

Making a Mark in the Tees Valley: Locally focused online resources for schools

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Summary

The National Portrait Gallery and museums across the Tees Valley have developed 'Making a Mark in the Tees Valley', an online learning resource for schools exploring personal and local identity through museum collections.

Background

For the past four years, the National Portrait Gallery (NPG) has been working with eight museums in the Tees Valley, as part of the ACE funded Museum and Schools programme. The key aim of this partnership is to connect local children and students with their heritage, helping them to develop a sense of place and identity and in so doing, raise their aspirations.

The history of the Tees Valley encompasses industry and innovation, creativity and design, and exploration. Collectively, the partner museums offer fascinating insights into the people and stories that shaped this remarkable region and its impact on Britain and the wider world. We created the idea of 'Making a Mark' – exploring personal and local identity through people's stories - as a focus.

During its first three years, the partnership created a cohesive learning programme for schools with sessions in each of the regional museums. Nationally significant portraits with local resonance were loaned by the NPG to the Tees Valley museums for a series of locally focused exhibitions.

Challenge

We recognised that high quality museum learning for schools begins and ends in the classroom, and that teachers need support to maximise learning opportunities and take visits beyond an isolated 'day out'.

Approach

With the Museums and Schools initiative in its final year and the funding reaching an end, the approach needed to be sustainable, low maintenance and easily accessible for teachers. We decided to create an online resource and to consult local teachers about which content to include and how it should be organised. We worked with Inspire2Learn - a teaching and learning centre funded by local schools – to recruit teachers for the consultation from their existing networks and to help launch and publicise the resource.

Intended outcomes

- Teachers more likely and better able to use examples from local heritage to bring their curriculum topics to life
- Wider reach of partner collections
- A 'joined up' offer for schools supporting local heritage learning through museum visits and in the classroom.

Intended outputs

A set of online resources for teachers:

- where partner collections combine to reveal a rich and holistic story of the Tees Valley
- which places local collections and stories in a national context, extending reach for all

- partners
- which supports curriculum-linked learning about personal and local identity.

Obstacles and issues

The NPG, as a National institution, holds a comprehensive and extensively digitised collection. However, many of the partner museums simply do not have access to this kind of resource. This coupled with ensuring all partner collections were equally represented, while delivering curriculum-relevant content, were key challenges.

Actual outcomes

With some creative thinking, we were able to meet our aims of providing unique content representative of each partner, telling a holistic story of the Tees Valley while ensuring genuine relevance for local teachers. Whilst too early for feedback from teachers Andrew Stogdale from Inspire2Learn says:

“feedback has been really enthusiastic with teachers appreciating a sneaky peek into what they might see for real when they visit their local museum. There is just enough additional information to spark the questions that are at the heart of effective history teaching and bring our local history to life in the classroom.”

Actual outputs

Collectively, partners provided an array of digitised images including objects, paintings, photographs, portraits and manuscripts. These were organised into themes steered by the teacher consultation and presented as a set of ‘image galleries’.

Themes are locally-focused, curriculum-relevant and range from Early Settlers and Exploration, to the Seaside and World War I. Here an astronaut sits comfortably next to a designer, Captain Cook and a Saxon Princess, while ordinary men, women and children mine millions of tons of ironstone, build the Sydney Harbour Bridge and journey on the world’s first public railway.

Concise, audience-relevant information about each theme and image, coupled with ideas for classroom activities, a series of fascinating ‘did you know..?’ facts and links to further online material bring the themes to life.

Lessons learned

Teachers’ requirements from museum-based online resources are relatively modest – and needn’t cost the Earth. What they really need is:

- A quick route to your best stuff – a ‘greatest hits’ of good quality images (and video clips if you have them) from your collection that they can print, project onto a whiteboard or repurpose in a presentation or tablet App
- Access to your knowledge through concise, audience-focused text (or video if you have the budget) - the teachers we consulted particularly liked the inclusion of ‘Did you know..?’ facts as a way of ‘hooking’ their students in to deeper content
- Simple classroom activities – teachers wanted flexible, workable, ideas, pointers and starters (as opposed to detailed lesson plans) organised by Key Stage.

Working across a local/regional partnership of nine museums and galleries is an effective way of producing a resource of a quality and range that will genuinely engage teachers. However, consideration must be given to the significant amount of time and coordination needed for a collaborative project such as this.

Working with a local partner with existing teacher networks proved very effective in gaining support and interest from schools. Feedback from our successful launch event at Inspire2Learn showed teachers not only welcoming the resource to help prepare for and follow up museum visits in their classrooms, and really make the most of museum collections, but asking whether the resource could be extended to include even more objects and images.

Next steps

The partners will continue to evaluate use of the resource via Google Analytics and anecdotal

evidence from visiting teachers. The Tees Valley Museums will work with Inspire2Learn to deliver teacher CPD for using the resource and to explore possibilities to work together to extend the resource further.

Further information

The Tees Valley Museums comprise Kirkleatham Museum, Cleveland Ironstone Mining Museum, The Dorman Museum, The Captain Cook Birthplace Museum, Middlesbrough Institute of Modern Art, Preston Park Museum, Head of Steam - Darlington Railway Museum, and the Hartlepool Museum and Art Gallery. The National Portrait Gallery are the national partner.

View the resources: www.npg.org.uk/MaMTeesValley

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Useful links:

Evaluation of Extending Digital Practice programme – Flow UK and Artswork

<http://www.artswork.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/Artswork-Extending-Innovative-Practice-Background-digital-report-NEW-....pdf>

Stronger Together, digital strand evaluation by Flow:

<http://www.langleyacademy.org/strongertogether/wp-content/uploads/2015/06/Stronger-Together-digital-research-Flow-Associates-Mar-20151.pdf>

Culture 24 Let's Get Real: connecting collections to young audiences

<http://weareculture24.org.uk/projects/action-research/>

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