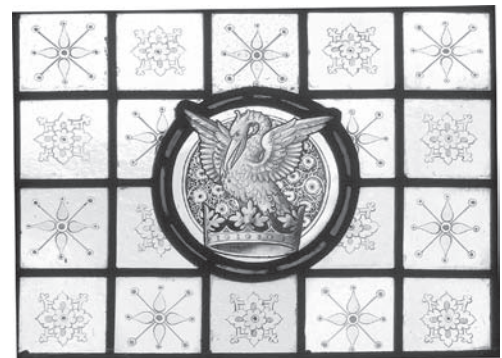


Making the most of a property visit

Pupils particularly enjoy the chance to take part in “hands-on” activities when they are on-site, but they will get more out of them in the context of a clear scheme of work that has an outcome, such as a display, performance or presentation to work towards.

USING PLANS

If you are visiting a large property, such as a castle, a cathedral or one of the larger museums, it's a good idea to help pupils become familiar with ground or floor plans. Try making plans of your classroom, or parts of your school, adding in symbols for doors, windows, sinks, radiators and even desks and bookcases. Being familiar with the idea of plans will be invaluable when pupils explore the site.



PRE-VISIT

HOW MUCH INFORMATION SHOULD I GIVE PUPILS?

After your planning visit (see section 2), you will have to decide how much information pupils will need before their own visit, and how much you want them to discover on-site. For example, if you are visiting a windmill, you might first give pupils information about the importance of milling to earlier communities, but then give them tasks on-site that will let them explore how the mill actually worked and who would be involved in its day-to-day life.

It's also worthwhile liaising with the venue and local museums to find out whether they have any relevant collections that you can borrow beforehand. Handling artefacts, replicas and models can be ideal ways in which to engage children, regardless of their reading and writing skills, and to inspire class discussion. Sometimes you can find relevant artefacts in the local supermarket or shop – in the case of the windmill visit, pupils could handle different types of flour and discuss how they were produced.



Making the most of a property visit

ON-SITE

GROUP WORK

Splitting your party into small, supervised groups can make your visit more manageable, particularly if pupils will be attempting a series of activities during the day.

THE 'DREADED' ACTIVITY SHEET – GETTING IT RIGHT

Some properties will provide you with activity sheets for use on your visit. Some of these are excellent and will largely meet your needs. However, there's no substitute for preparing your own.

Like you, Heritage Open Days has the aim of inspiring young people's curiosity, so we have put together some tips we have found useful in designing engaging activity sheets:

- Questions and activities should relate specifically to your visit and should require pupils to thoroughly investigate the property
- Tasks should encourage pupils to observe, discover and hypothesise
- Design questions that invite a variety of responses, such as description, comparison, drawing, note-taking, poetry or creative writing
- Don't make the mistake of thinking a good worksheet needs lots of questions – some of the best have only one or two questions that engage pupils by making them think and observe carefully
- Exploring a property using other senses than sight can help pupils gain fresh perspectives on their surroundings
- Encourage pupils to empathise, perhaps imagining what it would be like to live or work in a property
- Encourage pupils to identify and record how a property has changed over time, both physically and in relation to the local environment. Viewing historic buildings as dynamic entities that reflect changing times can help pupils come to see the built heritage as something living and relevant.

WRITING NOT NECESSARY

Don't be afraid to discard worksheets altogether. While pupils need to record what they see and discover if they are going to make the most of their visits, they don't need to do it in writing. Drawing, photography, video and audio recordings are all excellent ways of helping pupils engage with their surroundings in a new way. Pupils can also use the historic environment to stimulate imaginative storytelling.

