

BLENHEIM SQUARE

LOCAL STUDY: URBAN SPACES

VICTORIAN BRITAIN



See 'Introduction and Lesson 1' for the background to these lessons. The challenge was to bring the history of a local urban square to life and give the children an insight into life there in Victorian times.

The lessons

- 1 Victorian Leeds and Blenheim Square
- 2 Visiting Blenheim Square
- 3 Census work: Who lived in Blenheim Square in 1881?
- 4 Story-telling: living in a 19th-century house
- 5 Role play: upstairs, downstairs
- 6 Thinking about the future

Lesson 2 Visiting Blenheim Square

We took the children out into the Square to find out and record what it is like now.

Resources for lesson 2

Map of Blenheim Square in 1990, one per child.

Recording sheet: Your house at Blenheim Square, one per child.

Episode 1

Focus: Investigating Blenheim Square now.

With the class, we reviewed our learning from Lesson 1. From it we have an overview of Victorian Leeds and of the development of Blenheim Square.

We reminded the class that we are investigating three questions:

What was Blenheim Square like in the past?

What is Blenheim Square like now?

What would we like Blenheim Square to be like in the future?

Today we're going to look at Question 2: What is Blenheim Square like now? We are going to visit the Square and record what it is like now, finding as many clues as we can about its past.

We have three digital cameras and recording sheets for you to use.

Episode 2

Focus: Preparing to record the Square.

We gave out the 1990 maps, blown up so that Blenheim Square was at the centre. The children wrote their names on their maps.

We then assigned each child a house of their own. Fortunately there are 26 houses on the Square. We distributed highlighter pens and asked the

children to highlight their particular house on their map. We stressed that this was their own map for recording evidence about the Square now. They could draw onto it any features they found in the Square that were not included on the map. We next distributed the recording sheets: *Your house at Blenheim Square*, and a clipboard and pencil each.

We briefly showed the children how to work the digital cameras and told them they could each take two photos of their own house and one other. The ‘other’ should be something in the Square: we want the trees, benches, path, wall, flowers, railings recorded. In other words, we want to end the day with a complete visual record of the Square.

Finally we divided the class into three groups (three adults were available today: Dawn the class teacher, Steve the headteacher, and me). We assigned one camera per group. It had begun to drizzle, so we made the children don coats and jackets.

Episode 3

Focus: Recording the Square as it is now.

We walked the 100 metres or so up to Blenheim Square. Before beginning the recording, we stood and surveyed the Square. It was deserted, green and overgrown after all the spring rains.

In the three supervised groups, the children photographed their houses and other features of the Square, and collected leaf specimens from the trees. We adults discussed the house features with our groups, focusing their attention on the windows, doors, brickwork and other features.

The chattering group of children drew two older residents out of their houses. One told the children that rich people used to live in the Square (‘Not like us poor people now’), and that horse-drawn carriages would drive up in front of the houses. He also told us that George Bernard Shaw had once spent the night in the house he lived in – now two flats. The name meant nothing to the children, but their imagination was stirred by the image of horses and carriages sweeping around the Square. Too soon, it was time to return to school for break time.

During the following week the children tracked down the names and origins of the Blenheim Square trees on the internet. They mounted their leaf specimens on card and labelled each leaf with its name and country of origin. There were six different kinds of tree in the Square: hawthorn, lime, rowan (mountain ash), wayfaring tree, sycamore and horse chestnut. All except the last two are native to Britain.

Leeds Urban Spaces project

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