The importance of history vocabulary

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Beyond phonics! Terminology for history

Teachers and schools should surely be forgiven for quickly turning to the pages containing the 'subject content' – within the new history curriculum – and finding out 'what' they should be teaching. This is especially true for Key Stage 2 where children must now learn British history from the Stone Age up to 1066. Now, well into the academic year, we have an opportunity to reflect on our delivery of the new curriculum.

Within the overarching aims of the new history curriculum, pupils are required to:

• *gain and deploy a historically grounded understanding of abstract terms such as 'empire', 'civilisation', 'parliament' and 'peasantry'.*

• *understand historical concepts such as continuity and change, cause and consequence, similarity, difference and significance, and use them to make connections, draw contrasts, analyse trends, frame historically-valid questions and create their own structured accounts, including written narratives and analyses.*

If we are to ensure that we have an outstanding history curriculum in our schools, we must understand what progression will look like in relation to vocabulary and historical terms.

Whole-school approach to historical terms

In collaboration with teaching teams

As a subject leader, mindful of the absence of vocabulary provided, I held a meeting with teaching teams and we reflected on the vocabulary required when teaching our current planning and how to develop children's historical understanding. Much of

the vocabulary generated in the discussion could be placed in two categories:

1) Language relating to the passing of time. For example: here, now, then, yesterday, last week, last year, x years ago, a long time ago, etc.

2) Language connected the measuring of time. For example: hours, weeks, years, decades, centuries, millennia, eras, epochs, AD, ACE, BC, BCE, and so on.

Some further abstract terms and historical concepts were provided, but it became clear we needed more support with these elements of terminology. The vocabulary poster created by Alf Wilkinson and published in *PH69* was gratefully received, the list is reproduced in figure 2. The teaching teams have recently met again and enjoyed the challenge of dissecting the list and beginning to classify the terms.

Other categories became apparent. These included: historical concepts, historical roles/occupations and historical abstract nouns, such as: monarchy, democracy, aristocracy. This has provided a spring-board from which we can proceed to further map our curriculum, and, importantly, track the progression of historical terms through the year groups.

In collaboration with pupils

At Wroxham, it is a priority to involve the learners in the planning of the curriculum and any attempts to embark on whole-school change. Not only does this promote pupil empowerment and engagement, but it also provides an invaluable opportunity to undertake Assessment for Learning (AFL) and assess the starting points of learners and year groups.

As a school we are using the established 'circle group' meetings to introduce and investigate the terms within Alf Wilkinson's list, and then year groups will continue the task in greater depth. Circle groups are led by Year

Figure 1: Class display at Wroxham School demonstrating how hand actions and sentence starters can be used to identify the various forms of the verb.

6 children and pupils, of mixed ages, from all the year groups participate. Effectively, circle groups are an inclusive, child-led, school council. From this platform, pupils will be tasked to:

1) Embark on the task undertaken by teachers, where language from the vocabulary list can be separated into categories. Children will then be tasked to self-assess and identify terms that are understood, are understood to a certain degree and not understood at all.

2) Develop an understanding of some of the more abstract terms, through investigating terms and generating tangible examples and connected language. This task will be introduced with a view to enable younger children to begin understanding abstract terms. This offers an invaluable opportunity for older learners to review their own understanding and move towards 'mastering' their understanding of terms and concepts. An example of this could be using examples of: teachers, headteachers, sports coaches, Beaver and Brownie group leaders, to introduce terms such as monarchy and democracy. As ever, it is crucial that terms are taught in context. Another useful way to deepen understanding can be identifying distinctions between concepts, such as comparing the Monarch to elected leaders such as the Prime Minister.

Planning for progression

In addition to a whole-school assessment and exploration of historical terms, careful attention should be given to the planning of units in order to promote progression of understanding and usage of such terms.

Hilary Pegum produced very useful planning proformas for use in Key Stages 1 and 2 (found in *PH67*). These proformas can be deployed in planning across the school to ensure the relevant introduction, revisiting and deepening of the understanding of historical terminology. This also will provide teachers with concrete links between historical topics taught and the appropriate terminology to support learning.

Where terms may be considered too abstract – particularly for young learners – teachers should seek tangible and real-life contexts from which to introduce and compound such terms. Terminology can be introduced exclusively within historical learning, or within the wider curriculum; class voting, for instance, clearly provides a context from which to introduce and consolidate 'democracy'.

KEY KS1 and KS2 historical terms

AD	Change	Democracy	Hunter-gatherer	Metal-working	Parliament	Sacrifice
Agriculture	Church	Discovery	Immigrant	Migration	Past	Secondary evidence
Ancient civilisations	Christianity	Diversity	International	Missionary	Peasant	
Archaeology	Chronology	Emigrant	Interpretation	Monarchy	Pope	Settler
Aristocracy	Colony	Emperor	Invasion	Monastery	Prehistory	Significance
Artefact	Conquest	Empire	Invention	Museum	Present	Slave
BC	Continuity	Execution	Iron Age	Myths and legends	Primary evidence	Stone Age
Bronze Age	Court	Explorer	Islam	Nation	Rebellion	Torture
Calendar	Crusades	Global	King/Queen	Nomad	Republic	Traitor
Causation	Dark Ages	Gods / Goddesses	Local	Oral history	Revolt	Treason
Century	Decade	Heresy	Long ago			Yesterday

Activities for 'low-stake' summative assessment

In addition to embedding the vocabulary throughout the teaching unit, the following suggestions can help develop the lexical prowess of our young historians and would make useful starters or activities to be used at the start or end of the day.

Bingo

Pupils are given grids to populate or which are previously populated with historical terms and vocabulary. The teacher provides definitions (and examples, if appropriate) and must tick off the corresponding words until they have ticked all the terms. The rest of the class are able to challenge the winners and elicit explanations/definitions in order to check accuracy.

'Articulate'/'Pictionary'

In keeping with the conventions of the popular board games, students are required to describe without naming, or draw pictures in order to allow the partner to identify the specific piece of historical vocabulary. Dictionaries can be provided as well as definition lists for those children still clarifying their understanding.

The opportunities for embedding historical learning within the wider curriculum, specifically the English curriculum

The new English Programmes of Study challenge schools to explicitly teach and assess English grammar. These requirements are also coupled with the spelling and grammar test at the end of Key Stage 2, with a Key Stage 1 'SPAG' test on the educational horizon. Arguably, this can provide a rich opportunity for historical vocabulary to be reinforced through English grammar activities.

Word types – nouns, verbs, adjectives and adverbs

Many of the terms provided by Alf Wilkinson's list can be classed as 'abstract nouns', for example:

democracy, monarchy and immigration. Pupils can be tasked to use their existing lexical knowledge, or use dictionaries, to find the connected forms of the words. These could be to any other connected abstract nouns, adjectives, verbs and adverbs. Classes can create word maps and displays to help reinforce this learning. Taking 'democracy' for example, children can create maps to show the forms: democratic, democratically and the verb democratise. These maps can then form classroom displays to compound the learning and also to share with other classes in the school. See figure 1, image of the class display, which shows how hand actions and sentence starters can be used to identify the various forms of the verb.

Adverbial phrases

Words and phrases referring to the passing of time are often adverbial phrases, which is an area of grammar introduced in the Key Stage 2 English Curriculum. Many of these phrases can be placed at the start of the sentence, thus becoming 'fronted adverbial' phrases. By providing key vocabulary and phrases to children during tasks, learning can be supported in both speaking and listening exercises and writing tasks. Here are some examples:

- Last week, …
- A long time a ago, ….
- During the reign of_____ , ….
- Throughout the Maya period,…
- Towards the end of the Roman empire, …
- Pre-1066, …
- In 1939,…

When exploring such cross-curricular links, especially with regards to writing tasks, teachers should be clear whether the learning objectives are history- or English-focused. Although in truth, with primary timetables already congested, any opportunity to further introduce and review historical terminology should be exploited.

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