Was there a Sixth Century World-Wide Web?

The evidence from Sutton Hoo

This resource was created by **Neil Bates** of Harrow Way School in Hampshire – Neil will be well-known to many teachers from his numerous CPD sessions as an advisory teacher and as a workshop leader and plenary presenter at SHP Conferences and other events. As one of history teaching's great enthusiasts and creative thinkers (and a great supporter of young teachers), he's also created a good many resources including this guide to Music in the Classroom at

https://thinkinghistory.co.uk/ResourceBase/MusicintheClassroom.html

This material was created for a single lesson with Y7 classes but could be used with KS2 students too – and with older students who need to have their perceptions of the Early Middle Ages challenged! Unfortunately the onset of Covid-19 meant that Neil hasn't, at the time of putting this on the site in August 2020, been able to trial it and gauge students' responses we both felt it was better to make it available and give you the chance to use it if you wish.

Now over to Neil to describe the activity and its use.

Introduction and Aims

The origins of this lesson lie in my past as an archaeologist, a slight obsession with Saxon, Celtic and Nordic art and a reading of Valerie Hansen's excellent book *The Year 1000: When Explorers Connected the World and Globalisation Began*. While this enquiry deals with events somewhat earlier than 1000AD it (and Robert MacFarlane's writing about Mesolithic sea lanes connecting the Atlantic coast of Europe from Biscay to the Hebrides) got me thinking about historic global connections. The aim of this single lesson is to quickly introduce our students to the idea that England was historically connected to networks that allowed the movement of people, goods and ideas. It is designed to be one of the first lessons our Y7 students encounter and follows a big overview asking what stories the people who passed our school site over the last 5000 years might tell.

Side note: Our school sits on the Harrow Way, a late Neolithic/Early Bronze Age trackway linking Dover to Dorset via Stonehenge- so a great location to be at the crossroads of lots of history. Having established the notion of our little corner of the World being visited by Neolithic farmers,

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Roman legionaries and Vikings undergoing a religious conversion, we wanted in this lesson to look outwards to the World in a little more detail. We are also hoping with this enquiry and our Stories of the Harrow Way to build the idea that History doesn't start in 1066.

Resources

PowerPoint sequence – the core resources

An extract from Beowulf (one sheet of A4)

How you'd do it in the classroom

The enquiry begins by asking students to consider the connections between three images. On slide 1 we have a graphic of the internet/world wide web alongside 19th Century shipping lanes and a map of the Silk Roads. Our aim here is to establish early on the notion of international connections. From there we pose the big question (slide 2) and move on (slide 3-4) to ask what a group of archaeologists might be examining back in 1938. The images on slide 4 are drip fed in to slowly build a picture that we are looking at a major archaeological discovery. This sense of importance is further reinforced by the image of the Sutton Hoo helmet (slide 5).

NOTE: It is important at this stage that students are NOT given any information about the geographical location of the dig site. Equally, we do not reveal that this is a ship burial but instead ask them to speculate as to what was discovered.

As our school is encouraging reading for purpose we thought that this was a perfect opportunity to build such reading into the enquiry. The burial at Sutton Hoo is similar to one described in some of the opening passages of the great Saxon epic, Beowulf. To this end we now (slide 6 and quotation provided) ask students to read the relevant passages from the book and ask them to compare the events described with their own thoughts on the archaeological discovery. Once this conversation has been conducted we unveil the ship burial using a classic slow reveal in slide 7.

The next stage of the enquiry beginning with slide 8 involves students attempting to predict WHERE the burial took place (hence the Note above about not revealing the location was important). To complete this task students are issued with a worksheet (see slide 15 – the last slide) containing information about the origins of the grave goods and a map – see slide 9. The aim is to draw links from the grave goods to the appropriate location on the map.

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We highly recommend giving students access to an atlas for this task in order to help the geographically lost.

Once the students have annotated their maps we ask them (slide 10) to predict the location of the burial site. The idea here is for them to consider all the various origin points of the grave goods and simply speculate based upon the geography. In some senses this is leading students down the garden path so as to give more impact to the actual location. We achieve this plotting by asking students to write their names onto a post-it note and place that onto a projected map. We can then use this for further discussion.

With the plotting complete we can now (slide 11) reveal the location of Sutton Hoo in East Anglia. Students are then asked to mark the real location onto their map. We next (slide 12) return to the big question- now slightly modified as "Does Sutton Hoo reveal the existence of a Sixth Century World Wide Web?"

Concluding the lesson

In finishing the enquiry we were aware of time and not always being able to devote class time to a longer written task. So, on this occasion we aimed to use the idea of a Wall of Misconceptions (slides 13 and 14). This is a device whereby we constructed a physical wall in the classroom- usually using those printer paper boxes that are always lying around in school reprographics rooms. On this wall are printed signs containing statements that are plausible but incorrect. Students are asked to verbally challenge these with their newfound knowledge and then using a PG-Tips Monkey toy- demolish the wall of misconceptions. The physicality and (unusual-ness) of this activity really helps pupils remember what they're learning but for colleagues who do not relish the thought of projectiles being hurled around their classroom a safer alternative is to demolish the wall via post-it notes or simply through discussion.

As a final question you could ask students to identify what is the most important thing they think they have learned from this lesson or what has most surprised them – asking pupils to think explicitly about what they have learned really helps them retain that new understanding.

Possible follow-up/links to other topics you teach

The idea of looking for international links showcased in this enquiry is slowly being built into our curriculum. As mentioned earlier we connect the movement of people in the Sixth Century to travellers on the Harrow Way over thousands of years; people of different origins speaking many

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different languages. We have also attempted to look at a similar world wide web in Elizabethan England. That enquiry uses Elizabeth's hand resting on the globe in the Armada portrait to ask how global was Elizabeth's reach? We also look at the nature of medieval empires by contrasting the paltry English-held territories with the empires of Genghis Khan and the Medieval Caliphate.

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