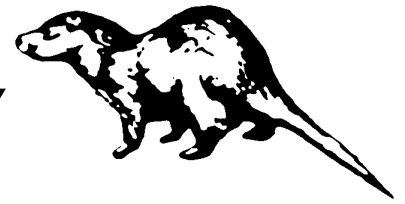


NUFFIELD PRIMARY HISTORY



BRITAIN SINCE 1930: INTRODUCING THE EMPIRE THROUGH COINS

TEACHERS' NOTES

We taught this lesson during a half-term topic about Britain since 1930. The coins lesson can stand alone or form an introduction to an in-depth study of empire, immigration and emigration. It also overlaps usefully with geography. It introduces children to a complex and controversial subject in a practical, hands-on way.

You will need a variety of coins for the session. They can usually be picked up for modest sums in second-hand shops. My local Oxfam sells world coins by the bag. A request to friends, family and neighbours should also yield silver and copper aplenty. Alternatively, you could photocopy, cut out and glue pictures of coins from a book for the children to examine.

Year group/class

Year 6, 31 children of mixed ability and gender.

Teaching time

One hour.

Learning objectives

For the children to:

- be able to read coins as texts yielding information
- realise that coins are sources of historical evidence
- gain an understanding of the extent of the British Empire
- begin to understand the chronology of decolonisation
- gain insights into the attitudes of the ex-colonies towards Britain.

Key question

- What clues can coins give us about the British Empire during the 20th century?

Resources

Atlases, class set

Outline world map, one per pair

World map showing extent of the British Empire pre-1940, one per pair; see <http://www.britishempire.co.uk/maproom/maproom.htm>

Magnifying glasses, one per pair

Modern British 2p coins, one per child – set A

Coins from the Empire or Commonwealth (all displaying British monarch's head), as many as you can collect – set B

Post-independence coins from countries once part of the British Empire, as many as you can collect – set C

What does it mean? sheet (OHT, or one copy per pair of children)

Coins record sheet, one per pair of children

A guide to old English money sheet, one per pair of children

For your own background information, a good book about coins. We used Mackay, J (1991)*The Beginner's Guide to Coin Collecting*, London, The Apple Press.

The teaching [Lesson 1]

Episode 1

Focus: Cracking the code – reading coins.

We gave out the magnifying glasses, one per pair of children, telling them that today they'd have to read very small writing, some of it in code.

We then gave every child a modern 2p coin (set A). What is on the head/obverse side? What is on the tail/reverse side? Do all English coins have the same things on their heads and tails? No – only the Queen's head is the same.

We can all read the amount on the tail side, but can we make sense of the writing on the head side?

The children snatched for the magnifying glasses again, and all easily read Elizabeth II and the date. The rest defeated them – D.G. REG. F.D.

So we put up the *What does it mean?* sheet, and talked through the abbreviations with them. We then read out the code in full: 'Elizabeth II, by the Grace of God Queen, and Defender of the Faith'. The children loved the sonorous words.

This class had studied the Tudors the previous year, so we were able to draw on their prior knowledge to explain Fid. Def. Some of the pupils grasped the irony of the Pope having granted Henry VIII that title before his divorce and secession from the Catholic Church.

Episode 2

Focus: Recording information from coins; locating their origins.

Now we distributed the empire/commonwealth coins (set B), the outline world map, the atlases, the *Guide to old English money*, and the recording sheet: *Coins*.

We explained the task: 'These coins are from other countries, let's see what they can tell us. We haven't enough coins for you to have one each, so will each pair work together to record all the information from your coin. Divide up the tasks between you, and share the rubbing – one do heads, the other do tails'.

The children got busy while we circulated, sorting out arguments and helping the strugglers to locate their coin's country in the atlas and mark it on their outline map.

Episode 3

Focus: Raising questions; coins as clues to the past.

When each pair had filled in their *Coins* sheets and marked the country of origin on their outline map, we asked: 'Have you noticed anything interesting about your coin? Are there any questions you want to ask?' The comments and questions spilled out:

- Mine's got our Queen's head on it, but it comes from South Africa
- Mine, too, and it's from Nigeria
- Yes, why is she on the money from other countries?
- Is she in charge of them?
- My coin is a shilling, like the old English money, but it's not English
- We've got a king, not the Queen; he's King George
- Ours is made of funny metal and it's much lighter than English money
- We've got a hole in the middle of ours – what's it for?

We responded with a short explanation about the British Empire and Commonwealth, its extent, its age, its nature, its decline.

Look at your outline maps – how far away is your coin’s country, once ruled by Britain? How many other countries did Britain take over? We gave out the map showing the extent of the British Empire in the first half of the 20th century. The children were impressed that such a small island had ruled so much of the world. We asked: ‘How do you think Britain managed to take over so many places? Look at where they are...’ With much prompting, they finally realised that the Empire had depended on sea power.

Next we asked them: How would you feel if you were taken over by strange people from far away? What would it be like to be ruled by a foreign country? After they left, would you feel friendly towards them? Would you still keep up connections? Do any of you, or your families, come from countries once ruled by Britain? (No-one in this Exeter class did. In another place we could have opened up a rich seam of oral history).

Episode 4

Focus: Mapping change; perspectives after independence.

We announced that we had a final set of coins for the class to examine. The children’s eyes gleamed, magnifying glasses at the ready.

We distributed the post-independence coins (set C), and asked: ‘How many countries once ruled by Britain have kept the British monarch’s head on their coins? What does this tell us about their attitude to Britain, and to their own country? Also look at the dates on your set B and set C coins. What clues do they give us?’

We made two lists: one of countries that had kept the British monarch’s head, one of those that hadn’t.

Here we ran out of time, and illness prevented us from following up with the planned timeline work and case study of Kenya’s struggle for independence through pictures and documents.

Learning outcomes

The children:

- realised to their amazement that coins can yield a wealth of information beyond their face value
- stimulated by the coins, were actively engaged in learning, gaining knowledge of the extent and nature of the British Empire
- began to understand the historical complexity of decolonisation, its timescale, and how coins can tell us something about the attitudes of the ex-colonies towards Britain
- learnt the meanings of some common Latin words and phrases
- extended their geographical world knowledge and ability to use reference books – atlases – purposefully.

Nuffield Primary History project

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