CHIMNEY-SWEEPS

The content for ‘Chimney-sweeps’ consists of three episodes, each about 6 minutes long, which can be listened to individually or sequentially. A synopsis of each episode clip is below.

Lesson plan:

Learning intention ‘We are learning to…’
We are learning what life was like for city children working as chimney sweeps during the Victorian era.

Assessment criteria ‘What I’m looking for…’
As an outcome I am looking for a short piece of drama describing the work of a chimney sweep.

Share and discuss a listening focus for each episode by asking the key question and instructing the children to make the following notes.

Resources needed: note-making paper and pencil.

1. Climbing boys

Before listening: one key fact to discuss

• Chimneys. Chimneys are long, narrow, stone passages to carry smoke from coal fires up to the roof where it can escape into the sky. Discussion question, ‘How could you get hurt doing this job?’ (Damage to knees, elbows, eyesight, breathing.)

During listening: one question to focus on

• Key question: ‘What do you need to be a good chimney sweep?’
• Instruction: ‘Make a note of what Charlie learns about being a good chimney sweep.’

• (Answers: You need to be, small, fit and strong. You need to climb with your elbows and legs spread out using your feet to push yourself up the chimney.)

2. The grand London house

Before listening: one key fact to discuss

• Sweeping. The only heating in houses came from coal fires that needed chimneys to carry away the smoke. Discussion question, ‘What is soot?’ (Sticky black dust left in chimneys by smoke from coal fires.)

During listening: one question to focus on

• Key question: ‘What dangers did sweeps put up with?’
• Instruction: ‘Make a note of the dangers of sweeping chimneys.’
• (Answers: getting stuck, suffocation, breathing diseases, falling, etc.)

3. Thomas Barnardo

Before listening: one key fact to discuss

• Charity. Charities were very important in the Victorian era. There was little free education, medical care or housing without them.

Discussion question: ‘What basic services are provided for us now that did not exist in the Victorian era?’ (Schools, hospitals, housing, fire service, etc.)
During listening: one question to focus on

- Key question: ‘Why does Thomas Barnado help the children?’
- Instruction: ‘Make a note of all the reasons why Barnardo set up his charity.’
- (Answers: Barnardo set up his charity instead of leading a Christian missionary project to a different country.)

After listening

Activity: individually, or in pairs, create and perform a short drama about chimney-sweeping. Three things to include in your drama:

- the skills and dangers a sweep might be thinking about as they climb a chimney
- a problem or accident that might happen while working
- what the master sweep might do to solve the problem; help the sweep by trying to climb up, set a fire to encourage the sweep to move, or send another sweep up to help them.

Differentiation and teacher support for SEN / Focus group / Whole class

Teacher to model example of monologue phrases. Children can be given the role of sweep or master sweep to encourage interaction and support dramatic performances.

Challenge for gifted and talented learners

Can you create a realistic but surprising ending to your drama?

Plenary and assessment

Choose individuals or pairs to perform for the class and ask the class to identify what they thought was good about each performance.

Episode synopses

The three stories in this programme focus on the life of a young chimney-sweep called Charlie. In the first two episodes Charlie tells us how he became a chimney-sweep and some of the dangers he faces, before finally being discharged from his work. In the final episode he is reunited with Maddy, Jacko and Gyp, this time at Covent Garden fruit market. While scavenging for food they meet Thomas Barnardo.

1. Climbing boys

Charlie is another of the children sleeping rough at Billingsgate Market. He explains how he started out at Covent Garden, where his father was a street act with a special trick - allowing bystanders to break a stone on his chest with a sledge hammer. But one day it all goes wrong... and Charlie is left an orphan.

Charlie spends a final night in the cramped lodging house where he lived with his father. A boy there offers to help Charlie find a job as a sweeper, only to steal Charlie’s jacket. Then a passing sweep spots Charlie and seeing that he’s about the right size to become a ‘climbing boy’ offers Charlie a job working with him.

Charlie then recounts his early experiences as a chimney-sweep - the constant choking from soot, the cramped spaces, the painful knees and elbows, the fear of being trapped...
2. The grand London house

In the second episode Charlie recounts a visit to sweep the chimneys of a grand London house. Charlie is climbing in the last chimney when he becomes stuck in the flue...and begins to panic.

George, the master sweep, suggests he does it 'in the buff' - but Charlie is completely stuck and fears he is about to endure every climbing boy’s worst nightmare. Eventually George manages to push Charlie up through the flue and Charlie carries on out on to the roof of the house. But when he gets down again he is summarily dismissed: he’s too big for sweeping work now.

3. Thomas Barnardo

In the final episode we meet Jacko, Gyp and Maddy again (characters from ‘Street children’). Charlie takes them to Covent Garden to scavenge on the rotting fruit - a serious health hazard.

While there they meet Thomas Barnardo who confronts the children and tells them they could enjoy a better life with food and schooling if they will come with him to his home for destitute children. The street children are initially dismissive of the idea, but gradually the fear of ending up like ‘Carrots’ - an unfortunate child that Barnardo tells them about - and the lure of something decent to eat begins to work on them.

Thomas Barnardo came to London from Ireland in 1866. He was intending to travel to China to be a missionary. However, after seeing the conditions in London he decided to stay and devoted his time to improving the lives of destitute children. In 1867 he set up his first ‘Ragged School’ where children would receive a decent meal for attending school. Then he founded the first of many homes where street children could sleep the night.