HOW TO USE THESE MATERIALS

Teaching literacy and history through Greek myths

Greek myths are often the aspect of studying ancient Greece that children enjoy and remember most. But myths are frequently seen as parallel to rather than integrated into children's work in history. The aim of this unit of work is to

- develop children's literacy by using the power of storytelling to help them explore and enjoy the wealth of human imagination and experience the myths represent
- develop children's historical understanding by making the myths gateways to the world of the ancient Greeks through direct connections to the Key Stage 2 history programme of study on Ancient Greece, whether taught in its own right or through topic work.

Timing and structure of the unit of work

The unit provides content for six weeks of work based on five hours of work per week divided about 2/3 on literacy and 1/3 on history. A final extra session is required at the end of the unit for the children to present the results of their historical enquiry. If you have more time to devote to the unit, the children's experience will be all the richer.

Each week the children will hear two stories from Greek mythology linked by a common theme. The stories are told by two of Britain's finest storytellers, Hugh Lupton and Daniel Morden, and are available as streaming downloads directly from this site.

One story each week is designated as the **lead story** and is used as the link to a historical topic on ancient Greece. The history materials offer ideas and additional resources to help teach that topic and to develop the children's historical understanding within the framework of a historical enquiry (see below).

We do not intend that you use all the history resources each week or cover every aspect mentioned. You should feel free to select as many or as few ideas and resources as suit your timetable and your children. We expect that you may also want to continue to use your existing activities and resources where they have worked successfully.

The story at the centre

The key principle of our approach to learning is that the stories function in three ways:

1. as the motivating force that engages the children
2. as the initial resource for their exploration of human character, action and motive, andof language
3. as the initial evidence for investigating an aspect of the world of the ancient Greeks

The lead story should be the starting point for each new theme and topic, but it and the other story should also serve as 'anchors' for the children's learning to which they can refer back periodically and which are in turn enhanced by their growing understanding as the unit progresses. It is always good to say, "Now do you remember when…?"

We strongly recommend that, before beginning the unit, you look at 'Preparing the class to work with stories', where we provide a variety of practical strategies and techniques that will help you derive the fullest benefit from using the spoken word in your classroom.

The literacy materials

The nature of listening in a group provides a forum to exchange, compare and extend personal responses. The literacy materials are intended to help children to clarify their thinking through talking about characters, describing scenes, comparing emotions and imagining objects or events in the story.

The materials offer ideas to support the statutory requirements and non-statutory guidance in the programmes of study for comprehension, where there is considerable overlap between Years 3/4 and Years 5/6. We have not included tightly focused literacy activities at sentence and word level owing to the differences among statutory requirements across the four years of Key Stage 2. You are encouraged to devise such activities for the specific context in which you are using the unit of work.

For each story the following are provided:

- **transcripts**: these match the spoken story; available to download as editable Word documents
- **starting-points**: possible avenues of discussion to explore before listening to the story
- **pause points**: recommended points at which to pause the listening; and possible questions to reinforce understanding of the story, stimulate reflection or encourage speculation
- **questions for discussion**: suggested questions to prompt children's exploration of themes, characters, motives and action
- **suggested activities**: ideas for ways in which children might explore, represent and communicate aspects of the story and its language; examples of other resources, such as paintings, which could be used to extend children's discussion through comparison with the story

The history topics

The website provides materials for the study of seven aspects of ancient Greek culture which still have importance today:

1. The Greek language
2. Greek theatre
3. Athletics and the Olympic Games
4. Greek myths
5. Greek philosophy and science
6. Greek architecture and art
7. Politics and democracy

The topic of Greek myths is combined explicitly with science and philosophy in Week 4, but it runs through the whole unit because of the story-based approach.

The history materials

We are conscious that most teachers will already be using their own approaches and resources to teach many of these topics. The materials have been designed to allow you maximum flexibility to fit them to your existing practice. They are offered for you to use selectively to replace, enrich or supplement things you are doing already.

Nevertheless, we strongly recommend that you consider following the suggestions made about historical enquiry and outcome, regardless of how you use the rest of the materials. We would also draw your attention to the less familiar approach to teaching Greek gods suggested below.

The materials for each week's lead story consist of a summary of the main topic, key concepts and issues to work on with the children, information about the Greeks for teachers, teaching ideas, additional resources, mainly visual, and some information and image sheets for children.

While each week's teaching ideas do combine into a structure, we have not produced lesson plans or worksheets so that you have the maximum flexibility to use the materials in the way that suits you and your children.

Historical enquiry

Best practice in history teaching recommends the use of an over-arching enquiry question to help focus children's work and to encourage development of higher level skills and concepts of judgement and historical significance.

The history materials have been developed to suit an enquiry question about the achievements of the ancient Greeks. Here are four possible versions of that question:

- What were the most important achievements of the ancient Greeks?
- What was important about the ancient Greeks?
- Why are the ancient Greeks still important today?
- Why do we still study the ancient Greeks today?

An enquiry outcome

Once you have chosen an enquiry question, it is important to create a clear outcome which will act as a framework for the children's enquiry. Here is one possible scenario using the seven topics listed above:

A TV channel has asked you to make a series of five programmes about the importance of the ancient Greeks plus a series trailer. Each programme must focus on one important aspect of the ancient Greeks. You will have to present your ideas to the TV channel. To do this you need to:

1. *choose the topic for each of the five programmes in your series*
2. *give reasons for why you have chosen these five topics*
3. *choose just one of the five topics for your trailer and give your reasons for choosing it*

The children do not have to plan the detailed content for the programmes or design or script them; they simply select the five topics according to how significant they think they are for the overall enquiry question. They will base their choices and reasons on the various activities and discussions you use as you teach each week's topic.

If you use this approach, the children will find it helpful if you identify and introduce each week's topic clearly so they understand that they are being challenged to make a judgement in selecting five out of seven possible topics. You will need to schedule an additional lesson at the end of the six weeks to allow groups of children to discuss and finalise their series and trailers and present them to the class.

Teaching the Greek gods

We do suggest a particular approach to teaching the gods. One of the main advantages of studying Greek gods and goddesses through stories is that discussing the stories brings out the rich character of the divine world of the Greeks and the complex relationships between humans and gods. The simple tables of deities and their matching responsibilities found in many books oversimplify the situation. For this reason, we recommend building up the children's familiarity with the gods and other divine beings gradually over time using the stories as the basis for understanding what they were like. We explain how to set up this approach in the materials for Week 1 and how to conclude the investigation in the materials for Week 6.

Greek names

The ancient Romans devised a way of spelling Greek names that is still used commonly in English. For example, the god Dionusos in Greek became the Roman/Latin Dionysus; the playwright Aiskhulos, became Aeschylus. As we are using the myths to teach the history of the ancient Greeks, we have used a form of spelling that is closer to the Greek, but does not make the names too difficult to look up in reference books and online. For example, in these materials, Dionysus is spelled Dionysos and Aeschylus is spelled Aischylos. This will also make it easier for children to write the names in Greek letters if that is an activity you choose to do.

The storytellers use the common English pronunciation of Greek names which is based on the Latin spelling. We recommend that the children use the same pronunciation; in most cases, our spelling system makes little difference to the pronunciation and any cases where it does are not of great significance and should not affect the children's understanding.