

Back to basics:

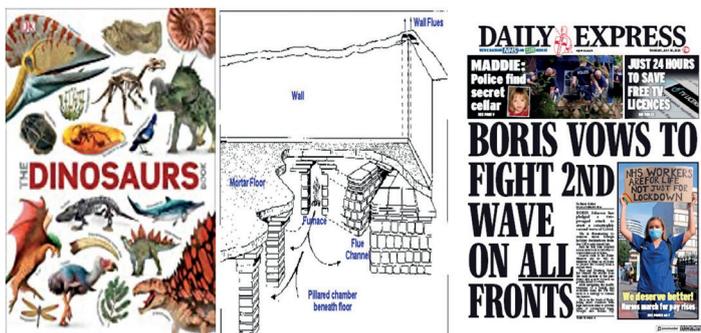
what does a good history lesson look like?

Susie Townsend

The new emphasis from Ofsted on the importance of the foundation subjects has meant a very welcome renewed interest in history and how it is taught. For years the dominance of literacy and numeracy in the curriculum has meant that time for foundation subjects has at best been compressed, and at worst has disappeared from a regular weekly timetable. History has fared better than a number of these subjects to some extent, but often due to the fact that literacy can be taught through history. Cross-curricular approaches can be very exciting and beneficial but the learning objectives are often based on literacy rather than historical learning outcomes. History appears to be being taught but is, in reality, window dressing disguising the fact that the actual learning taking place revolves around progress in literacy.

What is history and why is it important?

Maybe this is a good point to consider what is history and why is it a vital part of a child's education?



With Key Stage 2 classes or with staff you can get them to consider three images – here I have used a diagram to show the Roman hypocaust system, a non-fiction children's book about dinosaurs and a newspaper front page about Covid-19. They can vote about whether they think are all history, one of them history, or two of them history. This creates interesting discussion. Does the fact that the diagram is a modern reconstruction mean it is not history? Is the Covid-19 outbreak too recent to be history? The answer of

course is that dinosaurs are animals and so not history. In the end it should be established that history is about people in the past and that the past can be thousands of years ago or yesterday. The use of quotes about history can widen the debate to encourage people to consider the significance of history. The comments below by Winston Churchill and Michael Crichton are just two examples that can lead to reflection about the controversial nature of history and its importance.

History will be kind to me for I intend to write it.

Winston Churchill

If you don't know history then you don't know anything. You are a leaf that doesn't know it is part of a tree.

Michael Crichton

So what makes a good history lesson?

The diagram below is one way of demonstrating the ingredients of a good history lesson. Three elements are shown here: substantive knowledge, disciplinary knowledge and methods of enquiry. A good lesson is where all three of these elements combine.

The perfect history lesson

