

Developing a sense of identity and place through local history and museum collections

Anna Husband

A good understanding of history is an essential part of children's learning and development. Through connecting with and exploring people, places and events of the past, children develop a sense of identity and an understanding of their own and others' place in the world.



Captain James Cook by John Webber, 1779 NPG 26
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As their learning progresses, they understand the motivations and circumstances leading to key events and the impact that these have had on the political, cultural and social landscapes that shape their lives today. Engagement with 'the real thing' is a key part of effective history teaching and learning. Through museums children can make meaningful connections with the past, developing an enjoyment of and enthusiasm for history and a desire to find out more.

Where we live and grow up is an important part of who we are. Encouraging children to understand more about their local heritage helps them feel proud of their roots, develops a sense of place and identity, and in so doing raises their aspirations. Connecting children with real people, objects and stories from their locality through museum collections can bring these histories to life and lead to meaningful learning experiences with long-lasting impact.

I have been able to link the work we are doing in class to something real, something the children have already seen and it allows them to link the information in their own minds.

Primary Teacher

Local heritage

Every region has a story to tell. Perhaps a famous actor, inventor, or artist was born there, or it's where important things were built or made. It might have been the site of a Roman settlement or played a unique role during World War II. Or it could be home to a 'first' – the first cinema in Britain, the first woman bus driver, the first printing press. No matter how ordinary or extraordinary, our local heritage may seem, exploring the stories of what and who have shaped where we live helps us develop a sense of local and personal identity, make national and international connections and form a sense of self and our place in the world.

Imagine your region was the birthplace of a world famous explorer or an astronaut. Or that your home town produced millions of tonnes of iron and steel and built structures that stretched around the world! For children living in the Tees Valley, this is their local heritage. It's where Captain Cook was born, and where Arthur Dorman and Albert De Lande Long built the Sydney Harbour Bridge, from ironstone mined by thousands of Teessiders in the local hills. Where Edward Pease and George Stephenson opened the first passenger railway in the world. It's the site of the only World War I battle to place in the UK and was home to an Anglo Saxon Princess and to pioneering women like Gertrude Bell. The history of this remarkable region journeys through industry and innovation, creativity and design, and exploration - around the world and into outer space. It's a story of everyday people who not only made their mark on the Tees Valley but whose legacies are still impacting on our lives across Britain and around the world today.

Museums

With this in mind, the National Portrait Gallery (NPG) in London has been working with eight

museums in the Tees Valley, to create 'Making a Mark', a series of activities and resources connecting local children with their heritage through museum collections. Through looking at the people behind the amazing story of their region and the traces they have left behind, Making a Mark brings children face to face with men and women just like them who were born in their home towns or came from overseas to make their lives there. And who, through hard work, great ideas and, sometimes, sheer good fortune, made their mark on the Tees Valley, Britain and the wider world.

Making a Mark supports the development of children's historical enquiry skills through hands-on sessions for schools on a range of locally focused, curriculum-relevant themes, from Early Settlers and Exploration, to the Seaside and World War I. A brand new online resource, **Making a Mark in the Tees Valley** www.npg.org.uk/mamteesvalley features galleries of themed objects, photographs, paintings, letters and portraits for teachers to delve into. Concise, relevant information, ideas for classroom activities, a series of fascinating 'Did you know..?' facts and links to further online material help teachers bring local histories to life in the classroom. Together, these approaches help children feel proud of their heritage and inspire them to make their own mark in the future.

Children learned more from the two days at the Museum than they had during the five week topic at school!
Assistant Head

While Making a Mark provides a neatly packaged, curriculum linked offer for schools, it is by no means the only resource like it. Most museums offer interactive learning sessions for schools. Many also have online resources, or images of their collections - some even in 3D - that can be used in the classroom. A number of online sites now have useful portals into locally relevant, curriculum-linked material from museums around the country, such as:

- Culture24's 'Show Me'
www.show.me.uk
- The British Museum's 'Teaching History from 100 objects'
www.teachinghistory100.org
- My Learning
www.mylearning.org
- Historic England
historicengland.org.uk/services-skills/education/heritage-education-resources/
- TES Resources
www.tes.com/teaching-resources

And the National Portrait Gallery, of course, has an unrivalled collection of portraits of the movers and shakers who helped shape Britain. <http://www.npg.org.uk/collections.php>

If you can't visit your local museum, why not create your own local heritage exhibition at school - with artefacts, photographs and memories from children, staff and their families? Images from films from museum websites can provide further material to build local stories, or link them to nationally significant events and people of the past.

The Curriculum

The most relevant subject for activity focused on local heritage is, of course, History. The 'Making a Mark in the Tees Valley' online resource provides plenty of ideas for activities to support the History curriculum, many of which can be easily adapted to support different local histories and museum collections:

- Captain Cook and Astronaut Nicholas Patrick, both of whom were born in the Tees Valley, and explored the 'great unknown' in ships called *Endeavour* and *Discovery* (albeit in a 'space' ship in Nicholas Patrick's case!) provide the perfect subjects for a comparison between **the lives of significant individuals from different periods**
- The birth of the Railways, which revolutionised travel for men, women and children from all walks of life and breathed new life into villages, towns and cities provides a familiar subject for **exploring a nationally and internationally significant event beyond living memory** or a **significant turning point in British History**
- The development of the region's local seaside resorts, and the discovery of ironstone in the local hills (leading to the Tees Valley becoming one of the UK's major producers of iron and steel, building structures that stretched around the world), are just two of many **significant historical events and places**, alongside a cast of **significant people** – or 'Teessiders'
- Settlement by the Saxons and Vikings – including an Anglo Saxon Princess, as well as the region's unique contribution to World War I provide further case studies for **linking local heritage to nationally significant events**.

Teaching and learning from museum collections – both online and in real life – supports a range of **historical enquiry skills** including:

- Using historical sources
- Questioning, imagining and deducing
- Developing and substantiating an answer, argument or narrative
- Assessing reliability and bias
- Multiple perspectives – was everyone's experience the same..?
- Cause, consequence and impact
- Continuity and change

Adopting a 'topic-based' approach to History teaching is a popular and effective way of extending learning across the curriculum. And as well as Historical Enquiry, museum collections can support skills development in other areas, such as **Creativity** and **Critical Thinking**, including:

- Generating ideas
- Questioning assumptions and exploring possibilities
- Innovating, testing and adapting
- Making connections
- Creating

And **Literacy**, including:

- Developing language and vocabulary
- Persuading and arguing
- Qualifying and justifying
- Discussing and debating
- Communicating in different forms for different purposes

All the while connecting children to unique stories on their own doorstep, and fostering a sense of place, pride and identity.

History can often feel 'very long ago and far away' – particularly for young children – and perhaps never more so than with the current curriculum. By focusing on children's local heritage, we can literally bring some of these histories closer to home, providing recognizable hooks to engage children, gently steering them from the familiar to the unfamiliar while helping them understand what is really special about where they live and inspiring them to make their own mark on the world.

Further information

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The Tees Valley Museums comprise Kirkleatham Museum, Cleveland Ironstone Mining Museum, The Dorman Museum, The Captain Cook Birthplace Museum, Middlesbrough Institute of Modern Art, Preston Park Museum, Head of Steam - Darlington Railway Museum, and the Hartlepool Museum and Art Gallery. The National Portrait Gallery is their national partner.

Making a Mark in the Tees Valley online resource for teachers:

www.npg.org.uk/MaMTeesValley

Tell us what you think: #MaMTeesValley