakespeare was like that.
- Can I keep the same part when we do it at the castle?

The teaching [Lesson 2]

In this lesson the children created a storyboard of the play's scenes. The lesson took place during the second half of the morning, following lesson 1. The objective was to summarise the plot, clarify who was who, how they were related, and what their motives were; and to discuss the structure typical of several Shakespeare plays.

Episode 1

Focus: Whole class discussion – recapping the plot, understanding motives.

We began with a whole class discussion during which children volunteered to describe what happened next. I had written a list of all the characters' names on the board to aid this discussion. Together, we devised a list of headings for the eight sections of the play that we had explored. For example, the children named the scene with Trinculo and Caliban: 'Is it a fish?'

During the discussion we also looked at the structure of the play and its themes. We linked our discussion to our knowledge of the Tudors:

ZP: Why do you think Shakespeare wrote about a shipwreck?

Pupil 1: Because lots of them happened then.

ZP: When?

Pupil 1: In Tudor times.

Pupil 2: Everyone was going off around the world in boats like Francis Drake, discovering stuff.

We also discussed the idea of characters being re-united in the final scenes: what was lost being found. We also talked about the implications for our future costume designs and for our performance at Stokesay ('There won't be a climbing frame there, Miss!'). At this point the children were very excited about the project, and I wondered whether we could keep up the momentum until the last week of term!

Episode 2

Focus: Structuring expressive, exploratory story writing, using a blank storyboard split into eight scenes.

Now we set to to summarise the play's plot. The children were each given a blank storyboard, split into the eight scenes to be completed. The class combined writing with pictures. Some chose to do this in a comic book style using speech bubbles, but this was not the focus of the lesson. For the weaker children I had thought of preparing some storyboards with a writing frame on them, but couldn't do this, as I

wanted the children to devise the headings themselves. However, with the notes on the board, the events fresh in their memories and support from classroom assistants, all children were able to complete the task.

Episode 3

Focus: Plenary – sharing ideas; discussing language and its meanings.

For the plenary of this lesson, we first showed each other some of our work in progress, then we discussed famous lines from the play and Shakespearean language in general. The children were aware of uses of ‘thee’ and ‘thou’, and one child recalled using ‘prithee’ in our dramatisation. We discussed the meanings of the ‘do not be afeared’ speech made by Caliban and ‘We are such stuff as dreams are made on’ spoken by Prospero. This was essential preparation for the work we were to do after half term (exploring the text in detail and rehearsing for the performance).

The teaching [Lesson 3]

This lesson focused on writing in the style of Shakespeare, from different characters’ points of view.

Episode 1

Focus: Shakespearean language – extending the children’s understanding of Tudor vocabulary.

The children were already working on glossaries of Tudor words and phrases (and insults!) so the first objective of this lesson was to extend their understanding of the English language of the time, with particular reference to Shakespeare’s use of language in *The Tempest*.

We began the lesson by re-capping the words we had discovered since the beginning of term, mainly relating to Tudor fashion; then we discussed unusual words in *The Tempest*. The children agreed that most were easy to understand, and observations were made about the use of ‘st’ at the end of many of the words (e.g. ‘canst’). The children were then given their Shakespearean glossaries. Their task was to add missing definitions, using their copies of *The Tempest* to extend the list. The children worked in pairs to do this. After 20 minutes we shared our findings and reached agreement on the new definitions.

Episode 2

Focus: Independent writing – characterisation through diary entry.

This was the main independent writing activity. The children were now to write about the events of the day on the island from a particular character's point of view.

They could choose from the following list: Prospero, Miranda, Caliban, Ferdinand or Sebastian. The list became extended as the children were keen to write about Trinculo and Stephano too. The task was to write in the form of a diary. The diary had to describe the play's events, and the chosen character's thoughts and feelings about them. Most importantly, the children were to use appropriate language, using their Shakespearean glossaries and their copies of the play for reference.

This activity produced surprising results. The children were slow to begin, finding the task difficult. But once they'd 'got going' they wrote in an imaginative and lively style. I was very pleased to see the effort made to incorporate Shakespearean language.

Episode 3

Focus: Plenary – public reading; evaluation and praise of diaries.

The plenary consisted of several children reading aloud their diary entries, which the class discussed, evaluated and praised.

Subsequent lessons included costume designing, writing a newspaper article reporting on Prospero's return to power in Milan, and rehearsals for the play.

Learning outcomes

The children:

- experienced enjoyment of a Shakespeare play, seeing beyond the initially meaningless words on paper
- explored and gained understanding of the structure of the plot
- extended their vocabulary and gained understanding of the language of Shakespeare

- developed confidence with an alien way of speaking and writing
- gained the concepts, knowledge and understanding necessary for the subsequent rehearsals and end-of-term performance of *The Tempest*.

Reflection/evaluation

On reflection, it has been necessary to return to my personal objectives and the key questions raised. My objective was to make learning about the Tudors and Shakespeare lively and memorable. It is clear that the children have become increasingly knowledgeable about the Tudors. The concept that plays are written to be performed, and that Shakespeare's plays have a timeless appeal to all ages, has certainly been demonstrated.

The key question has been answered and added to. The children understand something of Shakespeare's popularity today and are knowledgeable about the Elizabethan theatre and its role in the lives of the Tudor classes.

Through observation and questioning, and the finished results of the children's work, it has been possible to assess their understanding and gauge their enthusiasm. The fabrics they have brought in, the research on the internet, the books from the library, and the new information excitedly shared on arrival each morning have displayed a level of interest that has only been achieved this year when learning about Ancient Egypt in the Autumn term.

Nuffield Primary History project

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