

Enquiry- based approach to learning

“How do we remember?”

This case study will outline how an enquiry- based approach to learning can achieve national curriculum coverage and provide practical and contextual learning experiences for children. The learning challenge question for this topic was “How do we remember?” and through this the children in the Year 5 and 6 class have covered many aspects of practical Science, writing for a purpose and enjoyed a trip to the Warner Bros. Harry Potter studios with strong curriculum links. As well as this, the topic has enabled priceless opportunities for developing knowledge of local history through the organisation of a community event culminating in a piece of community art, which will go towards the school achieving the arts mark.

How does the enquiry-based approach work?

The enquiry began with a primary learning challenge question, which was: “How do we remember?” however this question is then split into the secondary questions below.

How do writers use memories?

The class book for this half term was *Harry Potter and the Philosopher’s Stone* (NC: En2 8a). This book was chosen because of J.K Rowling’s use of interesting literary devices for creating flashbacks. The children compared the use of flashbacks in the book to the film version. They were able to find similarities and differences and discussed the cinematic decisions made by the director. Whilst the children have now completed the National Literacy Strategy objectives for a unit on flashbacks, they have also learned about how music and camera angles can impact upon the audience’s understanding of character. (NC: En2 4a-4e)

Another opportunity for exploring the use of flashbacks was through the film *Up*. This film begins with flashbacks throughout the main character’s life and is centred upon a scrapbook of memories called an “Adventure book”. The class were set the challenge to create their own adventure books for homework. They were given 4 weeks to complete recounts of 8 key memories from their lives including photographs and mementos. Once finished, these books were shared with the Year 3 and 4 class and at the community event at the end of the project.



We also looked at how poets use memories and the children created their own winter memory poems which were then displayed in the hall (NC: En3 9a, 12)

This learning challenge question finished with a Big Writing task, where children had to use memories in their own writing. They planned and wrote a short story with a flashback. They used their knowledge of Harry Potter to create a detailed description of a setting in

Dumbledore's office and then used the magical pensieve as a trigger for a flashback. Many children used memories from their adventure books in these flashbacks, which showed the impact of spending time on an extended homework project. (NC: En3 9a)

How does the brain store memories?

This question provided the opportunity for some high level, challenging Science. The children learned about the sections of the brain and how the brain receives and stores memories. After listening to a neuroscience rap, the children made clay brains, which they painted into sections and labelled. All children are able to explain the function of the hippocampus in the brain and most children can explain how the visual cortex, prefrontal lobe, primary motor and sensory cortex work together to create memories. The children enjoyed the opportunity to use scientific language (National Curriculum: Science, Breadth of Study 2b) and have a good understanding of how the nervous system works.



In addition to this neuroscience, this question enabled important lessons on the effects of drugs, alcohol and tobacco on the human body, in particular how this affects the brain. (National Curriculum: Sc2 2g) After learning about how the brain learns new things and stores memories, the children were able to make comparisons with a brain functioning normally and the slower reaction time and damaged synapses of a brain after smoking or drinking alcohol.



As well as looking at the health implications of these things, the children were challenged to think about how peer pressure may affect the way they behave. They were shown 3 glasses of liquid and told that if they drank the first they would be more confident, the second they would have lots of friends and the third they would forget their troubles. This led to an interesting debate about reasons for drinking alcohol, smoking or taking drugs where children made comments like: "If you drink the drink which makes you forget, your worries still won't disappear" and "If you drank a drink to become more

popular you wouldn't even be the same person".

These interesting questions then led to a philosophy lesson, where the children used their speaking and listening skills to debate the questions: "Is there more past or future?", "If you lost your memory would you still be the same person?" and "Does all History need to be remembered?" The children were learning how to use counter arguments and evidence in their debating. (NC: En1 3a-3d)

As well as the knowledge and understanding gained of the human body, this learning challenge has covered many of the scientific enquiry skills (NC: Science SC1 1a,b 2a-e) as the children designed their own experiments to answer the question "Is it possible to improve your memory?" They invented memory games based upon well known memory games and made predictions as to whether daily repetition of the game would improve a person's memory score. They had to show how they would achieve a fair test and created charts to record their observations. Finally, they had to draw conclusions and evaluate their experiment.

Is it important to share memories?

During this enquiry the school celebrated Remembrance Day. This provided a perfect opportunity to think about why we have Remembrance Day and debate as to whether it is important to keep on remembering events from History. The children were given photographs of different aspects of life during WW1 and they had to try to identify what was happening in the photograph and discuss what impact forgetting this History would have. In addition to this the class learned about the work of the Royal British Legion.



After looking at the importance of Remembrance Day we also thought about Black History Month, as this was celebrated the month before. Working in groups, the children created Keynote presentations (NC:ICT 5b) on the lives of important people in Black History, ranging from Martin Luther King to Michelle Obama. They discussed why these people should be remembered and why Black History month happens each year. (NC: History 4b, 5b, 5c)

What memories are there in Kenninghall?

This final learning challenge question was the finale to what was a challenging and rich enquiry. The children were set the task of organising a community event, where they could find out more about the memories of their village. They wrote an invitation for the local newsletter, inviting people of all ages, including past students from the school to bring their memories to share. They also wrote persuasive letters (NC: En3 9c, En3 11) to individuals from the community and many of them got replies. The high quality of writing produced on these occasions was a result of having a real purpose for writing (NC: En3 1a-c).

Events

Community event

On Friday 14th December the class held their community event in the school hall. They decorated the tables and served the visitors with tea and coffee, and mince pies. They performed Christmas carols, played their musical instruments, and most importantly shared their memories using their adventure books as a stimulus for conversation. The event was attended by past students, past teachers, people who have lived in the village for decades, the reverend, members of the Lands Trust and many more. These visitors came with photographs, newspaper cuttings and even metal artefacts found under the floorboards of the old foundry.

Children learned about the history of their houses, the school and the local church. They questioned the changes in the local area and (NC: Geog 4b) even found out how the school logo was chosen.

Comments from the Visitor's book show that it was not only an event which the children enjoyed, but also an event which made an impression on our local community: "Good company, well mannered children", "The children have some interesting stories. A very nice way to spend a morning"

On the day the children were presented with a jubilee oak tree, which will be planted in the school grounds with a time capsule to commemorate the year 2012.



Arts mark

This year we are working towards the Arts Mark and the community event gave the perfect opportunity for collaborating with people from the village community to create a piece of art. In the lead up to the event the children used their sketch books to gather ideas about how architecture of the village holds memories for people (NC: Art 1a-c). We went for a walk around Kenninghall and used photography, sketching and rubbings to record ideas. On returning to school, the children used photographs and sketching to create their own art of the community. In addition to this, children worked in groups (NC: Art 5b) on using a projector to scale up images of the church, East Church Street and the School to create a memory wall at the community event. During the event, the children encouraged the visitors to write their memories on to the memory wall, so that we now have an artistic representation of the memories of Kenninghall community.



In the new year we hope to commission an artist to work with the children on creating a permanent installation in the school as a result of this project.



Harry Potter Studios Trip

The class went on a curriculum based trip to the Warner Bros. studio in London to investigate how film sets are used to create flashbacks. After reading Harry Potter and watching the film, the children were ecstatic about the opportunity to find out about how the film was actually made. During the trip they had a workshop with professional costume designers, where they learned about how costumes are distressed in battles and indeed in flashbacks. They even had a go at using professional tools to distress fabric. The experiences of this trip meant that on return to school, when faced with writing a story beginning with setting the scene of Dumbledore's office, the children had a concrete example to use. The language and detail of the stories produced by the class is undoubtedly a result of this unforgettable trip.



Outcomes

- ◆ **Writing levels-** The Harry Potter short stories with flashbacks were formally assessed against the first piece of work the children did this term and every child has achieved their individual target.
- ◆ **Social Skills-** Children have had the chance to communicate with visitors of many different ages and backgrounds. Comments in the visitors' book show the interesting conversation and good manners of the children.
- ◆ **Closer links with the Community –** Since the event we have received letters and comments from many visitors, who enjoyed the day and have left a stamp on our memory wall.
- ◆ **Long Term Art Project-** The children now have a curriculum based starting point for an art project with an artist in the New Year.