Indus Valley Offline Lesson Plan – The Forgotten Cities

Learning Objectives

• to encourage children to identify gaps in historical and archaeological evidence
• to explore how gaps in evidence can limit what is known and how it is interpreted

National Curriculum

KS2 History Unit 16 Guidance: How can we find out about the Indus Valley civilisation?

The last learning objectives ask children to summarise what they have found out and suggest why they can answer some questions, but not others.


Teaching Activities – Key Questions

• What happened to Mohenjo-Daro and the other Indus cities?
• What was left behind?

Resources

Internet-linked computer. If available, a projector or interactive whiteboard so the class can view artefacts from the museum section of the website.

Any publications which provide information on the evidence of change and decline at Mohenjo-Daro in the last two centuries before it was deserted.

QCA recommended resources:

Indus Valley KS2 National History, published by Commonwealth Institute, 1996
Junior Focus, Indus Valley issue, No. 173, May 2002

Both publications give details about the deterioration in civic infrastructure in the later periods, when important buildings were abandoned and overbuilt with small workshops. They also explore different theories put forward to explain the desertion.

Introduction

Remind the class that the Indus cities were deserted, buried and forgotten for thousands of years. The task is a project on what was left behind and what survived for archaeologists to find.

• Explain that in the centuries after 1900 BC, Mohenjo-Daro and other important cities were deserted (though people went on living in parts of Harappa). In Mohenjo-Daro, some streets weren’t used and filled up with rubbish. Only parts of the city were lived in. Archaeologists found 38 skeletons lying in alleys and buildings in Lower Town. Two hoards of valuable jewellery had been buried under the floor in large houses in Lower Town (you can see some of this jewellery on the website). In houses in Lower Town, several small stone statues were found, like the one known as ‘Priest-King’ – all the statues were damaged. Mohenjo-Daro was deserted at the end of this time, but archaeologists do not think it was suddenly abandoned.*

* this is based on research since the 1980s, in contrast to earlier theories of invasion, massacres and sudden abandonment.
Group activities -
Abandoning the School

Divide the class into two and have the children working in smaller groups on two scenarios.

a) Moving the school
The school is being closed and everyone is moving to a new building, which has no furniture or equipment. What items would they take with them? Ask different groups to do different rooms – the classroom, the hall and/or gym, Head Teachers office, school office etc, and record the items under these headings – Take and Leave behind.

b) Evacuating the school
The school building is unsafe and has to be evacuated in 12 hours. Which important items would they take with them? Ask different groups to do different rooms as above and record with these headings – Take and Leave behind.

Feedback
Map what the groups come up for the whole class.

c) In the future
Far in the future children are taught in computer pods and don’t have schools. Archaeologists investigate the empty school building. What could they work out? Encourage children to come up with various ideas. Ask groups to note what the archaeologists could tell/not tell about how the rooms were used. What conclusions might archaeologists come to about who or what the people were? Was someone in charge of this place? Supposing these archaeologists could not read or understand the languages we speak?

Plenary
Ask children to feedback and compare their ‘archaeologist’s’ conclusions.
Whole Class activities -
What Evidence Survived at Mohenjo-Daro?

Recap with photos of the artefacts in the Museum section. Ask children to work in pairs and list the materials they were made of. Why did they survive? Ask them to identify objects in the classroom which might survive/ not survive years of burial using the terms Imperishable and Perishable. Tick the materials that the ancient Indus people did not have.

Preparation
Make some clay objects and leave them to dry unfired. Make plasticine objects. Bake wheat and barley grains, chickpeas and lentils in a slow oven for 12 hours to simulate carbonisation.

Gather small pieces of wood, seeds, grains, leaves, vegetables, paper, cardboard and leather. Collect fabric samples - wool, cotton, synthetic. Gather used plastic items, drink cans and pieces of ceramic etc. Collect torn printed matter and paper written on by pencil, biro and soluble and insoluble fibre tip. Ask children to bring in small items of clean rubbish from home, for example, food packaging, toys, books or ornaments they no longer want.

You could bury a number of perishable and non-perishable items in containers either outdoors in garden soil or indoors in cling-filmed trays of moist compost. Bury some items in dry and wet sand. Immerse some items in a container of water. This could be set up as a class experiment at the beginning of the topic.

Small Group Activities
The first activity should be completed after several weeks.

• Explore perishable/non-perishable
  a) In a whole class discussion ask children to devise an experiment to discover what becomes damaged by burial or immersion. The brief is to include two kinds of materials – those they predict would survive and those which would not survive. Decide on a range of different environmental conditions. Test the materials listed above.

  b) Or set up an experiment and ask the children to predict the results.

• Our rubbish - archaeologists could only have our rubbish to go on
  Ask children to pool the rubbish they have brought in, from packaging to unwanted items, then visit other groups as ‘archaeologists’ and explain what these artefacts reveal about them.

• Clues about us
  Ask children to choose and draw modern artefacts that need not be valuable, but would tell future archaeologists the truth about how they live, then visit as above. Prompt children to discuss whether the items they chose were intended to give a rosy picture.

  Children could display and label items on a poster or as a museum exhibit with their conclusions.

Plenary
Discuss what the artefacts tell us about the way people lived. Discuss what they don’t tell us. Ask the children to identify what they would still like to find out about life in the Indus cities.

Draw on the children’s knowledge of what has survived from societies in the distant past, such as Ancient Egypt, Greece or the Anglo-Saxons. Ask them to compare this with what they know about the Indus civilisation.