

Riding along on my pushbike... exploring transport in EYFS

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High wheel 'penny farthing' bicycles
Classic Image / Alamy Stock Photo

There is a myriad of opportunities for exploring the history of travel and transport in Early Years. You could focus on the Montgolfier brothers' hot air balloon flight in the late eighteenth century, the invention of steam trains and motor cars in the nineteenth century, or even the space race of the 1960s and 1970s. All these options can be covered, but it may be more profitable to explore just one in depth. In this instance, the humble bicycle...

The bicycle is a great focus for an Early Years class: learning to ride a bike is something personal, familiar and something children can relate to their own lives. It is something most of us can remember as a significant event in our own histories.

Another good reason for choosing the bicycle is that most Early Years settings will have a range of scooters, bicycles and tricycles as part of their provision for outdoor learning. You can add to these resources by bringing in larger-sized bicycles to observe, compare and contrast. Because you can provide pupils with 'real thing', you will ensure that children have first-hand, multi-sensory learning experiences.

Different bicycles

A good starting point is to look at the different bicycles we ride at different times in our lives. This is an effective way to cover the early learning goal for children to understand 'past and present events in our own lives and the lives of family members' (DFE,

Bicycles change as we change – a personal timeline



2018). While you could show the children a range of images, it would be better to gather together a collection of different bicycles. Observing, handling and using the bicycles themselves will be more memorable. This activity should also help children begin to use language relating to measurement, including the vocabulary of time (e.g. 'This seat is too high for me to sit on', 'I cannot fit in this chair because I am four').

Discuss and decide which ages of people would ride in or ride on each bicycle. What features do all the bicycles have in common? Why do some of the bicycles have different features, such as stabilisers? How do the bicycles we ride change as we grow?

Ask the children to rearrange the bicycles in order depending on the age of the people who would ride them. This simple timeline activity will help children to develop their sequencing skills and build an early understanding of chronology.

An excellent picture book to support this activity is *Sally Jean, the Bicycle Queen* by Cari Best (2006). Sally Jean is a girl who loves to ride her bicycle, even when it gets too big for her to ride any more. This book addresses several key historical concepts, such as continuity, change, similarity and difference, in a way that is accessible and engaging for young children.

The penny farthing

Bicycles were first invented in the nineteenth century and one of the most recognisable early bikes is the high wheel bicycle, often called the penny farthing. These were popular in the 1880s. They were invented in France by Eugène Meyer, and later British versions were developed by James Stanley in Coventry. Penny farthings are popular with children as they look so very different from the bicycles we ride today. As such, they provide a memorable focus for learning.

The penny farthing was so called because of its large front wheel and much smaller back wheel, which were said to resemble a penny coin leading a farthing coin. If you have access to large cardboard

coins, you can ask children to use these as templates to paint or draw a modern-day version of a penny farthing using current coin denominations. What coins do we use today? Which is the largest coin? Which is the smallest?

This creative activity will help children make connections between the past and the present. It will also support aspects of mathematical development such as classification, measurement, shape and number recognition.

Penny farthings are best seen in action, and useful video footage can be found online – some of which dates from the early twentieth century – which you can share with your class.



Which coins would we use to make a twenty-first century 'penny farthing'?

1820 Draisine, the first two-wheeler



1868 Velocipede, earned the name of 'bone-shaker'



1886 Coventry Rotary Quadracycle for two



1886 Rover safety bicycle, the first modern bicycle



The inventor's workshop

Learning about different inventors and inventions is an effective way to introduce children to some of the ideas they will encounter when they begin National Curriculum programmes of study in Year 1; ideas such as significant people from the past and turning points in history.

Show the children some images of early bicycles and discuss what they can see in the pictures. Who invented these bicycles? How did people travel before bicycles were invented? What materials were the first bicycles made from? What features did they have? Did every bicycle have pedals?

Set up an inventor's workshop in your class or outside area. Resources might include: small world figures, construction equipment and junk modelling materials (old CDs, for example, can make good wheels). Can the children invent their own bicycle? What features would it have? Some of the early bicycles had nicknames such as the *hobby horse* or the *bone shaker*. Can the children guess why they had these nicknames? Can they think of a good name for their invention?

The picture book *Mrs Armitage on Wheels* by Quentin Blake (1999) is another good prompt for this activity. Mrs Armitage has all sorts of ideas about how to improve her bicycle and what it 'really needs'. Sharing this story with your class should provide some entertaining ideas to inspire their inventions.

Whatever you choose as your focus for an Early Years theme based on transport and travel, try to ensure that it provides opportunities for children to gain first-hand experiences that relate to their own lives and to the world around them.

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Resources

Miffy's Bicycle by Dick Bruna (2004). Publisher: Egmont

Mrs Armitage on Wheels by Quentin Blake (1999). Publisher: Red Fox

Sally Jean, the Bicycle Queen by Cari Best (2006). Publisher: Farrar Straus Giroux

British Pathé: *The Penny Farthing Bike Race* (1928) www.youtube.com/watch?v=8HRpVV_x3N4

DfE (2018) www.gov.uk/government/publications/early-years-foundation-stage-framework--2