

LONG AGO OR FAR AWAY

THE GLOBAL PERSPECTIVE

— Ilona Aronovsky

Introduction

Even an inclusive national history curriculum can make Britain (and Europe) appear as the lynchpin of world history. Without a coherent structure for global history, young people remain unaware that continents beyond Europe have histories of equal significance.

This article suggests ways children can explore how sophisticated human societies have developed and often influenced each other, across the globe. All societies have features in common as well as differences, which children can compare and contrast.

World history topics of 1999

The 1999 list with its minimum requirement of one world topic for KS2, confusingly, made no distinction between civilisations from the remote past (Ancient Egypt, Indus Valley, Ancient Sumer, the Assyrian Empire) and those contemporary with British and European History in the Common Era (Maya – classic period, Aztecs, and Benin).

Integrating global perspectives

Whilst two (expanded) world history option lists make chronological sense, breadth cannot be achieved by cramming in extra topics. Instead we could plan world history through time, and across the continents and oceans that connect them, with a combination of chosen topics, key questions about human society and its development, such as 'When and where did people first live in cities?', embedded in thematic topics, or 'history snapshots' in cross-curricular projects.

Connecting time lines with world maps

Mapping chronologically and spatially can be an explicit part of what children record, and help them to think about chronology, continuity and change, whilst moving around time and space. Identifying local, national and global in curriculum planning also allows the tracking of world history elements in tandem with British and European history.

Global examples at KS1

- **Toys, homes and buildings** can include examples from world history.
- **Myths** and stories (e.g. *1001 Nights*, *Jataka Tales*, and *Tales of the Silk Road*) are rich sources for history. Hilary Claire discussed how using myths can help KS1 children to grapple with what could be true or not true. We can ask children what they deduce from common themes (e.g. poor man through magical means acquires royal riches).
- **Stories** give us clues about what was valuable, and extensively traded. Can children corroborate these stories with artefacts or other evidence? Buddhism spread

along important trade routes, such as the Silk Road. The story of Buddha, a real person entwined in religious fables, and his representation in carved stone from India to China, links with RE and Art.

Ancient technologies and other evidence at KS2

We only know about the cities of the Indus Valley civilisation from archaeology and non-perishable remains. The technology of fired and baked brick provided an infrastructure, with city-wide provision of wells, street drains, bathing rooms as a standard feature of dwellings. Were these new-build, planned cities. Unlike Egypt, China, and Sumer we cannot read the Indus script, and no monumental tombs stuffed with valuables, nor the fabulous array of evidence that comes from Ancient Egypt, China and Sumer have been found. Differences invite comparison. Children (without prompting) compared the (few) modest tombs of Indus people with those in Egypt, and concluded they might not have believed in the afterlife.

Interpreting world cultures as historians

Hilary Claire described the importance of working with common pre-conceptions children have about Africa as a famine-prone continent, of jungles and animals; they were able to discuss why the first white people to see the ruins of Great Zimbabwe believed its unique architecture was Arab, not African.

Across oceans and land routes

Thematic projects could explore oceans and the continents around them. The Indian Ocean, bounded by East Africa, Arabia, South Asia and routes to China and South East Asia, was an important hub of world trade, commerce, culture, contact and knowledge transmission from antiquity to mediaeval times. The Silk Road (the route for silks so prized by the Romans, and the knowledge of paper making, invented in China) was equally important for two millennia..

Projects about the origins of our food, or the properties of textiles, such as wool, silk or cotton, lend themselves to historical enquiry. What is it about silk that makes it a luxury product? Where was cotton grown and woven millennia ago?

A fuller version of this article, with its internet links, can be downloaded from the HA website www.history.org.uk

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