

Planning Your Project

Later on in this pack, you'll read about ideas for two projects that you and your pupils can get involved in as part of the Heritage Open Days programme. The first is a series of activities and lessons that will prepare you to open up your school for a day (or more) and show off your pupils' work to the local community. The second gives you ideas for interpreting a local property for the community at a special Open Day.

This section, however, contains practical tips and advice to help you achieve the best possible success, whether you work on either suggested project or a similar one of your own.

CHOOSING A PROPERTY TO INTERPRET

DON'T JUST CONSIDER 'HISTORIC' PROPERTIES.

If you aren't planning to open up your school, you first need to choose a property that your pupils can interpret. Heritage Open Days properties belong to a wide range of eras – right up to the very modern – and were built for many different purposes. They range from churches, abbeys, castles and cathedrals to water mills, Turkish baths, Buddhist temples and state-of-the-art civic buildings.

However, an Heritage Open Days property does not need to be brilliantly or unusually designed. Some sites – including many schools – were built badly for their intended purpose;

and there is great value in pupils finding out why these mistakes were made and telling others their findings.

BE PRACTICAL

It might seem obvious to say it, but if you're hoping to get a property involved in Heritage Open Days, the more local it is – and the more time pupils can spend there – the better.

That said, it's important that the property fits your schools' needs. Think about the curriculum areas you want to prioritise and how colleagues can contribute their expertise. Are there



opportunities for citizenship, PSHE, science or other areas in interpreting your chosen property? Can you plan activities that will integrate different skills and subject areas?

In addition, it's vital to get the support of colleagues and school management for the project. While opening up a property for Heritage Open Days will rarely strain your budget, pupils' learning experiences will be the more valuable as part of an integrated, school-backed programme.

Once you've got the go-ahead from school management, it's a good idea to make a shortlist of properties you would like to work with (unless you have chosen your own school) and, before approaching the owner or custodian, asking yourself the following:

- Does the property already take part in Heritage Open Days, or has it done so in the past?
- If not, do I have enough information to explain the programme to the owner?
- Am I clear about what access pupils will need to the property, what activities will take place there and what displays are planned?
- Can I explain what benefits opening up the property will have for both pupils and the venue itself?
- Have I identified volunteers who may be able to help with the project?

It's normally best to make your initial approach in writing, following it up with a phone call after a reasonable period. And be prepared



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TIP: Remember that embossing is more effective than incising, particularly when using clay. If the original feature – such as an out-of-reach inscription – has incised lines, make a replica that embosses them.



for the occasional rejection – there are sometimes good reasons why property owners or custodians can't get involved. For this reason, plan well ahead and make your approaches as early as possible.

REGISTERING FOR HERITAGE OPEN DAYS

Once you've identified the property you plan to work with, and you've got the agreement of the person responsible for the venue, then you or they will need to register the site with Heritage Open Days. Registration forms are normally available from February and need to be returned by early May to qualify for inclusion in the printed directory of events, or the end of July for inclusion in the online dictionary. Be sure to check with the HODs team, though, by contacting us on 0870 240 5251, visiting www.heritageopendays.org or emailing hods@civictrust.org.uk

Heritage Open Days takes place over four days in mid September although, of course, you can hold an open day at any time of the year; but do get in touch to let us know your plans – we may be able to help you.

PREPARATIONS

Think carefully about the activities and subject areas you want to cover and the planned outcomes – are you going to work towards exhibitions, performances, interpretation aids or a combination of different displays?

The two project sections in this pack will give you ideas for teaching across the curriculum, plus ideas for learning outcomes, but if you want to adapt them to suit your needs it's a good idea to use a chart of your chosen venue to plan your final displays. For example, if your pupils will be working to interpret a church for the community, you could plot your outcomes on a plan like the one seen in Section 6.

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REACHING OUT TO ALL

One of the great advantages of pupils interpreting a property for the community is the fact that pupils can work on making it accessible for different groups.

OTHER PUPILS

Many properties don't appeal to young people because exhibitions are too often aimed at adults. Explore with your pupils ways of making exhibitions and performances appeal to other children. Are there any hands-on activities available? Are labels and captions clear enough and do they give the visitor enough context? Can you prepare an audio guide for other children to use? Are children willing to learn how to be tour guides during the open day?

PARTIALLY SIGHTED PEOPLE

Consider working with pupils to make your property accessible to partially-sighted people. This is a very rewarding citizenship activity that can draw on skills and knowledge developed across English, Design and Technology, PSHE, Art and other subject areas. The following suggestions are particularly useful for pupils who are working to make a building accessible.

MAKE TACTILE REPRESENTATIONS

Visually-impaired people may have difficulty engaging with features at the site that they cannot touch. For example, windows, arches, light fittings, site plans and other elements may cause difficulties.

By creating tactile replicas, pupils can interpret evidence for visually-impaired people that they otherwise wouldn't be able to appreciate.

Tactile materials are easy to acquire: string, Velcro, sandpaper, straws, lolly sticks, clay and different fabrics can all be used. Aim to produce replicas that can be easily handled – about the size of an adult's hand – and keep detail to a minimum. Concentrate on the main features and keep the background surface as smooth as possible.

Make sure that pupils' representations are robust – they don't need to look startling, but they do need to cope with repeated handling. Think about using contrasting colours that partially-sighted people can more easily sense.

CREATE AUDIO RECORDINGS

Creating audio guides for visually-impaired people – or for other children – is very popular and effective. To make a success of this project, make sure you bear the following in mind.

Make the actual recording on site – accurate acoustics are important to visually impaired people and add to the atmosphere for all listeners.

Use the best quality tapes and recorders to which you have access. If possible, use a recorder with an external microphone to avoid taping the whirr of the motor.

Be clear about directions. If the guide is aimed at visually-impaired children, insert instructions onto the tape asking the child to turn off the tape recorder, ask their helper to take them to the next area of the building and then switch on the tape again.

As well as pointing out hazards, describe important features and direct listeners and their helpers to tactile materials.

PEOPLE WITH MOBILITY IMPAIRMENTS

When designing the activities and exhibitions on offer on your open day, consider difficulties that people with mobility impairments may have. Can pupils think of the most effective ways of situating their work to allow easiest access to it? Are ramps and handrails needed? Are there issues that are insurmountable because of building restrictions – steps up to a church's bell tower for example? If so, could pupils display their ideas for improving access?

BRINGING COMMUNITIES TOGETHER

Think about ways in which pupils can interpret the property's history in ways that connect with a wider range of communities. Decide early on to include, where possible, a range of community languages in guidebooks, interpretation sheets and other written or audio materials. Think also of ways in which the property itself might have connections with people of different backgrounds – for more ideas contact the Black Environment Network, whose contact details can be found in Section 7 of this pack, or visit www.ben-network.org.uk

TIP: USE LARGE PRINT TEXT Many visually-impaired people will benefit from enlarged text, so if pupils prepare a site guide or captions for exhibits, consider using 14 point text. Remember also that partially sighted people find it easier to read short lines, like a newspaper column, printed in black type on yellow paper.

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ALL VISITORS

Put a plan of the building near the entrance so that visitors know where the exhibitions are and when performances will take place. If pupils produce simple guides including a map, information of particular interest and a timetable of events, offer these to visitors too.

GETTING HELP

Do think about members of the community who can help you and your pupils. Local historians, archaeologists, architects, parents, university students, community group representatives and civic society members may be willing to contribute through sessions in school or on-site; or they may simply be willing to give you advice on your plans.

Also, remember to ask colleagues whether they can help – including non-teaching members of staff. Many will have special interests or talents – such as storytelling – that can be used to great effect in your project.

ATTRACTING YOUR VISITORS

When your pupils have put so much work into their open days, you need to make sure that you entice community members to visit. The following ideas should attract visitors, curious to find out more.

HAVE A HIGH-PROFILE LAUNCH

Invite a local (or national!) ‘celebrity’ to launch your open day. Historians, storytellers, the local mayor, a member of the police force or fire service – it doesn’t matter who it is as long as they are passionate about what your pupils have done. Pupils also love to meet people from outside school and learn from them.

SEND OUT PERSONAL INVITATIONS

All your pupils will have contributed to the open day and will be keen to show off their work. Send personal invitations to all parents and guardians encouraging them to come along and celebrate.

LET THE LOCAL MEDIA KNOW

Let your local newspapers and radio stations know about your plans well in advance. Arrange, if possible, for pupils to tell the press about their experiences. You will find a draft press release at www.heritageopendays.org which you can adapt for your own project.

ADVERTISE, ADVERTISE, ADVERTISE

Don’t lose any opportunity to spread the word. We can provide you with a template for posters and leaflets, or you can make your own. Put posters and other materials in public libraries, arts centres, youth centres, local shops, leisure centres and anywhere else you can think of. And don’t forget the school newsletter!

For more ideas on publicising your event check out our Organiser’s Handbook, available for free download at www.heritageopendays.org/education/resources

You’ll find lots more ideas for use on-site and in the classroom in the next two sections of this pack. We hope they inspire you to open your school or another property for Heritage Open Days.



FURTHER RESOURCES:

English Heritage produces a wide range of tailored resources, ideal for use in Heritage Open Days projects. Booklets such as *Primary History and Using Houses and Homes* are invaluable, as are videos such as *Buildings and Beliefs*. For more information visit the Learning & Resources section of their website www.english-heritage.org.uk or telephone 0870 333 1181.

