



NT Education Workpack

Best Mates

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Best Mates
by Sarah Daniels

A collaboration between the RNT, The Waterways Trust and British Waterways A Millennium Commission as Lottery Project that forms part of the UK-wide Millennium Festival.

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Introduction

Best Mates is a play about so many things and raises an endless range of possibilities for follow-up work in the classroom. It is a play of deft intelligence that examines part of the history of our canal network, reveals the role of canal women in the working of the boats, heightens an audiences' awareness of the importance of education and literacy and cleverly slides between eras of the past and the present time to underline the resonance of history for the here and now.

What we offer here is a teacher's pack (and it is a teaching pack rather than range of learning materials) that offers planning initiative for cross-curricular or combined approaches to exploring themes raised by the play. Like the play *Best Mates*, the pack does not concern itself solely with the history but seeks to make connections with pupils' present day experiences and understanding of the world. There are possibilities here to use a wide range of curriculum strands. Importantly the subjects and their National Curriculum criteria are consistently noted (in emboldened type and italicised margin references). This is designed to help with teacher's planning of classroom delivery and to highlight the pertinence of the approach to the demands of the National Curriculum. At both KS2 and KS3, for example, the theme of canal history has pertinence for both Victorian and post 1930s Britain.

The pack is divided into six sections that roughly divide as labour (Labouring for a Living), the art and culture of canal life (Keeping up Appearances), the physical environment (Insight on Site), the economic (Coins, Cash and Currency) and human exertion (Physical Prowess). and the issues of social exclusion (Inside Out).

Labouring for a living

1

In the play *Best Mates*, Jason sets off on a journey through the past and on the canal boat belonging to Agnes and her daughter Daisy, their first encounter is with a Christian reformer concerned about the conditions in which canal families lived.

'...for the sake of the transportation of coal, flour, textiles and other goods necessary in today's world that over one hundred thousand canal boat men live with their families, not just their wives but children often four or five in a cabin rife with poverty, disease and squalor, no bigger than the average coal hole. Their gaudily painted boats might give the impression of all things being bright and beautiful but inside it is all gloomy, ungodly, ugliness. ...' (Cedric)

Entire families of parents and four or five children often lived in a boat cabin that was little more than 10 feet by seven feet. In the early years of canal life, profits were generous enough to pay boatmen a reasonable wage and families lived on the land. However, as the railways took work and income from the canal companies, so pay became increasingly poorer. Families could no longer sustain a house and so they moved to living on the canals. Constantly on the move, their lives were very different from conventional households. Babies were strapped to a harness and toddlers often had to be tied to the chimney on the cabin roof for safety but as soon as they were ambulant,

Four-year-old Colin Harris
aboard his parents Willow
Wren pair *Moorhen & Wagtail*.
Grand Union Canal, 1961
photo Hugh McKnight



they quickly became part of the working life on the canals and learnt to work the locks, lead the horse and steer the boat. The women worked hard as wife, mother and boat worker. These women's efforts were not recognised or rewarded by their employers until some companies belatedly acknowledged their labour in the 1920s.

Activities

Key Stage 2 & 3: English / History

*

Pupils could be prompted to **plan, predict and explore** the lives of boat children through an imaginative diary of what might be a typical day. They may need to be provoked to think about the lack of social contact and the insularity of such children's lives given that the boats were constantly on the move. This meant little opportunity to move far from the canal, to explore the surrounding towns and countryside, to mix with other children, to go to school. What would the day be like given that it was taken up with constant work and little shelter on the boat?

*

Work for women was heavy and included domesticity alongside the business of being the main parent whilst helping with loading cargo, bowhauling a boat into a lock (pulling the vessel in on ropes), shafting off banks and into tight moorings and working the locks with their heavy paddles and gates. In small groups, pupils might like to **role-play** the journey through a flight of locks and explore the many facets of trying to manage boat and family in safety.

*

Using a comparative list to **explore and evaluate ideas beliefs, attitudes and experiences**, pupils might brainstorm and consider the quality of canal children's lives compared with the children who lived on the land. It has to be remembered that until the 20th century, land children may have been equally employed in factories and received

Labouring for a living

little or no schooling. Which environment is more appealing? Daisy remarks that her mother is better off on the boats than 'burning her fingers in a jam factory'. Do pupils think that it was the same for the children?

2

'I thought I'd be up for a bit of a lark and spend my day poddling about on boats seemed just the ticket. Only when I got here it was anything but. My God, it's bally hard miserable work, unbearably tiring, freezing cold with bugs and lice running amok over one's bod nightly' (Connie)

Connie's voice is markedly different from that of Agnes and the other people who work the boats in the play. It is not just a reflection of the time (World War II). Young and educated women were recruited to work the canal boats because men had been called up. They wore badges bearing the initials 'IW' that earned them the unsuitable and mistaken nickname of 'idle women'. Much of this experience is documented and written about

Mrs Rose Whitlock aboard her Blue Line Canal Carriers boat *Lucy*, Grand Union Canal, mid 1960s

photo Hugh McKnight



because this group of women were educated and literate, unlike the members of traditional boat families.

Activities

Key Stage 2 & 3: English / History

*

To extend their knowledge and understanding of **events, people and changes in the past**, pupils might wish to think about the contrasts faced by women such as Connie who left their comfortable and comparatively sheltered lives to work on the canals. Through **role-play**, pupils could improvise comparative scenes of life pre-war and then as a worker on the canals. In watching the improvisations it might be a good strategy to freeze the action at important moments to underline the pupils' own discoveries of difference and pertinence. If necessary, these key moments could be repeated as a motif to underline understanding of the issues. This reflective activity could then be extended into the writing of an imaginary letter to friends or family at home.

*

In this instance history is both seen and heard through the vehicle of a play. Histories, of course, can be relayed in many ways. Pupils may want to reflect on the way in which they have learnt histories. This is an opportunity to heighten awareness of the way in which the past is **recalled, selected and organised and to recognise that the past is represented and interpreted in different ways**. List all the suggested routes such as oral traditions, museums, personal collections, museums, reading, films, television, the recollections of family and friends, building plaques and public notices? Pupils might consider what histories are considered 'important' in our culture. What are the problems in finding out about the past of people like Agnes as opposed to the articulate voice and literacy of Connie?

Labouring for a living

*

Pupils will inevitably have personal anecdotes that they are aware of that connect to places or the past. Encourage story telling through writing or talking as a prompt to examining a sense of the place or the past. In particular, the leisure use of canal systems may offer an opportunity to reflect on change and to identify **differences between ways of life at different times**.

3

'I thought she (Connie) was so stuck up but it's just her voice. She's really kind. Mind, did you hear her? She's only been on the canals two minutes and she's going to write a book about it. What about my life, my Mum's life, my Grandmother's and her Mum's before her. All our lives sink without trace like pee from the po thrown in the Cut. And my Daisy's, my little girl's life packed so full of hard work and adventure and nothing to show, nothing to remember her just a name and a date in a book no one ever looks in.' (Agnes)

Family life on the canal had a relatively brief history (roughly from 1800 to 1960) but because of the intense relationship with the waterways, the boats and the ports, factories, coal pits and power stations, the people who worked the canals quickly developed a deep and powerful culture and identity. Much of this is still evident in the legacy of the striking decoration of narrow boats and the crochet, ropework and embroidered artefacts that remain. There was also a highly developed language. In the play, Agnes refers to onlookers and outsiders as 'gangoozlers'; the canal is a 'cut' and the towpath a 'stretch of pound'. These terms, some self-evident in their meaning, others more obscure, clearly helped to include and exclude particular groups of people.

Activities

Key Stage 2 & 3: English / History

*

Pupils might be encouraged to reflect on the way that local dialects and the vocabulary of

identifiable groups act to reinforce identity and community. In the Calder Valley in West Yorkshire newcomers are still referred to as 'off-cumdens'. The word has the same resonance as 'gangoozlers'. What words can the pupils list that have a specific value for particular groups of people? It might be worthwhile to collect single words on single cards and then attempt collectively to organise them into groups by attribution to the past, to age (the voices of grandparents or of youth culture?), to interest, to place. This is an opportunity to highlight **changes over time and the origins of words** and to recognise **social and cultural diversity**. There may be other categories that you or the pupils identify. Some words may not fit neatly into any category, others may cross boundaries; do they also have variances of meaning according to the people who use them?

4

'Before the war we was all aware that our work was precarious, there was less and less of it, more and more of us was having to settle on the land. The war was a sort of reprieve because the military needed so much of the land transport but after the war the working lives of canals were all over bar the leisure industry. In many ways living on the bank was something to look forward to because it was all work, work on the water but once we got inside the factories it was like prison. It might only have been a nine to five day but it was dirty, smelly, noisy and even if it was physically easier it was much worse than being your own boss everyday of the year in the open air.' (Walter)

Activities

Key Stage 2 & 3: English / History / Music

*

Research might be prompted by the idea that the canals had a renewed life during the war. Pupils may be directed towards considering what cargo was particularly suitable for canal transportation. This is a moment where pupils may reflect on the **results of the historical events, situations and the changes in the period**. It is interesting to note that in places a number of floating barracks

Labouring for a living

were converted from moored barges.

*

There is a sharp contrast between the criticism of the quality of life that Cedric, the reformer, offers and this nostalgic commentary spoken by Walter. The difficult and arduous conditions of the boats seem to have been replaced by closed and oppressive factories. Using music as an approach to capture this distinction, pupils might be encouraged to consider the qualities of sounds on the canals (including the continual chug of the boat) and the sounds of the factory. There is an opportunity here to reflect on the environment. Pupils should be offered the opportunity in groups to improvise with percussion and other instruments to **develop rhythmic and melodic material**. Reflecting seemingly 'natural' locations and contrasting 'mechanical' environments, pupils might strive too offer a judgement within the musical piece about the quality of life in the different places. This is an opportunity to **practise, rehearse and perform with awareness of different parts, the roles and contribution of the different members of the group, and the audience and venue**.

Keeping Up Appearances

1

'...for they are cabin'd, crib'd and confined and generally herded together in a way that is neither comfortable nor decent. A more appalling picture of human degradation it would be perhaps difficult to conceive...' (Cedric)

Early in the play *Best Mates* we meet Cedric the reformer, who is condemnatory about the cramped conditions on the canal boats. Entire families lived in tiny cabins with no sanitation and a lack of privacy or space. However, the evidence suggests that most boats were proudly and carefully maintained. The outside of the vessel was brightly painted in the tradition of 'Roses and Castles'. The origins of this convention are uncertain although some researchers suggest a parallel with fairground art. However the style clearly borrowed heavily from landscape art prevalent in the nineteenth century and made popular by the advances in printing. Echoes of the style can be seen in the faces of grandfather clocks of the era. Typically, a central landscape panel showed a country scene crowned by a castle and including a sailing boat. The border was of garlands of roses. The work was effected in bright, bold colours and continues to be coarsely copied in modern interpretations on narrow boats and souvenir wares. The style had strong regional qualities and it was easy to identify boats from different boatyards when they were on the canals or moored for the exchange of cargo. It was a strong way of binding communities of canal people. The art form bred specialist painters and many of them became famous for their skills.

There is a splendid booklet available from the Birmingham Canal Navigation Society or through Boat Museums called *Narrowboat Decoration* by John M. Hill (£1.00) that offers brief but clear detail of Rose and Castle work.

Activities

Key Stage 2 & 3: Art and Design

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Either by a visit to canal moorings or, if easily

accessible, to a Waterway or boat museum, pupils could be encouraged to investigate the designs on boats and make rough sketches of a central castle panel so that the significant features such as **colour, pattern and texture, line and tone, shape, form and space** are recognised. This is a palpable opportunity to **investigate art, craft and design in the locality and in a specific genre, style and tradition**. KS3 pupils should be encouraged to make notes alongside their sketches that note the **codes and conventions and how these are used to represent ideas**. In particular they be encouraged to consider the way that the landscapes are idealised and romanticised.

*

Using stencil techniques based on the panel illustration above, pupils might cut a series of simple templates that when overlaid offer an opportunity to layer colour to achieve the rose garland for the border designs used on narrowboats. Here pupils can **apply their experience of materials and processes, including drawing, developing their control of tools and techniques/experiment with and select methods and approaches, synthesise observations, ideas and design and make images**.

*

As a final stage to this process, pupils may work from the initial sketches to offer their own interpretation of a Castle design located within a border built up by the overlaying of the templates. They may want to offer their own regional interpretation of the Castle design that uses a local landscape or building. Perhaps water towers or cooling chimneys become our contemporary castles or does this stray from the romantic notions that are embedded in the 19th century designs? This is an opportunity to **adapt and refine their work and plan and develop this further, in the light of their own and others' evaluations**.

Keeping Up Appearances

2

New Year 1948 saw the nationalisation of the waterways and a new standard livery was imposed upon working boats. The Castles and Roses were temporarily effaced from the outsides of boats to be replaced by a standard colour and logo. This caused hue and outcry, even meriting a cartoon in *The Daily Mail*. The resistance to this change prompted a short-lived habit of decorating the interior of cabins in the traditional idiom. There was to be a revival of the Roses and Castles tradition although many modern vessels are actually decorated with transfers that are easy to replace and considerably cheaper to apply.

Activities

Key Stage 2 & 3: Art and Design

*

Pupils might be prompted to think about the way in which livery promotes a corporate image. Modern shifts from the nationalised status of transport industries means that the privatised train and bus companies have adopted a particular livery to distinguish their services. Pupils might study different livery and discuss the impact of design features. What does the choice of colour, form design, lettering suggest about the status and style that the company is attempting to

Typical petal styles

from *Narrowboat Decoration:
A Short Guide*, John Hill 1983



promote. With this analysis in view, pupils might be prompted to design a livery for some form of local transport that reflects their own sense of either the service or the region in which they live. Here is an opportunity to **explore the roles and purposes of designers working in different times** and to reflect upon **continuity and change in the purposes and audiences of designers**.

*

British Airways are currently painting out the tails of their planes after an experiment in which contemporary artists were commissioned to create unique designs for individual planes. The exercise was a considerable investment for the company and faltered because the public were antagonistic to the change and felt that the tail fins did not offer a suitable national reflection. There is an opportunity here to discuss art and design in the public space and to explore the idea that art might be integrated in our lives on functional sites (murals on buildings for example). What site on the nearby canal system might be enhanced by artwork? Pupils might work in a group on a series of sketches for this site considering scale, materials, cost and the impact on the environment. The final design, for a more ambitious project, could be transferred to a scaled plan of the imagined site. This project involves **collaborating with others, on projects in two and three dimensions and on different scales**. It also offers the possible challenge of **investigating art, craft and design in the locality, in a variety of genres, styles and traditions, and from a range of historical, social and cultural contexts**.

Keeping Up Appearances

3

Towards the end of the play *Best Mates* Agnes collects together a Christmas stocking for Daisy who is in a sanatorium with tuberculosis. The contents of the stocking are later seen in a flash-forward in time in a display case. Poignantly, Daisy died before receiving the stocking. The contents of the stocking reflect the hardship of canal life and the items are all hand made using traditional canal craft skills of woodwork, rope- work and crochet. To this stocking Jason adds a tiny Dragonfly made out of thin wire.

Activities

Key Stage 2 & 3: Art and Design

*

Using modelling wire, pupils could explore modelling a dragonfly or other insect or animal life that they recognise as being residents on the waterways. Here pupils can **explore a range of starting points for practical work including their experiences and natural and made objects and environments.**

4

The stocking is exhibited years later in a display case at the old sanatorium that has become a municipal records office. The legend beside it reads A Christmas gift given to a canal girl whose parents because of pressure of work couldn't visit as often as they'd like. (Connie) The discovery of the stocking highlights Jason's inability to read (he has to ask Connie to read the notice; it becomes a symbolic moment in which the boy begins to recognise the importance of literacy; a recognition that is later crystallised by Agnes's plea that he learn to read and write so that he can write their story; the story of working canal women.

Activities

Key Stage 2: English

*

Pupils might like to collect objects in the genre of the contents of the stocking and display them in the classroom as if tumbling from a large sock. Surrounding this disgorged stocking, pupils might like to attach cards that carry the meanings that they have taken from the play. Some discussion might help to gel individual thinking and opinion. Sentiments might include a recognition of the relationship of the past with the present, the role of women in society, how history is shaped and told, the importance of education, the qualities of good friendship and so on. Pupils will be full of thoughtful and resourceful ideas! This offers an ideal opportunity for **group discussion and interaction** with particular emphasis upon **explaining, reporting and evaluating.**

Insight on Site

'...It was choked with mud and slime and smelly as a runny dog's doings on a hot day...' (Agnes)

The canal system offers such a fertile opportunity for investigating the geography and ecology of an area that it is difficult to do it justice. From the earliest days, the canal system transfigured the landscape. Inevitably it met with considerable resistance and it is not hard to imagine how this extraordinary feat of engineering scarred the landscape with its high cut banks and rigid lines that time has healed with trees, hedgerows and colonised plants. It was not just the waterway that altered the landscape but the contingent development of warehousing and factories.

One of the cradles of the industrial revolution, the Calder Valley in West Yorkshire changed from a sleepy, remote rural landscape to a fug of chimneys and intensive terraces to house the workers in the cotton and fustian mills. Interestingly this area has become, like the canal system in many places, a magnet for leisure and tourism and the Rochdale Canal (which joins with the earliest canal in the country, the Bridgewater in Manchester) has been renovated and renewed. At one point an entirely new lock at Tuel Lane has had to be built to renew the connection with the Calder and Hebble Navigation. If you stand on Scout Rock (Ted Hughes' beloved edifice of cliff overlooking the Calder Valley) you are offered a paradigm of industrial growth below with the river, canal, train line and road running in tandem along the floor that up until the 18th century had been a boggy and disregarded tract below the farmed hills. There is evidence to be seen of old mill factories and sentinel chimneys and alongside these buildings, often renovated as hotels and apartment blocks, are the vast industrial estate buildings of modern industry. The canal has been sensitively and strikingly renewed and cared for. It was almost lost. The Hebden Bridge Council and a considerable retinue of townfolk pressured to have the canal filled in during the 1960s. It is now a major tourist draw card and a new marina and canal interpretation centre is planned. These histories and geographical changes are not unique. You will be able to trace just such patterns in your own area.

Nothing quite beats a hands on experience to understand the workings and intricacies of the canal system. To explain the lock systems to pupils in abstraction is possible but it is so much clearer in concrete reality. The following section offers a survey form for pupils to use on a visit to the canal.

Key Stage 2

- * Collect and record evidence
- * Analyse evidence and draw conclusions
- * Use appropriate geographical vocabulary
- * Describe where places are
- * Identify how and why places change
- * Recognise and explain patterns made by individual physical and human features in the environment
- * Recognise some physical and human processes and explain how these can cause changes in places and environments.

Key Stage 3

- * Ask geographical questions and identify issues
- * Collect, record and present evidence
- * Appreciate how people's values and attitudes, including their own, affect contemporary social, environmental, economic and political issues, and to clarify and develop their own values and attitudes about such issues
- * Use an extended geographical vocabulary
- * Describe and explain the physical and human features that give rise to the distinctive character of places
- * Explain how and why changes happen in places, and the issues that arise from these changes

Insight on Site: Canal Survey #1

Your name

5

Look on the inside of the lock wall. Can you see a measuring scale?

Class

What is the high level of the water and what is the low level of the water?

Date

Write down the number and name of the locks and their different maximum or minimum depths.

1

What is the name of the canal that you are visiting?

2

What is the nearest uphill town (the town towards the higher levels of the canal from the position where you are now)?

3

What is the nearest downhill town (the town towards the lower levels of the canal from the position where you are now)?

6

Are there a number of locks close together?

Why is this necessary?

4

Are the locks numbered or named or both? Write down the numbers and names that you come across.

How many are there?

Do you know what a close series of locks are called?

Insight on Site: Canal Survey #2

The close position of several locks is necessary because?

Canals built like this are called?

7.

What buildings have you come across alongside the canal? Make a list e.g lock-keepers house, factories, warehouses, houses, apartment blocks.

8.

How many buildings do you think were built here because of the canal?

Describe them briefly. For example can you see doorways built high into the building so that goods can be loaded in and out of boats?

9.

Are there buildings that have obviously changed their use?

From what to what? Write down the changes.

10.

What materials are used in the buildings? (stone/brick/wood)

11.

How do you think the materials for the buildings were brought to the site on which they are built?

Insight on Site: Canal Survey #3

12.

Which locks are against boats coming upstream (the lock is full and has to be emptied before the boat can go in)?

17.

What birds have you seen during the course of the day? Make a list of the ones who live here because of the water.

13.

Which locks are against boats coming downstream (the lock is empty and has to be filled before the boat can go in)?

14.

Is there an aqueduct nearby that takes boats over a road, river or another canal?

18.

What other animal life is evident on the canal? Why do some animals live in this canal environment?

15.

How close are the nearest road, river and railway?
The nearest road is?

The nearest river is?

The nearest railways is?

Which of these animals live here and which are here only temporarily such as dogs being exercised or cattle and sheep grazing nearby?
They live here because?

16.

Roughly how far is it to the nearest tunnel (if you have not got a map with you, look out for a sign on the towpath that gives details of the journey of the canal? The nearest tunnel is?

Insight on Site: Canal Survey #4

19.

Most canal companies built reservoirs to keep a constant supply of water even in the driest weather. The water is often at a distance from the canal and is fed into the waterway by a series of feeder channels. Do you know where the nearest reservoir is?

Have you come across any feeder channels?

If so draw a sketch map to show how the water is fed into the canal.

Insight on Site: Canal Survey #5

20.

How many different kinds of boats have you come across?

Draw a bird's eyes view of their shape (a view from above).

Do you know what the different boats are called and what they are used for? Make notes underneath your drawing.

Insight on Site: Canal Survey #6

21.

How many working boats have you seen?

How many leisure boats have you seen?

How many houseboats have you seen?

22.

What evidence is there that the canal has been improved and looked after by people?

What aspects of the canal and towpath need more attention and care from people?

Who do you think should be responsible for looking after this environment?

Coins, Cash and Currency

1

At the beginning of *Best Mates*, Jason, a present-day schoolboy and the central character of the play, tells us about the Crown coins that he has inherited from his grandmother. These Crown coins become a recurring motif in the play and Jason spends them, during his journey through the past, to rescue the people he meets from various predicaments. Happily, however, his kindness is repaid and the Crowns are returned to him before his arrival back in the present!

'...They're called Crowns and they're really worth a lot... When tomorrow I turn up in a hundred and five quid pair of trainers then the only person laughing in my class will be me...' (Jason)

Such was the shortage of coins during the cutting of the canals that companies struck their own tokens to pay the navvies. These coins sometimes carried the Coats of Arms of the company or images of the locality in which the canal was being built.

Activities

Key Stage 2 & 3: Mathematics, English, Art, Design & Technology
Key Stage 3: Citizenship

Coventry Canal Token
1768



into the problems of not being able to spend the tokens in some places and the sense of frustration or exclusion from 'land' life. In contrast pupils could explore the effects for businesses when the navvies moved on to another stretch of the cutting of the canal. Pupils could be encouraged to think about the effects of a 'local currency' and the impact on how money was spent and trade occurred. Inevitably tokens would only be recognised and therefore accepted in a limited area and by a number of businesses which would mean a very particular 'boom' for as long as the work on the canal continued.

*

Since these tokens would not be endorsed currency, there had to be a way to ensure they had financial value. In fact the company would buy back the tokens wherever they were spent. How do pupils imagine the system worked? Can they **explain, report and evaluate** contemporary uses of tokens and the way these are operated? (eg. school dinners, doorstep milk delivery in some places, gaming machines). Why are they used in these places and what security do they offer because of their closed circulation and specific value?

*

The tokens had a local character in their design. They sometimes carried a Coat of Arms or images of the region. Pupils could **investigate and make** their own tokens. What would they include in a Coat of Arms for a company and what images would they borrow from the locality? Considering the face designs of modern coinage might help to stimulate pupils' thinking about the way in which values are carried by design. The displacement of currency through the use of tokens tends to have been replaced by 'plastic'. Credit cards, prepaid mobile telephones, subscription cards to clubs and organisations are a few examples. **Exploring and evaluating** the increasing use of these cards might throw up some interesting insights and encourage pupils to think about the way that they are involved in the process of change and the making of history here and now.

Coins, Cash and Currency

2

A Crown coin buys safety for Agnes and Daisy on their boat when Bill, full of hatred for the canal people, douses the boat with petrol and threatens to light a match. A Crown coin buys a horse for Lily and Walter who have had to have their working horse put down. Jason attempts to use a Crown coin to bribe the Inspector who discovers that Agnes, the boat woman who has befriended him, is under weight with her cargo of grain because she used some to bake some bread to pay back the kindness of people when her daughter, Daisy, goes into hospital.

A Crown, of course, was worth five shillings. There is other coinage in our history: Pre decimalisation (15 February 1971) – a pound was worth 20 shillings. There were twelve pennies to a shilling. There were at various moments in the past, Crowns (5/-), half-Crown coins (2/6), florins (2 shillings), sixpences and threepences (thre'pence), pennies, halfpennies (ha'penny) and

farthings (a quarter of a penny).

Further back in our history we had units such as the Sovereign (roughly a pound in its contemporary value), a Royal (between 10 to 14 shillings), an Angel or a Noble (between 7 to 10 shillings).

Interestingly, there was heated debate before decimalisation about whether to use ten shillings or a pound as the basis for the new decimalised currency. Countries such as New Zealand and Australia had already moved from a sterling unit to a ten-shilling unit that they called a dollar. Britain kept the pound because of tradition and prestige but, interestingly, had we moved to a ten-shilling unit there was talk of calling it a Royal or a Noble!

Activities

Key Stage 2 & 3: Mathematics, English, Art, Design & Technology

Key Stage 3: Citizenship

*

Pupils might want to **explain, explore and evaluate** why the Crown coins that Jason has will apparently buy a pair of trainers at £105.00 in current terms. Why are the coins worth so much today? Why and how do coins accumulate worth beyond their face value? Pupils may need guidance to consider how this was once partly related to the metal value or gold and/or silver but increasingly the value is enhanced by history or rarity.

*

Although the coins may have a value way beyond the 5 shillings when they were minted, Jason seems to feel that £105.00 for a pair of trainers will be a good exchange. Once upon a time he could have bought a horse for just one of the coins at 5 shillings! Pupils could **explain, explore and evaluate** the products found in magazine and newspaper advertisements and write up a list of single items of significant cost that they could buy with £105.00. Which of these items would they chose and what is their justification? Do all the items have the same apparent complexity or worth in their construction? Issues to consider could

Staffordshire & Worcestershire
Canal Company token



Coins, Cash and Currency

include the effects of volume of sales in reducing the unit price or, conversely, the popularity of a product making it possible to demand higher profit margins.

*

Using coloured counters with an imagined face value for each colour, or coins designed and made by pupils, and working in groups, pupils should use **any of the suitable four number operations** to exchange and barter with pre-decimal currency. Each group should have an equal fund at the outset but in different denominations of coins. Whatever the design of the activity, the task should involve an exchange of coins (and denominations) using arithmetical thinking. According to the complexity that you wish to include, increase the range of coins that need to be considered. At the end of the task the value of their 'stash' should be the same as when they began but be an entirely different range of coins.

*

When the 50 pence piece was introduced in the early 1970s, it caused a national outcry. People did not like the coin. Pupils could be encouraged to **evaluate** current coins and **explain and report** the merits each design has in their eyes. Do they still think 50 pence coin a poor design? Why has it got seven edges? They might be prompted to consider the issues of weight, size

Canal tokens



and shape in relation to people of different abilities and needs. What does a blind person need to be able to establish when handling coins? What is helpful to people in carrying a large amount of small change?

3

Financing the canals was a complicated process because many projects faced severe difficulties that had not been foreseen such as the challenges of the terrain. Money was raised through £100 shares and this investment was clearly only within the reaches of the very wealthy. Given that some canals soon made considerable profits, some wealthy investors became even richer. The gap between the wealthy and the poor (such as the very people building the canals) became more exaggerated. In 1797, navvies ('navigators') working on the Kennet and Avon Canal were paid between 10p and 15p a day in promissory notes that then had to be cashed at a discount! Men often had to pay into a fund to cover injuries sustained in the dangerous work. Canals offered the possibility of greater loads and less difficulty for the transport of fragile goods by road. A good example of a principal investor who reaped rewards from both transport and investment was Wedgwood whose fragile china was difficult to move in safety. Ironically, the coming of the railways temporarily enhanced the profits as materials were moved by canal. It was also the case that once the railways were built, interest and use of the canals fell sharply.

Activities

Key Stage 2 & 3: Mathematics, English, ICT
Key Stage 3: Citizenship

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In groups, pupils might **plan, predict and explore** the differences in attitude towards the canals for those able to afford to buy shares with excess capital of at least £100.00 compared with the people paid between 60 new pence to £1.05 a week. The activity could lead to a structure of contrasting **improvisation and role-play**

Coins, Cash and Currency

discussing the day's work and gains around a meal. Who is likely to be sitting down to this event, in what conditions and with what kind of reflections?

*

What connections can be made between the canals and their pivotal role in shaping the industrial revolution and the changes in our modern society wherein the transport of ideas has become as crucial as the transport of goods? Pupils should be guided to think about the impact of ICT on their world. This could partly be achieved using the Internet itself to **obtain information matched to purpose by selecting appropriate sources**. The information might then be shaped into a narrative account, word-processed, for a history of the future. How would a future Jason explore our current world of information technology and what aspects of our lives might have changed? Pupils will need to **plan, predict and explore** such an account.

Physical Prowess

1

'The girl with... big muscley hands, and chapped knees from the canal?' (Nurse)

'And if I had my choice again and I could go back over those years – I have had a very hard life and a bad one but I would do it all again exactly the same as I had it with the horses, the boats, the loading – I have loaded 25 tons of corned beef, I have emptied 31 tons of spelter, I have done 25 tons of timbers – to me work was nothing. I couldn't care less, I don't even today. But I like it and I liked my horse and I liked the boat as it was...I mean you look along the boat as it was going and you see that horse just walking along that road and the hedges and trees and everything going by. No one can ask for better than that. What would I like to see now – before I leave this world – I would like to see all those horses come back and the place come back as it was as I knew it.'

(Nell Cartwright 1977 quoted in *The Great Days of the Canals* by Anthony Burton: publ. David and Charles, 1989)

Canal life was physically arduous and demanded great fitness from the people who worked the boats regardless of gender or age. The very young learnt quickly to become part of the working team looking after younger children and working the boats, locks and docks. Women were often back on deck within hours of having delivered babies and taking more than their full share of responsibility for the tasks involved with running the boat, journeying the canals and loading and unloading cargo.

Steam Narrow Boat
'Victoria', 1900s
from a drawing by
Edward Paget Tomlinson



Activities

Key Stage 2 & 3: Physical Education
Key Stage 3: Dance / Drama Activities

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Using the game 'Captain Coming On Board'x with modifications to accommodate Canal life offers possibilities for a physical warm up to a PE or Drama lesson. Label the ends of the gym, studio or hall as bow and stern and the sides as either left and right or port and starboard. If you want to really focus the group you might like to use Daisy's signposts of bread and cheese. Using these labels as target directions, the pupils will run from one to other as you instruct. You can always alter the navigation mid stream and the last to the station or the pupils who head in the wrong direction may be excluded from the game. Now add in the following instructions for activities on command:

Whoa Buttercup (the canal horse)

Freeze and stay frozen until told to unfreeze – any movement before this instruction puts the participant out of the game

Draw the paddles

Participants mime winding the windlass to raise the paddles and allow the water into the lock.

Leg it

On their backs, the pupils mime walking the canal through a tunnel in a crab like movement.

Load the cargo

Participants quickly pair off to mime the lifting and throwing of a sack into the hold of the boat.

You can add any number of commands that you can think up related to life on the canals. The winner(s) of the game are those with the concentration and energy to stay the course. This activity offers the opportunity to **warm up and prepare appropriately for different activities.**

*

Working towards a choreography of dance by structuring a limited number of central motifs from the physical work on the boats. Work with the pupils on a series of movements that represent

Physical Prowess

'bowhauling' (physically bringing the boat in on a rope in areas where there is no access for a horse), 'legging it' (a spider movement of the legs whilst lying on your back to carry an unmotorised boat through a tunnel without a tow path – the horses would have been led over the hill), 'windlass on the paddle' (the job of winding up the toothed bar that operates the paddles to drain water in and out of the locks), 'walking the pound' (the steady task of walking the horse along the towpath) and, finally, 'the last' moment of the day (signified through a decline to the floor in foetal shape). This work recognises the need to **respond to a range of stimuli** in shaping dance work.

*

In groups, pupils will take these movements and with music or accompaniment of their (or your) choice work towards a complex realisation of a dance that offers a realisation of the working day on the canal. Here pupils will **create and perform dances using a range of movement patterns and use compositional principles when composing their dances** with a regard for **awareness of motif development, awareness of group relationships** and **spatial awareness**.

'...The women took to it better than the men did. Any canal man if he's honest will tell you that the only person capable of doing five things at once is a woman. And they're also much better at adjusting to change. In fact whatever life threw at them they seemed to be able to pick up and carry on better than blokes. In my opinion they can adapt to anything bar one. I never ever met a woman who became accustomed and managed to pick herself up and carry on quite the same after the death of a child.'

Inside Out

1

'Some people will tell you that canal folks are quiet, romantic people who just travel up and down the canals doing no harm to anyone, keeping themselves to themselves. But the people who tell you that are most likely well meaning but ill-informed, rich people, who do not have to live near them, ever met one nor are ever likely to. Don't misunderstand me I've nothing against pikeys. I just don't want them living round me or my family and I certainly don't see why we should subsidise them.' (Bill)

Go-ahead for asylum hostel enrages village: Irate residents predict crime, tension and plummeting house prices.

Go-ahead for asylum hostel enrages village: Irate residents predict crime, tension and plummeting house prices.

The hamlet of Over Stowey, nestling in Somerset's Quantock Hills, would be a suitable place to house 74 asylum seekers, a planning inquiry ruled yesterday...

Residents and parish councillors in the all-white community of 314 reacted with shock and disbelief at the news that the planning inspectorate had overturned Sedgemoor district council's refusal to

approve a planned hostel for asylum seekers...

Embittered residents said the decision was a 'disaster' for the local community, which has already been divided by the proposals...

Rocketing crime, begging, racial tension, and plummeting house prices could result, said residents...

Keith Perry in *The Guardian*
Wednesday August 9, 2000

Activities

Key Stage 2 & 3: English
Key Stage 3: Citizenship

Grouping pupils in fours or fives, the class is briefed that you (the teacher) will select one individual from each group to leave the room shortly. The class should be told that in the absence of these group members, the remaining pupils will be given a topic to discuss. The excluded individuals on their return will have the project of identifying the topic of discussion and becoming fully reintegrated with the group by taking an active role in the discussion. It is important that the individuals chosen for this task are relatively robust and articulate. When the selected members have been chosen, they should be excluded from the room and the remaining class members briefed that the additional element

of their discussion should be that they steadfastly ignore the excluded group member when they return. There should be no acknowledgement of verbal contributions and no physical or eye contact should be made. Given the topic for discussion, the groups should be given a few moments to establish the debate. The others should then rejoin their groups. At the end of the exercise pupils should be encouraged to articulate their feelings both as the excluder and the excluded and to extend this insight to wider situations. This is an opportunity to **use their imagination to consider other people's experiences** and to **use dramatic techniques to explore issues** and to **explore, hypothesise, debate and analyse**.

*
Invite pupils to consider the moments and places where they have discovered themselves to be 'different'. Good examples include holidays where language, accent or dialect becomes a matter of heightened importance. The shaping of this discussion should be in terms of encouraging pupils to understand the world as a complex and highly differentiated world in which their own status is by no means transparent or ordinary and that this very diversity is what is interesting. The extension to this exercise could be that pupils list their own identified 'differences' and memberships to different communities of people that have distinct rules (school, home, sports club, religious group). Choosing one of these memberships, they may write a brief article that explains to an outsider some of the interesting or less well-known facets of belonging to the identified group. This may offer parallels for acknowledging **the diversity of national, regional, religious and ethnic identities in the United Kingdom and the need for mutual respect and understanding**. It offers a context for **using different ways to help the group move forward, including summarising the main points, reviewing what has been said, clarifying, drawing others in, reaching agreement, considering alternatives and anticipating consequences**

Inside Out

or (at KS3) synthesising others ideas.

*

In discussion explore **(review)** and compare **(clarify and synthesise)** the values and attitudes in the quote offered from Bill's speech and the reactions to the planned hostel in Over Stowey reported in *The Guardian*.

*

Pupils could be asked to write a diary account of someone from another country newly settled in a British town or country setting. The pupils should be prompted to 'make strange' the world that they know and take for granted. What is it about our own lives and the places where we live that gives it its character or flavour. What is it that might be alienating about initial impressions about such a place? What losses are there in being moved from what is familiar and comfortable? Prompting pupils to share experiences of holidaying or moving may help with ideas. The emphasis should be upon **explaining, reporting and evaluating and to reflect on the nature and significance of the subject**.

Exploring social exclusion prompts the need for sensitivity and a clear sense of the pupils present in the classroom and their own status and histories before investigating the many prejudices, experiences and perceptions we hold of groups other than ourselves. Even supportive initiatives, that expose our misapprehensions about identifiable sets of people can, for some pupils, feel like yet another facet, be it a different focus, of their exclusion by the mainstream of our society.