A new venture in Education

The Models
1. Observation
   - Select a part of the site - eg chapter house
   - Study it for clues - eg original use, seats, windows
   - Interpret clues - eg seats and windows = meeting room
   - Check interpretation - use guidebook / museum
   - Where can I find further background information? - Consult history texts / extra-mural lectures

2. Hypothesis Testing
   - Original question - eg How was the site used?
   - Collect clues by observation - eg study architectural details
   - Set up an hypothesis / theory
   - Use guidebook / Test theory - use museum / site interpretations
   - What has been learned?
   - Where can I find further background information? - consult history texts / extra-mural lectures

3. Using Empathetic Reconstruction
   - consult - history texts / guidebook / museum
   - Accurate background knowledge essential
   - Selecting a role eg - founder / monk / pilgrim
   - Selection of relevant part of site - eg church
   - Selection of relevant activity - eg visit by pilgrim
   - Application of controlled imagination
   - Empathetic reconstruction - To make the ruins 'live' to contrast the present

Hailes Abbey lies at the foot of the Cotswold scarp, five miles north of Winchcombe. It was a late Cistercian foundation dating from 1231. It is now owned by the National Trust and administered by English Heritage. The dayschool was jointly organised by myself, as a student of the University of London and a university extramural department on methods of interpreting its sites to interested adult visitors.

The day was divided into three main parts. During the morning the background information: the use of Hailes Abbey as a Medieval Monastery was given. After lunch, the students were divided into three groups, each with a different teacher and topic. The first group visited the abbey church, the second visited the abbey house and the third visited the abbey garden. The afternoon was spent in the abbey ruins, where the students were divided into smaller groups and given a part of the site to investigate. The day finished with a presentation by each group, who shared their findings with the other students.

David Alderd
Hailes Abbey Curriculum Centre
Gloucestershire

Looking into glass

Streetwise investigate clues to the streets near your school!
Using Models at Dover Castle

Jonathan Barnes describes the educational impact of some of the reconstruction models in Dover Castle’s Education Centre, now available for use by visiting groups.

My first weeks as a teacher ascended to work for English Heritage at Dover Castle were characterised by a feeling of constant disorientation. I knew what I was supposed to be doing and where I wanted to go, but every time I ascended a spiral staircase I came out somewhere I didn’t want to be!...I had a strong motivation, therefore, for commissioning the first model for the new Education Centre at the Castle: a five-layer model of the keep which would help orientation before ever setting foot in the place. I had in mind the wonderful cut-away job one sees behind glass in some museums.

When Maurice ‘the Engineer’ originally designed his fine Norman keep in the 1180s, the place was to be impracticable; he gave it only one mighty defended entrance. Inside everywhere was to be approached from the second floor downwards - even the roof! A complex system of spiral staircases, galleries and inter-connected service rooms made the smooth running of medieval court and household possible and in conditions of relative security. To get to the basement storerooms, for instance, one would need to go up to the second floor-ceilings and then down one of the corner spiral staircases, passing the first floor and eventually appear at ground level in the storey. Many modern visitors to the keep leave the building never having known that there is a suite of first floor rooms at all. Maurice’s ingenuity, coupled with later adaptations, led to a labyrinthine building only comprehensible to intimate knowledge or through a model.

The model (excellently constructed by The Educational Resource Service of Wakefield) arrived and immediately began to take on other functions as school groups made full use of it. A group of year 8 pupils noticed that the two great halls on each floor were of different dimensions and asked why. They also noticed the guarderobes (medieval latrines) each emplaced into the same pit and asked pointedly what they ‘did with it’ in the twelfth century. From dismantling the castle model they not only understood the massive fortifications at the entrance but also found that the chapel was surely the most secure room in the keep, being by far the hardest to get to.

A group of year 6 pupils studying Houses and Homes used the model as a finger maze. They traced the probable route a servant would take to prepare and serve food to the Constable of the Castle. Another group discussed whether the King, when visiting his castle, would ever have needed to use the spiral staircases which might have been seen as servants’ stairs rather like the ‘black stairs’ in a large, Victorian villa.

This kind of preparation in no way replaced the need for a visit to the real thing. Indeed, discussing the arrangement of rooms in the keep served only to focus the work which both groups subsequently did on site. Having understood the plan in diagrammatic form children applied their knowledge to the reality and the differences between theory and practice became teaching points in themselves.

An early surprise delivery at the Education Centre was a model I did not commission - a fine reconstruction of the unique Roman Pharos, or lighthouse, which stands at the west end of the Saxon Church within the Dover Castle site. This model had been constructed by 11 year old Susan Merrick of Brighton after a visit and as part of a school project. She kindly donated it to the Education Centre when the school had finished with it. Not only is it a fine reconstruction, explaining important aspects of the lighthouse’s construction, height and fabric, but again it has given Susan’s age mates the cue to discover where her evidence came from. The Pharos today is only four storeys high, Susan’s model has eight - how did she know it had eight?

How did she know it had wooden floors in it? How did she know it used different coloured building materials to make a pattern of strips up the tower and how did she make the model anyway?

Archaeologists now think the Pharos had a stepped profile unlike the smooth, weathered one of today. Susan’s reconstruction of its first century appearance shows a smooth profile - several groups have spent time deciding who is right by carefully measuring and observing at the site themselves. The most recent excavations of models was also made by EHS and is, in many ways, the simplest of all. It is just a small, Romanesque arch based on one from the lower chapel in the keep. The model demonstrates how medieval masons and carpenters combined their skills to create openings strong enough to support a weighty wall. It is not an easy thing to imagine forms in operation when everything seems to be standing still.

Nor is it simple to see how an arch performs the trick of transferring the weight of tons of stone via slender pillars to the ground. Children tried building an arch themselves and everything became clear. They saw what a precision job it had to be and how elegant the solution is. From the ‘folding’ wedges beneath, through carefully constructed ‘formwork pieces’ to the exactly angled stones of the arch, children and teachers can go through the process of construction. When the classroom arch is complete and the wooden forming piece removed, an even pressure from above visibly tightens the wedge-shaped blocks against each other. Put the pressure slightly eccentrically and the whole structure crashes (safely) onto the desk - ‘hands-on’ in the most real sense! Teachers from a local primary school consortium took the potential uses further by examining the mathematics of the construction and applying the principles they discovered to other structures and other arches around the site.

These three models, along with others reconstructing thirteenth-century castle rooms and military weapons, have been invaluable to both teachers and pupils in preparation for getting to grips with the real castle outside. Using the insights they have gained by careful study of the reconstructions, classes have gone out to discover the scraps of evidence from which they were made. Science groups have tested out theories as to the optimum dimensions of an arch or thick stone wall. The models have been the subject of lectures, drawings, diagrams, measurement and detailed questioning - but above all they are accessible and fun. One wonders why ever such things were once only accessible in a glass case.

Jonathan Barnes
Headteacher
St Peter’s Methodist Primary School
Canterbury.

You may book a free educational group visit to Dover Castle and its Education Centre by telephoning 0304 222129 or writing to - The Education Administrator, Dover Castle, Dover, Kent CT16 1HQ.

Model of a romanesque arch.

The Roman light house at Dover Castle.
A Sense of History
Key Stage 1
Longman, 1991
Pack comprising:
12 books for children:
- Homes - Kathy Swift
- Teddy Bears - Sallie Purkis
- Birthdays - Sallie Purkis
- Our Gran - Kathy Swift
- Working Hard - Sallie Purkis
- History in the News - Sallie Purkis
- Our Pets - Gill Durbin
- Under the Ground - Gill Durbin
- Shops and Shopping - Gill Durbin and Marilyn Tiltham
- Lights and Candles - Marilyn Tiltham
- Children in History - Joan Blyth
- Our Toys - Joan Blyth
12 posters related to each of the 12 books
12 black-line timetables
Teachers’ Book by Sallie Purkis
Cost of complete pack is £9.50
Children’s books are available separately at £2.75 each, the posters and timetables as sets only at £25.50 and £50.00 respectively, and the Teachers’ Book at £35.00.
Available from Longman Group UK Ltd, Longman House, Burnt Mill, Harefield, Essex CM29 2RE.

This could be sub-titled ‘all you ever wanted to know about Key Stage 1 History, but were too shy to ask’. It not only includes a conventional teaching scheme but also addresses the needs of teachers and students facing history head-on for the first time this year.

The focus pack on a child-centred approach and active learning methods using books and related posters that are beautifully illustrated and bound are bound to be appealing to children. The first few books are for the beginners, all the books cover elementary elements in the programme of study for Key Stage 1. Each book is summarised in the Teachers’ Book with suggestions for a variety of materials and activities, many on photocopiable sheets, together with follow-up work in the other National Curriculum subjects already in place. A lot of thought has been put into the design; the sheets look fun to do, with attractive, clear Illustrations, language pitched at the right level, and the whole for ring bound to make producing copies easy. This book could save the busy teacher hours of preparation time and as such could be worth its weight in gold, which, at £11.95, is not far off the mark.

Liz Hollieshead

RESOURCES
English Heritage Education Service
EDUCATIONAL CATALOGUE UPDATE

VIDEO

TEACHING ON SITE
This new series introduces approaches to using the historic site in situ in the classroom. It is accompanied by a series of case studies and Attainment Targets in National Curriculum Subjects.

Teaching on Site: History and Geography

This first video shows teachers preparing ideas and materials and setting out the practicalities for a visit with two classes to investigate the historic site of Castlegate and its surrounding landscape. We see work on site and follow-up in the classroom, as well as an evaluation of the project with an Advisory Teacher. In-service training: Initial teacher training; Key Stages 2 and 3; 22 minutes; 1991. Price £10.95
Product Code: XT 11494

The Key Stage 1 Curriculum

This second title in our Teaching on Site series shows a project with Key Stage 1 pupils in a historic site. The video follows the project from planning by the class teacher through to follow-up and shows the children working in small groups on site and in the classroom.

Suitability: Initial teacher training in-service courses; 19 minutes; 1991. Price £20.95
Product Code: XT 11313

Learning from the Past

Two further Teaching on Site videos are in production. Maths, Science and Technology, and Creative Arts which include Art, Design, Drama, English and Music. Both will be available during the summer term. Look out for more details in Remnants 17.

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