

It worked for me:

Knights and castles

Sarah Woods

Class 2 is the Year 2 class at Thrumpton Primary Academy in Retford, East Midlands. Thrumpton is part of the Diverse Academies Learning Partnership in Nottinghamshire. For their 2016 summer term topic, Class 2 learnt about medieval knights and castles. Their teacher at the time, Miss Harris, was on long-term supply with the class from February to July. She was particularly excited when she found out about the choice of topic for the term, as she has a degree in history with a specialism in medieval history!

We started the unit by exploring what we already knew and what we wanted to find out. For our first activity, we focused on PSHE and British values and we learnt about the legend of St George and why we celebrate St George's Day. We had great fun acting out and re-writing the legend. As we were so excited by the idea of dragons, we planned and wrote some instructions on how to catch a dragon to keep

as a pet. We loved drawing story maps to help us remember our ideas! Next we started to find out about castles. We got into teams of four and numbered ourselves 1–4. The number 1s had 15 seconds to look at a picture of a castle then draw what they had seen. Then the number 2s went, then the number 3s and finally the number 4s. As we completed the task, we had lots of discussions about the picture within our group, as it was a wooden motte and bailey castle and most of us had never seen one of those before! Afterwards, we looked at and labelled the features of a motte and bailey castle and wrote a list of advantages and disadvantages. We then used this to write a description of the castle. Moving on from motte and bailey castles, we looked at how this design evolved into stone castles. We discussed the similarities and differences between the castles and labelled the features of a stone castle. Next, we did an artist study of the picture 'Castle and Sun' by Paul





Klee and made our own versions using different media and techniques. We then looked at some locations of famous castles in the UK and plotted these on a map. For our final activity on castles, we made motte and bailey sandcastles which was great fun to do on a hot summer day!

After we had finished our work on castles, we started to learn about knights. We were fortunate enough to have a real blacksmith come and visit us to show us some armour and weapons that he and his colleagues had made for full-contact medieval fighting and medieval re-enactment fighting. We found out lots of interesting things and got to handle some weapons and armour! After our visit, we had a go at drawing a knight in a suit of armour and labelling the armour correctly. We were fascinated by the shield that Mr Woods the blacksmith showed us, as he explained how shields would have been painted with a coat of arms or picture so that people knew who the knight was if they saw him on the battlefield. Inspired by this, we researched our surnames to find our own coat of arms and had a go at drawing them. It was tricky as they were so intricate and detailed! After that we made our own shields and decorated them in a symmetrical pattern.

A particular highlight of our trip was going to the Royal Armouries in Leeds. We got to watch some real sword fighting and see lots of exciting things in the galleries. We also made our own castle character puppets, watched a knight get into armour and listened to a story about a brave knight.

To finish our topic, we learnt more about the people who would have lived and worked in a castle. We found out about a lot of different jobs and choose our favourite two to research and write about. We even did some role play to help us understand the feudal system! Finally, we all made a crown and had a medieval banquet where we ate food similar to what they would have had in medieval times and listened to medieval-style music. Miss Harris was also impressed by the support from our parents during this topic, as evidenced by the imaginative homework we made. This included brochures on local castles, medieval-style weapons and model castles, made from a variety of things ranging from lego to cake! We really enjoyed learning about this topic and hope that you have enjoyed reading about it!

Sarah Woods (née Harris) taught at Thrumpton Primary Academy in Retford, East Midlands and is currently teaching a nursery class in Mansfield Nottinghamshire.

Contextual learning within Castles

The cross-curricular dimension

Cross-curricular topic work continues to be a popular mainstay in many primary classrooms. There is much that is positive with this, not least the creative melding of different subject disciplines. There are also some issues, however, that need to be considered.

First, it is important to be clear about the conceptual learning that underpins the activity. It is these concepts that determine the subject focus of the task. If we are reproducing a piece of artwork in the style of a particular artist, then regardless of the historical content of the image this is an art activity. If we are using art to demonstrate our understanding of an historical concept such as characteristic features, then our learning relates to history.

Second, we should also be aware that findings from the last Ofsted subject report, *History for All*, suggested that children's historical understanding was less well developed when they were taught through cross-curricular topics.

Notwithstanding these considerations, cross-curricular topics allow us to investigate a theme from a variety of different standpoints, creating layers of meaning while making potentially rich connections across the curriculum. At its best the cross-curricular topic allows subjects to sing in harmony together.

Historical understanding

'George and the Dragon'

It is very sound practice to identify potential links to citizenship and the focus on British values. Knowing the story of St George and the dragon and being able to recognise him as one of the four patron saints of Britain is very valid activity. Considering why he was selected as patron saint allows us to consider what makes for significance. A useful follow-up would be to compare his historical validity with that of the other patron saints. How much do we actually know about the 'real' St George? Looking at what other countries also have as a patron saint would move this into a wider world context.

'Castles'

The focus here has clearly been on identifying **characteristic features**. First, *specific historical vocabulary* has been developed and used to describe those features. Second, in looking at how the motte and bailey developed into stone castles the children have been able to *identify similarities and differences between ways of life between different periods*.

Investigating the changes across the period from Norman to medieval has allowed children to extend their understanding of **chronology** by being able to *sequence and order* images.

The visit from the local blacksmith and to the Royal Armouries has extended **subject knowledge** and recognition of **characteristic features** through the use of **historical enquiry**. Here they have been able to both

ask and answer questions. At the same time their activity with the knight's shield has shown that they can *choose and use sources to show they understand key features*. There are also strong elements of **causality** here as children think about why armour was built in a certain way, *recognising that there are reasons why people acted as they did*.

They were able to look at identifying the way of life at that time with their research into jobs and role play on the feudal system. I am sure the medieval banquet was a wonderful occasion allowing the children to explore the period through all their senses and so really making it come alive. This allowed them to *identify specific features of the period*.

Identifying castles across the map is an interesting activity. I believe that it could have been extended to think about *why* the castles were situated where they were. What made those locations significant? This would reinforce understanding of **cause and consequence**.

Paul Klee 'Castle and Sun'

I am sure that the Paul Klee art produced some wonderful paintings and this was clearly a really appropriate choice of image. Perhaps this could also have been tailored to give it a British perspective by linking the colour palette to greys, browns and greens. Another aspect would have been to look at some *contemporary images* of medieval castles to use the shapes within the Klee-inspired paintings. This would have strengthened the historical focus within this task.

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