

Learning about the past through a study of houses and homes

Early Years Focus

Helen Crawford

A thematic study based on houses and homes is an excellent way to link learning about the past with something all children will be able to relate to – where they live. Planned carefully, it can provide a range of learning opportunities for both inside and outside the classroom.

Let's look outside

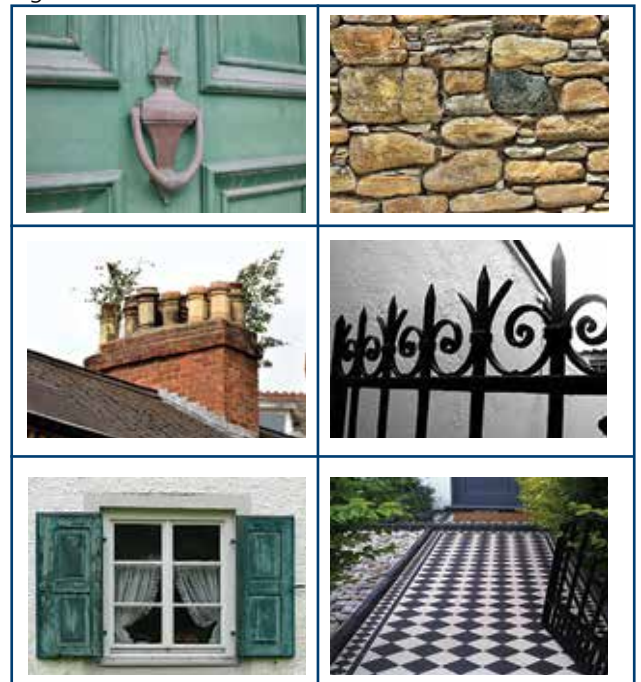
Learning about houses and homes necessarily lends itself to a study of your locality. Taking your class for a walk around the local area is an effective way to cover the EYFS learning outcome for children to 'know about similarities and differences in relation to places, objects, materials... and talk about the features of their own immediate environment'.

The best way to approach this is, of course, to consider the particular location of your school. Dating houses is not always straightforward. A very old house can have modern features (such as solar panels), and new houses are often built to look 'traditional'. As part of the preparation for the walk, look carefully at your local area and select which houses would be the best to focus on with your class.

Suggested themes for your walk:

- What is the oldest house in our neighbourhood? How old is it? How do we know? How could we find out?
- What materials are houses in our local area made from? Are old houses made from the same materials as modern houses? Why? Why not? What has changed? What has stayed the same?
- Let's be house detectives! As part of the preparation for the walk, take photographs of some interesting old features. You can give the children this visual checklist and they can tick off each feature as they find it (see Figure 1).

Figure 1: checklist for a local area walk



At the estate agents

Some schools are situated in areas, such as modern housing estates, where there may not be a great diversity of housing stock. Estate agents' leaflets showing different houses for sale are a great way for children to investigate houses and homes without leaving their classroom. Free local newspapers also provide adverts for homes. Can the children identify which homes for sale are new, and which were built a long time ago? How do they know?

Suggested classroom activities:

- Provide a selection of different images and ask the children to decide how they should be sorted. This could be by age, or it could be by their different

Figure 2: A timeline showing how televisions have changed over time



features (for example, a collection of different chimneys or front doors).

- Order images of different houses from oldest to newest. These can be used to form a timeline for a class display.
- Set up your role-play area as an estate agents. The children can write captions and description for houses to go on sale, show 'prospective buyers' a range of different options, book viewings and (of course) take commission when a sale has been agreed!

Let's look inside

Another key learning outcome for the EYFS curriculum is for children 'to understand past and present events in their own lives and in the lives of family members'. This means that exploring the features of a Victorian laundry (with its washboards and dolly tubs) is not really appropriate. We should be looking at change that the children's parents and grandparents can remember. Technological advances have been so great in the last 50 or 60 years that there are plenty of areas to choose from.

You could investigate how a particular household object has changed over time. One suggestion is to focus on a feature common to most homes – the television. The children could begin by looking at images of different televisions and sequencing photos to make a simple timeline (see Figure 2). There are also good opportunities here for some oral history and developing home links. This could involve asking grandparents (or an older member of staff) to visit the class. Questions for discussion could include: what was your TV made of? What colour were the pictures? How did you change channels? How many channels were there? What was your favourite programme? In a world where there are dedicated children's channels

which play cartoons on demand, the idea that children's programmes used to be scheduled for just a few hours a day seems very far away!

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Resources

Peepo by Janet and Allan Ahlberg (Puffin, 2011) is set in a house during the Second World War. The illustrations provide a rich picture of everyday life in the 1940s – from the wooden wireless, to the coal shed and the outside toilet.

Our House by Emma and Paul Rogers (Candlewick, 1993) tells the story of four families who have lived in the same house for over 200 years. It is an excellent resource for looking at continuity and change over time.

www.geffrye-museum.org.uk

The Geffrye Museum in London specialises in the history of homes. The website has a specific *Kids' Zone* and also hosts an image bank of household objects which can be downloaded.

www.bbc.co.uk/schools/dynamo/history/index.shtml

'*What comes from when?*' is an online game where children sort objects from a 1950s child's bedroom and one from the year 2000. It is aimed at Key Stage 1 but would also be suitable for Reception children.