

Designing Popular Activities: Museums and heritage projects

By Katrina Siliprandi

You're starting work on a heritage project, but you think you would benefit from some help. Why not get in touch with a local museum? Its staff, buildings and collections are invaluable for developing your pupils' knowledge, skills, confidence and judgement.

You may have a specific subject area in mind, or you may want to focus on a particular era, but it's worth remembering that museums are treasure houses for cross-curricular resources and can provide opportunities for developing children's key skills. For example, one school brought a Year 4 class to Strangers' Hall in Norwich to find out the differences between the lives of rich and poor people in Tudor Norfolk. The pupils looked at evidence provided by Tudor homes and they asked questions about who owned the buildings and their contents. The visit was a great spur for interdisciplinary work and the children also gathered evidence that allowed them to return to school and create their own Tudor dance and music, learn about mordents, make natural dyes and build a model of a jettied, timber-framed house, helped by their study of the mathematics and physics of such structures.



Whatever topic you choose to adopt for your project, the first step you need to take is finding out what is on offer at your local museums. The easiest way to do this is by visiting the online 24 Hour Museum (www.24hourmuseum.org.uk), a gateway to over 3,000 museums, art galleries and heritage attractions. On the site you'll find news and listings, sections for teachers and children as well as further information about regional museums, libraries and archives agencies such as EEMLAC (the East of England Museums, Libraries and Archives Council). The websites belonging to these agencies are often very useful, containing directories of museums as well as information about school programmes and their links to the National Curriculum. Alternatively, the Teachernet website (www.teachernet.gov.uk) also has a searchable database of museums and galleries.

Once you have found a museum with suitable collections and facilities for your project, get in touch. Combining your own skills and enthusiasm with museum staff's expertise can generate really exciting heritage projects that you and your pupils will enjoy. Many museums now have trained educators who can help you match the collections to your pupils' needs, while other museum staff and volunteers are usually eager to work with schools.

Working with a museum gives you the opportunity to develop your own learning. Some museums offer INSET that will help to broaden your knowledge and understanding as well as nurture your skills of working with artefacts. You may also be able to borrow loan boxes of objects, accompanied by information and activity packs that will help you use them in the classroom. Most museums produce resource packs and worksheets for schools, often written with the help of advisory teacher groups and usually available in printed form or online. These resources can be used for pre-visit and follow-up work in the classroom and will help you write your own activity sheets and support your preparation of lesson plans. You may find that any pictures of artefacts will be particularly useful, and these can be photocopied if necessary.

Sometimes, museums will provide special workshops for pupils that will be led by museum educators, or similar outreach sessions in the classroom. These give children the opportunity to handle objects and take part in practical activities. Increasingly, museums also offer popular and exciting 'living history' programmes, in which pupils can meet historical characters – role-players in period

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costume – and ask them questions and take part in debates. These programmes can be powerful motivators for children: they bring the past to life and pupils can quickly gain a deep understanding of a wide range of topics, almost without realising it!

Museums and all their treasures are a wonderful resource for your heritage project. To make sure your plans are a great success, work as a partner with the museum and help to tailor its services to your pupils' needs.

USEFUL WEBSITES:

- **WEB:** www.24hourmuseum.org.uk
- **WEB:** www.teachernet.gov.uk

REGIONAL AGENCIES FOR MUSEUMS, LIBRARIES AND ARCHIVES:

- **SOUTH EAST SEMLAC** www.semlac.org.uk
- **SOUTH WEST SWMLAC** www.swmlac.org.uk
- **LONDON ALM** www.almlondon.org.uk
- **EAST OF ENGLAND EEMLAC** www.eemlac.org.uk
- **EAST MIDLANDS EMMLAC** www.emmlac.org.uk
- **WEST MIDLANDS MLA**
www.mlwestmidlands.org.uk
- **YORKSHIRE YMLAC** www.ymlac.org.uk
- **NORTH EAST NEMLAC** www.nemlac.org.uk
- **NORTH WEST MLA** www.nwmlac.org.uk

CASE STUDY

THE MAHARAJAH, MUTOSCOPE AND PHOTOGRAM EXTRAVAGANZA

During the summer term of 2005, primary schools from the Thetford area took part in a heritage project called the 'The Maharajah, Mutoscope and Photogram Extravaganza'. The project was created by the Thetford Ancient House Museum and a local charity called Imagine, and the aim was to work with schools to present art and history in new and compelling ways. Specifically, this was done by encouraging children to look at technical innovations in photography and the moving image and the dramatic effect they had on Victorian attitudes to change, progress and social documentation. To achieve this, pupils took part in a carousel of three different sessions:

A MARVELLOUS MUTOSCOPE MECHANICAL MARVEL

In this session pupils learned the secrets of making images come to life. They explored animation techniques, tried using a real Mutoscope, and collaborated in their own animation.

PHOTOGRAM, ARTEFACTS AND LIGHT WORKSHOP

Photograms are images created by placing objects on photographic paper and exposing it to daylight, subsequently developing the image in the normal way. Pupils used this technique to explore Victorian objects from the museum's collections. These objects were handled, manipulated and interpreted and each pupil made his or her own unique Victorian Photogram.

MYSTICAL MAHARAJAH

Using the photographic archive of the Maharajah Duleep Singh, the last Maharajah of the Punjab, which is housed at the museum, pupils explored Victorian life and the relationship between the British and the Sikhs then and now. They used replica Victorian and Sikh costumes to stimulate the imagination.

At the end of the sessions, classes regrouped for a formal portrait as a memento of the visit and class teachers were given a resource box of artefacts, images and memorabilia to help them develop the work further.

The project was successful because pupils were encouraged to think for themselves, discuss their ideas and create something of which they could be proud. It improved their communication skills and raised their self-esteem. Teachers benefited because they were assisted in delivering the Victorian life element of the National Curriculum (whilst making links with art, religious studies, geography and citizenship), as well as encouraging their pupils to think about chronology and what it was like to live long ago. Both pupils and teachers came away with a deeper understanding of their local heritage.

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