

History enrichment in the wider community: a First World War case study at Wildern

As a department at Wildern we felt that it was extremely important to mark the centenary of the outbreak of The First World War with the respect and poignancy that it deserved. As a result, we embarked on a project that involved all students from Y7 to Y10 and various groups from the wider community. The project has been very successful in both enhancing students' historical knowledge and understanding of The First World War and also in reaching out to the wider community and raising the profile of history within the school. It was also a great way to tackle local history and make students reflect on their own origins and history. Below is an overview of what we did and how as this could be rolled out in other schools for other topics.

Step 1. Initiating the project with SLT

This was clearly a significant part of the process as we wanted to secure a whole school approach and also incorporate the wider community and external parties which required funding. We created a proposal that demonstrated the significance of SMSC and community outreach which was a key selling point.

Step 2. Liaising with parents and families

We were keen to use this project to personalise the content of the project and help students access the bigger picture of the past with smaller stories. 7 months before the planned event in July, we wrote home to all parents en masse asking for their family stories linked to The First World War. We set up a specific email address for them to reply to and send information such as pictures and documents so that we could manage the response and centralise it away from our day to day roles in the school. This worked really well and made it far more manageable and took the technicians about three minutes! The consent process was really important as we had to ensure that parents were fully aware of how we were using some information that was not only personal, but also very precious. All the parents were fantastically supportive and we were overwhelmed by the support and some of the amazing stories. We have taken some of them to use in our Schemes of Work as they were gold dust and provided a local aspect in a very different way to less personal local history

Step 3. Working with external agencies

We worked with several external agencies in this project. We made Hedge End Town Council aware and they were incredibly supportive and funded the evening event that we held in The Berry Theatre.

In terms of the history element, we worked with Fort Nelson who were phenomenally supportive and agreed to come to the school for the three day event in July. They ran the morning assemblies for us and ran workshops throughout the three days. They also brought with them a huge array of artefacts which even our more challenging students were mesmerised by.

In addition, we also worked with a First World War Historian, Jeremy Banning whom we happened to bump into a few years ago on a school Battlefields Trip and befriended. We hired him for the three days and he also ran assemblies and workshops for our More Able and Talented history students. As part of his commission, Jeremy also researched the relatives who had fought in the war for some of our students and staff.

The Ashcroft Arts Centre also approached us and invited our students to work with them as part of a National Heritage Project. This was a side line project for our Y7 and Y9 MAT students which involved them working with a film production company and the Royal Armouries to produce an exhibition, but we used their work in the July event.

We also had the support of the Hampshire Regiment Museum in Winchester who kindly researched the stories of the men from our local War Memorial in Hedge End. We used this information in the evening event at The Berry and also as part of our exhibition.

For our evening event, we also worked with five of our feeder schools which was brilliant as we were able to get them involved in the history and also link in and support some of their own centenary projects. We approached the Head Teachers initially and then worked with the history co-ordinators in the school. We have since done some follow up work with them working on other Schemes of Work which is a great way for us to influence what is happening in terms of KS2 history before the students even get to us.

Step 4. Managing a cross-curricular approach

After SLT agreed that we could run the event, we then invited any department who wished to get involved and were totally amazed by the response. Literally every department came back saying that they wanted to be so we asked them to suggest workshops. We felt it was really important to allow them jurisdiction on this so that they were doing what they felt was appropriate and could play to their strengths. Highlights included;

- Some beautiful poppies created in Art
- Students looking at buoyancy and displacement in Science linked to the development of submarines
- Student studying scenes from 'Oh What a Lovely War!' In Drama
- Using Pythagoras to work out shell trajectory in maths using catapults
- Analysis of war poetry in English
- PTI instruction by the PE department
- Investigating Conscientious Objection and moral responsibility in RE
- Looking at the Geography of war and its impact on boundaries and population and national identity
- In the MFL workshop students learned how to play Petanque in their target language and looked at recreational elements of French society in 1914.

Step 5. The logistics

Managing the timetable for this event wasn't as bad as it might seem! We collapsed the timetable for Y7, Y8 and Y9 on separate days and rotated students in groups of 20. They had 5 sessions each day which included 2 history workshops plus a core workshop, a creative workshop and a foundation work shop. The sessions were 45 minutes long and at the end of the day the whole year group met in the hall to reflect on Remembrance. This was a really lovely way to tie everything together and was led by Jeremy and the History team as well as some of the students.

Step 6. Showcasing the event

We were incredibly lucky that Hedge End Town Council were so supportive and footed the cost of The Berry. We had an evening of dance, drama, poetry and music with Jeremy as a guest speaker. Several VIPs attended including some of the senior members of the Royal British Legion and the Mayor. All proceeds from the event were donated to the Royal British Legion and we raised £1000 as a result of donations. We were able to showcase what the students had been doing and Fort Nelson also ran an artefact handling session for the audience during the interval.

Reflections

As a history team, we worked incredibly hard on this project but we planned and implemented it in stages over a year so that it was manageable. It was hard work, but it was so worth it and since the summer event we have been invited to participate in other events run by the local council, Royal British Legion and also local radio.

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