British History
Lesson plan: Robert Burns’ Cravat Pin

Aims and Objectives

1. To think about how we learn about history
2. To consider what types of historical sources are available
3. To develop an understanding of the history, heritage and culture of Scotland

Resources

• BBC Burns site
• How to plan a Burns Night Supper
• Robert Burns Cravat Pin worksheet

Teaching and learning activities

Introduction

1. Share the learning intentions with the pupils.
2. In pairs or trios ask the children to list ways that we can find out about life and events in the past.
3. Discuss the idea of ‘evidence’ with the children and ask them, in the same pairs/trios to list possible sources of evidence in their community.

One

1. Through discussion determine how many of the class have heard of Robert Burns. Get the class to write up a list of all the things they know about Burns
2. Read a selection of Burns’ poems and songs to the class.
3. Discuss the poems with the class. What can we tell about Burns the man? What themes was he interested in? What type language did he speak/use? If he were alive today what kind of person might he be? What would he look like? What kind of poems/songs would he write?
Teaching and learning activities

Two

1. Tell the class that Burns was known as the Ploughman Poet because of his farming background.
2. Show the class the wooden plough object on the A History of the World site. Lead a class discussion as to what life would have been like as a farmer in Burns’ time.

Three

1. Show the class the Burns cravat pin object on the A History of the World site. Explain to the class what a cravat is.
2. Ask the class what we can assume about Burns’ life through the pin. Ask how Burns’ life could have changed since his days as a farmer. For example you could lead a discussion about how Burns got enough money to be able to afford to have the pebble turned into a piece of jewellery.
3. Explain to the group how famous Burns was in his lifetime and this fame has endured long after his death.
4. Get pupils to fill in the Robert Burns Cravat Pin worksheet
5. Split the class into groups. Get each group to write and illustrate a magazine article about Burns in the style of Heat or a celebrity lifestyle magazine. This should include:
   • a short biography about Burns
   • the scandals he was involved in
   • Burns’ tangled love life
   • selections of his best work

Four

1. Explain to the class that Burns wrote poems in 18th century vernacular Scots about the people and places he knew.
2. Ask the pupils to read and adapt one of his poems into modern language.
3. Have some fun and allow the pupils to translate the poems into “text-speak”.
4. Ask the class to write poems inspired by Burns about their own lives and places and people that they know.
Teaching and learning activities

Five

1. Explain to the class that Robert Burns planned to emigrate to the West Indies to work on a sugar plantation.
2. Ask the pupils to find the West Indies on a map. Ask the class how Burns would have travelled to the West Indies. Ask how long such a journey would have taken and what it would have been like.
3. Show the class the sugar pan crucible object on the A History of the World page.
4. Split the class into groups and ask them to research and mark on a world map the territories that comprised the British Empire in Burns’ day.

Six

1. In groups ask the class to research what life was like in Scotland during Burns’ day.
2. Ask the groups to present their findings and then hold a class discussion about why Burns, like many other Scots, wanted to emigrate.

Seven

1. Explain to the class that not everyone who worked overseas on sugar plantations went there willingly. Explain the background of slavery and its importance to the sugar and tobacco plantations.
2. Watch the A History of Scotland clip about 18th century Scottish-owned sugar plantations.
3. Split the class into groups to explore two subjects: what was life like for slaves in these places; what was life like for the white plantation owners.

Eight

1. Show the class the anti-slavery pipe object on the A History of the World site.
2. Read/listen to Burns’ poem A Man’s a Man for A’That and the Slaves Lament.
3. Ask the pupils what Burns is saying in these poems. Get the pupils to discuss and explore the themes of equality and human rights.
3. After discussing these themes ask the pupils what they think Burns’ opinions on slavery might have been. Would they be consistent with the message behind the creation of the anti-slavery pipe?
Teaching and learning activities

Nine

1. Plan a Burns Night Supper using the Burns Night worksheet.
2. Have the pupils recite Burns poems and songs. One pupil can recite the poem Address to a Haggis as the haggis is carved open.
3. Explain to the class that Burns Night Suppers are held all over the world. Ask the class what this tells us about how Burns is thought of globally.

Ten

1. Show the class a photo of the Robert Burns statue in Dumfries. Explain that there are similar statues all over the world. Split the class into groups and ask them to find as many Burns statues as they can and mark them on a map of the world.
2. Ask each group to pick a statue and write a report (with pictures) about the statue, country and the people who erected the statue.