

Developing Creativity through the Arts

A Primary Arts Project based on

'The Midnight Man' by Berlie Doherty

Introduction

The Project was originally written to support schools in Warrington in improving standards in literacy. This latest 'Staffordshire version' has a completely new feel to the literacy sections which parallels the changes in the renewed primary framework.

The Midnight Man project was conceived to present teachers and pupils with ideas and opportunities to create and explore specific links between arts subjects and literacy. Separate units are included for each year group from Reception class through to Year 6.

The literacy materials for each year group are based on units and objectives from the renewed framework. However, these are intended as a starting point only. Shared and guided sessions should be tailored to meet the needs and interests of classes, groups and individuals. The Midnight Man can be used a basis for, or as a supplement to, many different units of work. However, forward planning is essential and this can include all staff as well as teaching assistants and perhaps most importantly, pupils.

The story of the Midnight Man is included on a CD in several formats including SMART notebook and Activstudio3. A PowerPoint version is also included along with a movie version and accompanying music (It should be note that the 'movie' version of the story with the accompanying music may run too quickly to allow some children to read the story). There are additionally a number of audio tracks and these may be played on a conventional CD player.

The activities contained in the pack are both varied and exciting. They have been deliberately arranged into years with the expectation that teachers will consider the range of ideas across the whole range of subjects. At a time when creativity is a common feature in the development plans of many schools, this project could serve as a useful starting point for the introduction of a more creativity approach to planning across the curriculum.

The essential feature of this project is its flexibility. It has not been designed as a series of lesson plans, rather as a set of ideas which can be shaped to fit the needs of individual schools, individual classes and most important individual children.

Feel free to dip into the pack and use as much or as little as you wish. Make it the basis for an Arts week or a whole term's project. The materials could be used by the whole school or as a transition project for students moving between year groups, key stages or schools.

The work in this project is intended to be entirely classroom based. However there could be an end result which might be on a small scale e.g. a class assembly or a class display of work related to 'The Midnight Man'. It could also take the form of a large scale celebration of children's work to which parents are invited.

The second disk in the pack is a DVD of video clips which show children from William Shrewsbury Primary school taking part in a wide range of activities. The excerpts contain a variety of examples of children's 'work in progress' during their three week project.

Recording the achievements of children is always important. Schools tend to be proficient at recording and assessing written work and art work, but less successful when recording drama, dance and music. Foundation Stage teachers often use photographs to record and assess evidence of pupil achievement. Taking this a stage further, try making use of video cameras to record and assess children's work in music, drama and dance.

Finally as with any project of this type, build reflection time into the curriculum to allow staff and pupils to evaluate what went well as well as what could have gone better. This will be a useful exercise when planning future activities which encourage not only creative teaching but also teaching for creativity.

Following the pilot of the project at William Shrewsbury Primary School, I have included some examples of the feedback which was received from staff and pupils:

Children told us that:

- The length of time spent on the project was about right, although some would have liked even longer!
- They felt it had helped them to build their literacy confidence in Year 4 – reading out aloud
- The project was as "an adventure in literacy", " a fun way of learning", " it helped us to understand a monologue" and "it helped us to build our confidence in dance and music"

Teaching Assistants commented that:

- The project brought the school together
- They could see progression – children of different ages working at different levels throughout the school.

Teachers shared that:

- The materials gave them an idea about how to go about planning.
- It was very useful to have a starting point and bank of activities
- Foundation stage 'explored'!
- Best writing achieved by pupils this year!
- The enthusiasm of children was significant and they exceeded expectations.
- Both boys and girls were able to relate equally to the story
- Less 'teacher talk' time allowed more 'child led talk' to try out things.
- There was more opportunity for true personalisation
- It had been valuable to include children in the planning process – pupils had ownership of the planning
- A creative approach can raise standards in other curriculum areas.
- It was important to involve the children from the start, work as a team (staff) and share the vision

The Senior Leadership Team shared that:

- The school felt different
- There was evidence of impact of the Arts on literacy (quality of writing)
- Children were totally involved in their learning
- The involvement of the whole school was a positive outcome for the school.

Acknowledgements

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Thanks to Sarah Luty (Primary Literacy Consultant Staffordshire) for all her work in revising and updating and extending the literacy and drama sections in this project.

Particular thanks to William Shrewsbury Primary School and their headteacher, Bernadette Hunter for agreeing to pilot the latest version of the project and for providing valuable feedback as well as sharing a vast range of evidence which shows how the project was delivered across all year groups in their school. Additional photographs of can be seen on the school website www.williamshrewsbury.staffs.sch.uk

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Finally, thanks go to Walker Books who have kindly given their permission to reproduce 'The Midnight Man' in electronic format for all schools in Staffordshire.

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Andrew Timmins
School Improvement Officer (Staffordshire)