



The  
Historical Association  
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# T.E.A.C.H.

## Teaching Emotive and Controversial History 3-19



A Report from The Historical Association on  
the Challenges and Opportunities for Teaching  
Emotive and Controversial History 3-19

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# 1

## Introduction

This publication is the result of research carried out by The Historical Association and supported by a grant from the Department for Education and Skills. The project has been entitled T.E.A.C.H. (Teaching Emotive and Controversial History) and covers the 3–19 age range.

The National Curriculum for History and GCSE and AS/A2 specifications often touch on social, cultural, religious and ethnic fault lines within and beyond Britain. A premise at the start of the project was that many teachers often avoided controversy in the classroom when focused on history. At the same time, there is widespread recognition that the way many past events are perceived and understood can stir emotions and controversy within and across communities.

The proposals that were put before the DfES envisaged researching the opportunities, constraints and case studies of effective practice across all key stages. The proposals were accepted in Spring 2006 and a steering group of three set up to plan and oversee the project. The basic structure of the T.E.A.C.H. project was:

- ◆ to recruit five experienced researchers, one for each of Key Stages 1–4 and one for post-16 to investigate current practice, particularly the opportunities and scope for addressing such issues through school history, as well as to seek examples of effective practice;
- ◆ to hold three weekends in Cambridgeshire (in June, October and December 2006), bringing together the steering group, researchers and those with expertise in teaching such issues. There were opportunities at these weekends to hear from and question those teaching history in schools with different ethnic mixes;
- ◆ to produce a final report by Easter 2007. This report would be distributed in hard copy to all members of The Historical Association, as well as placed on the open part of its web site.

One of the first issues that needed to be addressed was a working definition of what constituted an emotive or sensitive issue in history. This was widely debated at the first weekend. The definition itself generated emotion and controversy, but it was a vital first step in keeping T.E.A.C.H. manageable and consistent. It was recognised from the outset that one person's acceptance might be another's controversy and that sensitivity was relative.

There was also an acceptance that emotion, sensitivity and controversy can be affected by time, geography and awareness. For example, an issue or person could have been extremely emotive and controversial at the time, but no longer has such a resonance, or that something may be felt much more strongly in some places and among some groups or individuals than others, or there are issues that continue or now have contemporary significance or personal resonance. Likewise, the strength of feeling about certain issues can be affected by the age of the students. Thus there are historical issues that, at the time, aroused strong emotions and were subjects of great controversy. Simultaneously, there are issues that are emotive and controversial because they continue to have general contemporary significance or personal resonance for students.

The agreed definition by those present that has directed much of the report is as follows:

*The study of history can be emotive and controversial where there is actual or perceived unfairness to people by another individual or group in the past. This may also be the case where there are disparities between what is taught in school history, family/ community histories and other histories. Such issues and disparities create a strong resonance with students in particular educational settings.*

This report is seen as the start, rather than the end of an important process. Much more research is needed than was possible for this project. Nor is the curriculum static. The context is changing and this debate will need to embrace future changes. If history teaching is to help play a key role in helping young people understand the complexity and background to the world in which they are growing up in, much better resources will need to be both produced and signposted, and teachers made more aware of examples of good and effective practice. Plans are already in place to expand the case studies and references to resources, particularly through electronic means.

A good report also generates feedback and ideas. It is the intention of the authors of the T.E.A.C.H. project that the wider community will respond to the points raised in a constructive and positive way, drawing attention to good practice and how these issues are being, or could be, addressed in an effective way. The Historical Association want to encourage this ongoing activity. Details of how this can be done are provided in the Appendix.

# 2

## Executive summary

1. The working definition that guided the production of this report is as follows.

*The study of history can be emotive and controversial where there is actual or perceived unfairness to people by another individual or group in the past. This may also be the case where there are disparities between what is taught in school history, family/community history and other histories. Such issues and disparities create a strong resonance with students in particular educational settings.*

2. There are a sizeable number of opportunities available to schools to consider emotive and controversial issues in history. Some are generic across all key stages.
  - The range of opportunities is potentially greater below the age of 14 after which the demands of external specifications often act as a barrier, although there are many more opportunities than teachers plan for.
  - The best opportunities exist when teachers recognise the rationale behind the National Curriculum and external examination specifications with the balance of knowledge, skills and understanding, and where students are engaged actively in the processes of history rather than as passive receivers of disjointed information.
  - The key to success is systematic planning, particularly as part of an enquiry approach where students have to work independently and where they have time to consider and address matters in sufficient depth.
  - Teaching emotive and controversial history is unlikely to succeed where little or no attention is paid to the precise learning objectives and ideas associated with similarity and difference, change and continuity, reasons and results, and interpretations and using evidence.
  - Emotional engagement is a feature of effective teaching of controversial issues. The students have to want to care enough about the issues to arouse both their curiosity and their willingness to engage fully with the questions that are likely to require hard thinking and problem-solving.

- Personal engagement is much more likely when the students are themselves encouraged through history teaching to have a sense of their own personal identity and their place in the world.
- Teaching emotive and controversial history is best done when the students consider their own loyalties, their multiple interests and identities, and recognise the fact that everyone is both an insider or outsider to something and that their values can be conflicting and can change.
- Effective resources that are attractive and stimulating.
- Opportunities are enhanced when the school adopts a whole-curricular approach. Success is more likely to be achieved in history if there is a clear strategy in the school for accepting that such issues should be engaged in by all students and in a range of contexts. The success of history teachers is likely to be so much less if it is alone among the curricular areas in covering such matters.

3. A number of **constraints** currently act as barriers. These include:

- the time pressures and status of the subject;
- teachers have been encouraged to play safe with content selection and pedagogy, which acts as a powerful constraint to teaching emotive and controversial history. There are few incentives to take risks;
- the limited access that history teachers and others have to high-quality training in this area;
- a paucity of resources, which means planning is dictated by other resources that are more available;
- a lack of teacher subject knowledge, especially in the primary sector. This insecure knowledge can lead to coverage of content in equal depth, or rather shallowness leading to routine, superficial learning rather than “deep” learning;
- the tendency of teachers to avoid emotive and controversial history for a variety of reasons. Some of which are well-intentioned, such as feeling that certain issues are inappropriate for particular age

groups, or that they lack the maturity to grasp them, or a wish to avoid causing offence or insensitivity, or that they are best taught elsewhere in the curriculum, such as in citizenship or religious education;

- many students do not want to see the subject as complicated and problematical, which is an inevitable feature of emotive and controversial history;
- the way that teachers handle emotive and controversial issues can have a negative impact on students so that they feel alienated and disconnected;
- the tendency to introduce stories of disasters, technological and economic inferiority and brutality to motivate students that can result in people in the past being seen as stupid and inferior.

#### 4. Good practice results when:

- there is a clarity of purpose and a rationale for the school that emphasises identity, values and diversity;
- history is taught both as a body and a form of knowledge. The best practice places a high premium on planning, ensuring that the work has the right blend of content and hard thinking appropriate to the ages and ability;
- there is a strong emphasis on independent enquiry with its own procedures and conventions, ensuring that emotive and controversial issues are taught within a secure pedagogical and historic framework. The importance of good questioning is paramount;
- the planning and delivery builds in sufficient time and opportunities to reflect and to cover the different perspectives and beliefs involved. Where done fleetingly, learners failed to see what the historical problem was at all about an issue;
- the teaching matches clarity with a recognition of the complexity of emotive and controversial history;
- an emphasis on exploring multiple narratives and the past from different perspectives. The teaching of emotive and controversial history is seriously compromised if students do not see history as a subject that is open to debate and argument as they study different and competing views of the same events;
- balance is heeded across a theme or topic and across a key stage;

- learners are exposed to a rich variety of appropriate and stimulating resources, such as music, film and pictures. Quality resources can be a means of making personal engagement more likely.

#### 5. The report makes a number of **recommendations**. Many are specific to particular key stages, but there are a number that seem to have relevance across all age groups. These are as follows:

- giving more attention to the teaching of emotive and controversial aspects in initial teacher education and through continuing professional development;
- ensuring that the teaching of emotive and controversial issues is a whole school issue;
- planning themes and approaches to ensure coherence;
- providing teachers with both encouragement and guidance;
- encouraging rather than penalising teachers for the promotion of debate and risk-taking in the classroom and schools giving support when facing challenges from parents and communities;
- improving the range and quality of resources available to allow schools to introduce a more varied and relevant curriculum for their students;
- finding better ways to communicate the range and effective use of resources;
- improving the research and evidence base related to the teaching of emotive and controversial history.

The report also identifies some actions that might be possible in the short term and others that may take longer to address.

#### Short term:

- The Government and key agencies, including QCA and Ofsted, reinforce the importance of the teaching of emotive and controversial history.
- Give more attention to the issues and strategies in initial teacher education.
- Provide more opportunities for teachers to access training and ideas as part of their continuing professional development, including at external courses and through distance learning, such as the QCA's Innovating with History web site.



- Provide guidance on the strategies for addressing good practice outlined in the key stage specific recommendations above.
- Commission the production of resources for schools and training, including web resources and through Teachers' TV.
- Provide guidance and support for planning the teaching of emotive and controversial history as a whole school/curricular issue.
- QCA produce more schemes of work where emotive and controversial issues are addressed explicitly and where historical issues are linked to modern-day parallels.
- Communicate the range of resources more effectively that can support the teaching of emotive and controversial history, including the existing fellowships and visits.
- Commission more research into the issues, perspectives and concerns held by different individuals, groups and societies, including the relationship between personal, community and school history.
- Devise criteria for progression with regard to emotive and controversial issues, so that teachers and schools can benchmark progress against national criteria.
- Require schools to have a rationale for the teaching of emotive and controversial issues that is monitored, such as by Ofsted and by others such as the School Improvement Partners.
- Ensure that history has the status and time in schools to enable justice to be done to the teaching of such issues.
- Make the importance of teaching emotive and sensitive issues more explicit and prominent when reviewing the National Curriculum, GCSE, AS/A2 or other specifications.
- Evaluate the lessons of the GCSE Pilot in terms of teaching and assessing emotive and controversial history.
- Develop strategies that allow all students, including the lower attainers and the gifted and talented, to address emotive and controversial issues in challenging ways.
- Alter the culture in schools so that risk-taking and debate are encouraged and teachers feel supported and confident about engaging all students emotionally and challenging perceptions and misconceptions.
- Work with publishers and others to improve the range and quality of resources.
- Consider opportunities for effective work, linking different curriculum areas to improve the knowledge, skills and understanding with regard to emotive and controversial issues.

Long term:

- Consider the benefits of an entitlement for history teachers to sustained continuous professional development.
- Devise courses that allow teachers to be accredited through developing their understanding and skills with regard to the teaching of emotive and controversial issues, such as through the Postgraduate Professional Development initiative.

# 3

## Context and opportunities at each key stage

### Opportunities across all key stages

1. Even with the youngest pupils, there are opportunities to place people and the issues they face in a range of contexts. These opportunities are much greater than most teachers plan for. Whilst it is possible to find opportunities for every age group, the range is potentially greater for pupils below the age of 14, after which the demands of external examination specifications often act as a barrier. These examination specifications, however, offer opportunities for confronting emotive and controversial issues.
2. The best opportunities exist when teachers recognise the rationale behind the National Curriculum and the external examination specifications. This involves history being seen not just as a body of content or a set of skills divorced from content, but where there is a balance of knowledge, skills and understanding, and where students are actively engaged in the processes of history rather than as passive receivers of disjointed information. This integration of knowledge, concepts and processes was recognised as the essential framework for school history even before the launch of the National Curriculum, and it provides a firm foundation for the teaching of emotive and controversial issues.
3. The environment for covering emotive and controversial issues is broadly similar across the whole age range. The best opportunities occur when the teaching of emotive and controversial issues is planned to fit into a wider framework and the planning is explicit, although there is also considerable scope when issues present themselves in everyday classroom situations. These opportunities occur:
  - as part of an enquiry approach where students are given specific investigations, geared around enquiry questions that require engagement with the historical process. These questions and activities are themselves devised to elicit an understanding that history is itself problematical and not straightforward;
  - where students have to work **independently**;
  - when there is **sufficient time** for in-depth analysis.
4. Teaching emotive and controversial issues is unlikely to succeed where little attention is paid to the precise learning objectives that link the key concepts to specific content. In particular, there is a need to engage the students in the key ideas related to:
  - **similarity and difference** — emphasising not just that people and societies have differences, but also that there are similarities; that all share a common humanity and that, even where there are differences, much should be celebrated rather than condemned.
  - **change and continuity** — indicating that society is in a continuous state of flux, that situations that prevail in one period are unlikely to remain like that and also that some things have stayed the same. This can help young people realise that they themselves are part of a changing scene and that, although there is some continuity with the past, the world in which they grow up is not one of absolutes. Teaching emotive and controversial history is often more effective when accompanied by consideration of what there is to respect and admire in past societies.
  - **reasons and results** — devoting sufficient time to explaining why things were as they were and not just describing or reconstructing what happened.
  - **interpretations** — focusing on the way past events and situations have been interpreted after their time and the fact that there is nearly always more than one way of looking at a historical event or situation. Almost more than any other aspect of study, the idea that there is no one universal version of history and that history itself is not a product waiting to be caught in a net is vital if pupils are to discuss emotive and controversial issues in any depth. If explicit attention is not paid to this aspect, students also find it hard to understand the idea of significance. Those putting together accounts need to make decisions about what is important and central and what is less so. Pupils also need to appreciate the complexities that contribute to the production of a later

interpretation of earlier events, such as the view of the author of an original source and the view of the group or person using the source to compile an account. In addition, the reader or viewer also brings their own ideas in understanding an historical interpretation.

- **evidence** — introducing students to a range of source material that has to be evaluated and used as evidence for valid enquiries. Where practice is poorer, young people can be required to carry out such activities in a mechanistic and formulaic way that adds little to their understanding of the complexity of the historical process and the world in which they live.

5. **Emotional engagement** is also a feature of effective teaching of controversial issues. The students have to want to care enough about the issues to arouse both their curiosity and their willingness to engage fully with the questions that are likely to require hard thinking and problem-solving. It is an ironic fact that progression in historical understanding is characterised by a growing uncertainty as one realises that there is, at best, likelihood rather than definites. Students do not always find this easy or desirable. Many want clarity and certainty and need to be motivated to engage with issues lacking clear-cut answers. If students are to engage with complex and extended issues, teachers have to plan tasks and questions that they see as relevant and significant to their lives leading to a desire on the students' part to probe the issues and excite a wish to dig deeper.

Teaching emotive and controversial issues therefore requires that the themes and issues are brought to life with the people being made three-dimensional rather than actors in fancy dress. Students need to acquire some personal feelings towards the people involved, as well as the choices and dilemmas they face. Success is much more likely when they are encouraged to imagine issues from different perspectives and viewpoints, seeing much of what happened as far from clear-cut with contemporaries often viewing things as confusing, uncertain and without the benefit of hindsight.

6. The students are encouraged to have a **sense of their own personal identity and their place in the world** through history. The research indicates that this is something that is best fostered from an early age and reinforced throughout the years of schooling. Thinking about their own place in things and their attitudes and values has the inevitable side-effect of recognising the identities of others. Opportunities for debating emotive and controversial history are enhanced when students see themselves as members

of different communities with identities that are shaped by a range of different influences — their families, local communities, religion, ethnicity, social and economic status, education, politics, region, nation, continent and so forth.

7. Students need to consider their own loyalties, their multiple interests and identities, and to recognise the fact that everyone is both an insider or outsider to something and that their values can be conflicting and can change. Such can be seen as a **growing emotional intelligence** in relating to oneself and others. It means probing issues, such as who has claims to be right and wrong, whether changes can be seen as progress or regression, and how individuals and societies have to cope with conflicting values and beliefs.
8. **Effective resources** are crucial to this successful engagement. Students expect attractive, stimulating and accessible resources.
9. The **Respect for all** web pages of the QCA web site give guidance on planning a history curriculum that is inclusive and encourages respect from past and present people and societies.
10. Whilst the central scope of this project is on the role of history with regard to the teaching of emotive and controversial issues, opportunities are enhanced when the school adopts a whole-curricular approach. Success is more likely to be achieved in history if there is a clear strategy in the school for accepting that such issues should be engaged in by all students and in a range of contexts. The success of history teachers is likely to be much less if it is alone among the curricular areas in covering such matters. There are obvious links with many areas of the curriculum — citizenship, personal, social and health education, religious education, geography and science all have major contributions to make. Nor need everything be done through the subject-based curriculum. The debating of emotive and controversial issues should permeate the ethos of the school, both pastorally and academically. Extended provision also allows scope for students to come into contact with a world outside the classroom, such as through visits, visitors, work placements and engagement with sporting, arts and cultural activities.

All of the issues raised above apply throughout the 3–19 age range. In short, they refer to opportunities that should be available anyway through the teaching and learning of history. Nevertheless, the nature and extent of the opportunities does vary across the key stages. The next section focuses on some areas that are more key stage specific.



## Opportunities across particular key stages

For the **Foundation Stage and Key Stage 1**, there are plenty of opportunities to introduce pupils to issues through their socialisation into school. Establishing social relationships with other children and coming into contact with a range of adults helps that process. Early years practitioners encourage children to develop positive social relationships, foster the understanding of rules and behaviours, provide models for dealing with conflict and disagreement, and support children in their interactions with each other and within broader social groups.

Children are beginning to learn their place in the world, their own unique identity and the identities that they share with the rest of their group. In effect, children experience many of the circumstances that underpin the controversial nature of history in their daily lives. Consequently, studying the dilemmas and conflicts experienced by earlier societies and individuals in the past may contribute to children's own developing understanding of dilemmas and issues that they face in their own personal and daily lives.

The Foundation Stage curriculum incorporates a more holistic approach to curriculum planning. Specific history input is identified within the Early Learning Goal, *“Find out about past and present events in their own lives and in those of their families and other people they know”*. Studying emotive and controversial history helps cognitive development. The processes of doing history, asking questions, making observations, explaining and drawing conclusions, are all key skills that support their overall learning. The role of language is also crucial in communicating their understanding. Studying emotive and controversial history may provide opportunities to use talk for a variety of purposes: communicating thoughts, feelings and ideas; negotiating roles; making friends; asking for help, clarification or information; relating; reflecting; reporting; narrating; arguing; presenting ideas; persuading; explaining and instructing.

Foundation Stage children can be introduced to questions such as: *Who am I? How do I know that it is me? What other things make me, apart from how I look? What is the same about me and other children? What is different about me that makes me who I am?*

**Key Stage 1** is likely to present them with more opportunities and teachers have considerable freedom to develop the history curriculum to meet the needs and interests of their children. Within the breadth of study at Key Stage 1, children learn about their own personal histories and those of their families through studying

*“changes in their own lives and the way of life of their family and others around them”*.

Such histories may require sensitive handling by the teacher, taking into account children's different backgrounds and experiences. Anything linked with family histories needs dealing with sensitively, as well as requiring a sound awareness of different home situations and family structures. For example, issues like death might be covered through events such as the death of pets and people or what it means to be inside and outside social and other groupings. They might be able to explore differences between boys and girls and recognise differences in language and ethnicity. Key Stage 1 history allows them plenty of scope to experience different cultures and ways of life, such as through examining houses and homes, anniversaries, celebrations, leisure, food and famous people.

Key Stage 1 involves studying the way of life of people living in the locality or elsewhere in Britain in the more distant past. This requirement is sufficiently broad to permit teachers to introduce potentially controversial and sensitive issues, such as the experiences of children or the differences between rich and poor people in societies at different periods of time. In observing changes in ways of life, teachers may question who benefited from these changes and in what ways. Did all people necessarily benefit? There are opportunities to explore controversial issues through studying the diversity of different societies in the past.

Changes in the local community — the movement of peoples to, from and within the community — may also be studied. For example, how different buildings, shops, schools and leisure facilities have changed or remained the same. Some changes permit children to explore changing community needs. For example, traffic-free zones or the location of markets and shops. In addition, children may consider how changes have impacted on individuals within the community. For some individuals, changes might have had a positive impact, but they might have been more problematic for others.

There should be plentiful opportunities to introduce children to people from a range of cultures. Research, such as from Milner, suggests that children as young as three or four are aware of racial differences, and many enter school with preconceived notions about different racial and ethnic groups (Plinney and Rotherham, 1987). If this is the case, it is important that children are introduced to diverse histories from an early age. Moreover, for young children, this is also important for the development of their own sense of their identity.

Teachers choose which significant people to cover. Teachers currently tend to make their selection from a

restricted number of people with Isambard Kingdom Brunel, Florence Nightingale and Mary Seacole being the most popular figures. However, there are many opportunities to include other significant people including those from the locality. Selection of particular people may be controversial and some sensitivity may be required in dealing with different gender roles. For example, positive female role models might be antagonistic for some cultures.

Similarly, teachers may also select past events from the history of Britain and around the world. The Gunpowder Plot, the Olympics and Remembrance Day are popular topics. However, a more judicious selection could raise young children's awareness of controversy fully. Re-telling the story of the Gunpowder Plot is often closely allied with the celebrations linked with Bonfire Night. In the current context, it might be appropriate to encourage children to explore motivation more fully and also to question whether Guy Fawkes' attempts to blow up parliament were justified and should be celebrated. What other ways may conflict be resolved?

The topic of remembrance may raise several sensitive issues for children who have already experienced conflict or whose families might be involved in warfare. Questions such as *Why do we remember?* and *In what ways should we remember?* are potentially sensitive since they could relate to children's immediate experiences or those of their families.

Images that challenge stereotypes are important sources of information for young children, such as female explorers like Mary Kingsley or the black presences in England both before and after World War 2. Misconceptions also need to be challenged. For example, Claire cites the example of children looking at school pictures 25 years ago and now. A child notices that most of the children in the old picture are white, whereas in her class they are now nearly all black. The children were asked why this might be with one pupil replying, *"because in that picture the children prayed to God to make them white, so that white people wouldn't say horrible things to them"*.

By **Key Stage 2**, the children are more likely to be able to cope with and understand some of the issues than at Key Stage 1. The Key Stage 2 areas of study also offer more opportunities, far more than is often currently covered in schools. There is a requirement that pupils study history content that reflects diversity. There is also often a distinct pedagogical difference with Key Stage 1 as the pupils are usually asked to read and write more, and they are expected to work more independently without the teacher.

Several of the areas of study provide opportunities for teaching emotive and controversial issues. For example,

the local history requirement, which investigating how an aspect of the local area has changed or been affected by events or people, could examine immigration and cultural diversity.

The British areas offer much scope to consider issues such as the movement of populations, including the usage and meanings of emotive terms such as *native*, *immigrant*, *invasion*, *settlement* and *colonisation*. There are also many opportunities to consider the composition of the United Kingdom and how it has evolved over time. The coverage of the Romans, Anglo-Saxons and Vikings provides particular scope for that.

Britain and the wider world in Tudor times also allows teachers to raise issues related to the imposition of imperial rule. The nature of "Britishness" can also be addressed in several British units indicating, for example, the black presence in Tudor and Victorian times. Good teachers are already pointing out the distortion that often results in Key Stage 2 from a predominant focus on white, male, wealthy Christian people without placing them in the context of the wider diversity.

The European and world history areas clearly offer scope for introducing controversial issues such as slavery, methods of government, conquest and the role of women, but the current situation sometimes has the end result of tokenistic and simplistic views.

Support for teaching such aspects comes from a range of resources, including the DfES/QCA schemes of work, although many need to be adapted to bring out the emotive and controversial issues. For example, the scheme addressing what life was like for children in Victorian times can involve pupils discussing issues such as social inequality and family breakdown. Debate can ensue about the negative connotations attached to the poor and the danger of generalisations regarding such groups.

The opportunities available at Key Stage 2 can be explored further at **Key Stage 3**. For many students, this will be the last time they study history at school. As in other key stages, the current structure is already supportive of such exploration through the integration of knowledge, skills and conceptual understanding, and particularly the support given to critical thinking through independent enquiry and students making judgements following their evaluation of different interpretations.

Key Stage 3 is likely to result in a more sustained pursuit of independent historical enquiries. This is already in the current Programme of Study and it is likely to be strengthened further in the 2008 revision. Students have the ability to engage with the historical process by planning their own enquiries, posing hypotheses

and questions and using relevant evidence that allows them to reflect and deliver well-considered conclusions. This secure pedagogical and historical framework is a necessary part of dealing with emotive and controversial history effectively.

The 2000 revision to the National Curriculum for History included a statement emphasising the importance of school history by underlining the connection between its study and the pupils' own lives. This has been given an even sharper focus in the statement on the importance of history in the draft Key Stage 3 Programme of Study for 2008. For the first time, the statement makes explicit reference to history's role in fostering personal identity and it specifically mentions history's contribution to promoting mutual understanding in a multicultural society.

*History helps pupils to ask and answer questions of the present by engaging with the past. It fires their curiosity and imagination, moving and inspiring them by the dilemmas, choices and beliefs of people in the past. It helps them to develop their own identity through an understanding of history at personal, local and international levels.*

Students at this age are more likely to identify and adjudicate between differing representations and interpretations through exploring multiple narratives and seeing the past from different perspectives. There are many opportunities to discuss how those in later times have reconstructed and presented the past, the purpose of different historical interpretations, and the relationship between an interpretation and the evidence available. Students can be encouraged to see history as a subject that is open to debate and argument.

The content requirements at Key Stage 3 also encourage coverage of a wide range of emotive and controversial historical issues. Almost any aspect of history taught within this framework could potentially be described as emotive and controversial given that it is a subject of on-going debate among historians, even if some issues are more directly sensitive as they involved unfairness or harm to people by an individual or group.

For example, there are those issues which aroused strong emotions and were the subject of considerable controversy at the time. Many commonly taught issues at Key Stage 3 fall into this category, for example, the Norman Conquest, the Peasants' Revolt, the Dissolution of the Monasteries, the Terror in the French Revolution, the New Poor Law, and the fight for the vote. These issues can be taught in a bland way, leaving pupils unmoved and unaffected. However, they also have the potential to engage pupils with the dilemmas, complexities, injustice and moral courage of people in the past and to develop pupils' understanding of enduring human issues.

There are also those issues which are emotive and controversial because they continue to have general contemporary significance or personal resonance for students. Potential examples of such issues from Key Stage 3 include the Crusades, the Partition of India, the Holocaust, the transatlantic slave trade, Irish history and the history of immigration to Britain. In contemporary Britain, where ethnic and cultural divisions occasionally lead to direct interracial violence and where recent events have led to heightened racial tensions, learning about the legacy of Britain's colonial past and about the relationship between the West and Islam are potentially the most controversial and challenging aspects of the Key Stage 3 history curriculum.

One school that has successfully integrated black history into the Key Stage 3 curriculum is Henry Compton School in Fulham. In common with many schools, this includes the transatlantic slave trade. This is a subject that can provoke strong responses in pupils because of the atrocities, violence, cruelty and dehumanising experiences of the trade. Moreover, there are issues of 'unresolved legacy' for many people in Britain, which make the transatlantic slave trade a particularly sensitive issue. Teaching the subject, whether in mixed-race or all-white classes, raises challenging issues for history teachers about how to convey the inhumanity of the slave trade and how to deal with pupils' anger, racism, blame, guilt or indifference.

Some have argued that an isolated study of the transatlantic slave trade presents a distorted view of black history in which Afro-Caribbean people are largely presented as victims. A narrow focus on the abolition of the slave trade or the study of black history only in the context of black peoples of the Americas is simply too limiting and does little to develop pupils' sense of a positive identity or to foster their understanding of a shared heritage based on our colonial past.

The revisions to the Key Stage 3 curriculum are likely to focus teaching even more on issues which have the potential to be sensitive, such as the changing nature of political power, the relationship between rulers and the ruled and the development of democracy, the changing relationships of the peoples of England, Ireland, Scotland and Wales, how movement and settlement have shaped the British Isles, the nature of empires, the changes in the lives of men, women and children including work, technology, leisure, culture, religion and environment, or the changing nature of conflict and its lasting impact on national, ethnic, racial, cultural or religious groups.

**Key Stage 4** is dominated by the GCSE specifications that provide the only guidance or framework for teaching history at this key stage, although all work to QCA criteria requires specifications to study history

from a range of perspectives — political, economic, social, cultural, technological, scientific, religious and aesthetic, as well as social, cultural, religious and ethnic diversity of the societies studied and the experience of men and women in these societies. The three English awarding bodies each offer courses on modern world history, British social and economic history and a Schools History Project. Even though the number and variety of specifications available at GCSE is limited, each offers plenty of scope for dealing with emotive and controversial history.

The most popular specifications with schools are those concerned with modern world history. Here students often study a core with a range of options. A heavy emphasis is often placed on the early 20th century. Schools can choose from a number of themes with plenty of opportunities to debate emotive or controversial issues, such as the Middle or Far East, American Civil Rights and race relations, South Africa, India or China.

Social and economic history also offers opportunities. Many of the themes covered invite debates relating to inherently emotive and controversial issues, such as changes in work and employment, changes in transport, communications and leisure, population change, poverty and poor relief, campaigns for reform in factories and mines, public health and housing, trade unions and working class movements, the changing roles and status of women, education, the evolution of a multiethnic society in Britain, race relations in a multicultural society and Northern Ireland.

The Schools History Project specifications also allow students to engage with more emotive issues particularly through the modern world study that requires a linking of the past to the present. Themes such as the Arab-Israeli conflict, China in the 20th century, multicultural Britain and Ireland are relatively popular as options within the modern world study. A depth study has to be selected and there are two studies that are particularly popular — Germany 1919–1945, with its emphasis on domestic affairs, and the American West that allows students to study a clash of two cultures and the problems associated with that. Another depth study is Elizabethan England, where there are opportunities to explore the tension between state and religion and the issue of loyalty to either. A development study offers choice between medicine and crime and punishment. Both offer scope to address controversial issues through themes such as resourcing health or how society deals with crime.

The scope for addressing emotive and controversial issues has been widened recently by the addition of a new GCSE offered by OCR, which is currently being offered as a pilot to some 70 centres. A key aspect of this specification is the proportion (70%) of centre-designed work that not

just gives scope, but active encouragement to address issues relevant to the lives of the students. Even within the mandatory, externally-assessed core unit on medieval history, emotive and controversial issues can be addressed when covering content related to raiders and invaders and power and control. The local history option requires that a chosen historical issue needs to be considered in terms of its relevance today and the international unit requires students to consider how an event, issue or development divided and affected people and to examine different judgments about historical significance and interpretations. These open up the possibility of addressing difficult issues depending on the content chosen and teaching approach that has been adopted. Some of the other options are more obviously geared towards difficult issues, particularly ‘Whose history?’ and the migrant experience. Other options could be steered towards controversial issues such as ‘Heritage management’, which examines how an aspect of the past ought to be presented.

History is not mandatory after Key Stage 3 and around one-third of 14-year-old students opt for the subject. Whilst the numbers choosing the subject have held up well over the last decade and there are a number of schools that attract students across the whole ability range, history attracts more of the able students, giving them opportunities to discuss emotive and controversial issues through history. Opportunities are available through entry-level qualifications that allow tailor-made approaches to the main history specifications. In theory, this allows lower-achieving students to think about sensitive issues, but there is little good practice in these areas. Overall, numbers for entry-level history are small and those that do study it are usually given simplified or shortened versions of the conventional GCSEs.

Currently consideration is being given as to whether citizenship, which is mandatory at Key Stage 4, should incorporate a history dimension. This would at least allow the whole age range to debate emotive and controversial issues through some kind of historical perspective, but it is unclear whether it would enable the opportunities to link the content, skills and conceptual understanding required by current history requirements.

The pattern at GCSE is similar **post-16**. The rationale for AS and A2 allows and even encourages teaching of emotive and controversial issues as students need to demonstrate an ability to deal with controversy. The advanced-level criteria require students to understand the nature of historical study — that history is concerned with judgements based on available evidence and that historical judgements may be provisional. This is reflected in the specifications themselves where all awarding bodies want the students to “*develop their capacity for critical thinking*” and all have a moral and cultural dimension.



There are particular options in many of the current specifications that allow students to engage with the more obviously contentious issues. For example, AQA offers options of The Crusading Movement and the Latin East 1095–1192, Britain and Ireland 1969–1998, Decolonisation of Africa (Britain and Kenya and/or France and Algeria) and The Holocaust 1938–1945. Students also have the chance to study South Africa from Apartheid to Democracy, China from 1949 to the Tiananmen Square Massacre, The Middle East from 1945–1991, and Britain 1951–1997 (which includes the issue of immigration).

Edexcel offer opportunities through options on Conservative Supremacy: Policies and Parties in Britain 1886–1906, Pursuing ‘Life and Liberty’ Civil Rights in the USA 1945–1968, and Hitler and the Nazi State: Power and Control 1933–1945. Other options include Colonial Rule and the Nationalist Challenge in India c1900–1947, The Making of the British Empire c1660–1770, and Britain and Decolonisation c1870–1939.

OCR’s options include: The First Crusade and its Origins, The Irish question in the Age of Parnell 1877–1933, Race Relations in the South (America) 1863–1912, as well as Nazi Germany 1933–1945.

There are also opportunities for those taking the specifications offered in Wales and Northern Ireland. For example, WJEC has options that include: The Ottoman Empire and the Threat to Europe 1492–1571, Gladstonian Liberalism 1868–1893, People and the Changing World of Work c1880–1980, and Nazi Germany c1933–1945.

Students can also study Political Change in Wales to 1543 and Nationalist Tensions in Eastern Europe and the Balkans 1878–1971. Likewise, CCEA’s options include Nationalism and Unionism in Ireland 1800–1900, as well as The Nazis and Germany 1919–1933.

The International Baccalaureate also offers the opportunity for teachers to design their own courses within Group 3: Individuals and societies. An essential characteristic of the disciplines in Group 3 is that their subject matter is contestable and their study requires students to tolerate some uncertainty. Studies of some local situations and global perspectives foster an appreciation of change and continuity as well as similarity and difference.

Whilst the opportunities are considerable, many of these options cover past periods and do not require any connection made with the present. However, more opportunities do exist through the personal study. With centre-based work becoming a mandatory part of A2 specifications in the future, technically this increases the scope enormously for students to delve deeply into an issue that might be regarded as emotive or controversial. However, the evidence from the large numbers currently choosing the personal study option is that it is a relatively small minority that address issues beyond the mainstream themes such as Hitler, Henry VIII and World War I. Examples do exist where students engage with recent issues related to the Middle East, British and American foreign policy, Ireland, ethnic tensions and, occasionally even, pollution, unequal world resources and conservation versus development.



# 4

## Constraints to the teaching of emotive and controversial history

### Constraints affecting all key stages

Whilst particular constraints apply across particular contexts and key stages, a number seem to apply across all age groups and settings. This section outlines the general challenges before addressing some that are more key stage specific.

#### 1. Time and status of the subject

There is no guaranteed minimum of curriculum time set aside for the subject. The impact of primary strategies designed to raise standards in Literacy and Mathematics has resulted in reductions in time spent on the subject at Key Stages 1 and 2, where it is sometimes seen as “*light relief*”. The increased flexibility now given for arrangements at Key Stage 3 has sometimes resulted in pupils ending their study of history in Year 8 and, in some cases, being taught little, if any, history in Year 7 where a competency-based curriculum has been introduced. This, and the fact that two-thirds study no history beyond Key Stage 3, clearly limits the scope for addressing emotive and controversial history. The introduction of vocational diplomas from 2008 may exacerbate this trend and reduce the numbers of 14–19 pupils studying history.

#### 2. “Safe” content selection, pedagogy and official guidance

Despite the opportunities, teachers have not had much official encouragement in developing them. In particular, teachers of history at Key Stages 1 and 2 have tended to rely on QCA schemes of work that avoid controversy. Many schools have chosen to make the schemes of work mandatory, which is a practice sometimes supported through the inspection process. The combined effect of following the original QCA schemes of work for history too closely and sometimes other published schemes too easily suggested that emotive and controversial history is bland, simplistic and unproblematic. The same can be said for some frameworks and guidance for teaching specifications at GCSE and Advanced level from awarding bodies.

#### 3. Inadequate teacher access to high-quality training

Opportunities for high-quality training and support have been limited for “unproblematic” subjects such as history and this has acted as a barrier to the rationale for the subject being translated into effective subject pedagogy in many classrooms. Little attention is given to the teaching of history in initial teacher education for primary trainees. There are outstanding PGCE history courses for secondary trainees available at English universities, but the quality of training is usually not followed up through continuous professional development once a teacher takes up a school post.

Organisations such as The Historical Association, the Schools History Project, QCA and others produce high-quality materials and very well-received training, which develops teacher awareness of emotive and controversial issues and other aspects of history pedagogy. However, only a small minority of history teachers have access to this training, particularly at primary level. While senior leadership teams in schools have responsibility for continuous professional development for their staff, priority tends to be given to generic training or on core concerns, such as literacy.

There is no subject specific support for history left in most local authorities and the training that teachers are allowed to go on tends to be either generic or for 14–19, which is run by awarding bodies and geared to getting pupils successfully through existing specifications. Teacher awareness of the importance of emotive and controversial history is therefore damaged by poor access to high-quality training. There are alternative forms of workforce development, such as distance learning methods including Teachers’ TV, but these currently have limited usage.

#### 4. Paucity of resources

Appropriate resources need to be available to support emotive and controversial history. Such resources are scarce at present. Most current published resources are linked directly to QCA schemes of work or are

specifically designed to support a 14–19 specification. In many schools, planning is dictated by the particular resources already available. If these are of poor quality, content selection, planning and pedagogy may be dull. Content selection can be dominated by what is readily available so that introducing, for example, more famous black people at Key Stage 1 becomes more difficult than the study of Florence Nightingale since fewer resources are available.

### **5. Lack of teacher subject knowledge**

Teachers often admit that they lack adequate subject knowledge, especially where they have no specific qualification or updating in the subject. Secondary specialists generally know more than generalists, but it is ironic that the level of secure subject knowledge in teachers is at its greatest when the content is mostly narrowly prescribed at GCSE and AS/A2. Primary history ranges over a much broader scope of content than secondary history, but teacher subject knowledge is often less secure. Insecurity can also lead to coverage of content in equal depth or in a shallow way leading to routine and superficial learning rather than “deep” learning. With history in some schools now largely taught by Higher Level Teaching Assistants, there are even greater challenges with regard to security of knowledge.

### **6. Teacher avoidance of emotive and controversial history**

Teachers and schools avoid emotive and controversial history for a variety of reasons, some of which are well-intentioned. Some feel that certain issues are inappropriate for particular age groups or decide in advance that pupils lack the maturity to grasp them. Where teachers lack confidence in their subject knowledge or subject-specific pedagogy, this can also be a reason for avoiding certain content. Staff may wish to avoid causing offence or appearing insensitive to individuals or groups in their classes. In particular settings, teachers of history are unwilling to challenge highly contentious or charged versions of history in which pupils are steeped at home, in their community or in a place of worship. Some teachers also feel that the issues are best avoided in history, believing them to be taught elsewhere in the curriculum such as in citizenship or religious education.

For example, a history department in a northern city recently avoided selecting the Holocaust as a topic for GCSE coursework for fear of confronting anti-Semitic sentiment and Holocaust denial among some Muslim pupils. In another department, teachers were strongly challenged by some Christian parents for their treatment of the Arab-Israeli conflict and the history of the state of Israel that did not accord

with the teachings of their denomination. In another history department, the Holocaust was taught despite anti-Semitic sentiment among some pupils, but the same department deliberately avoided teaching the Crusades at Key Stage 3 because their balanced treatment of the topic would have directly challenged what was taught in some local mosques.

Where teachers model the processes of critical enquiry that characterise the adult discipline of the subject, history teaching may well clash with a narrow and highly partisan version of family or communal history in which some pupils have been reared. In some settings, emotive and controversial history is avoided because it is considered irrelevant to the needs of pupils. In an all-white school, little black history may be taught at all on the grounds that there are no black pupils to whom it would be relevant.

In some schools, teachers also respond to the students’ wishes to avoid history being complicated and problematical. This clearly affects the teaching of emotive and controversial history.

### **7. Lack of balance in teaching emotive and controversial history**

In selecting content to be taught within existing frameworks and specifications, the way that teachers handle emotive and controversial history can have a negative impact on pupils. Recent research on the impact of the teaching of the transatlantic slave trade and its abolition at Key Stage 3 shows that where black people are portrayed as victims, then Afro-Caribbean pupils and their parents can feel alienated and disconnected as a result. The same is true among black pupils where there are hardly any black faces represented at all in their history curriculum. Equally, in certain educational settings, white working-class pupils in the minority can feel alienated if the role of white abolitionists in the process of abolition is so downplayed that all credit is given to economic factors and black resistance in ending the slave trade. There is also the tendency to introduce stories of disasters, technological and economic inferiority and brutality to motivate students. Such perspectives can easily lead to students dismissing the past and its people as stupid and inferior.

### **8. Teacher avoidance of risk-taking**

For the various reasons listed above, history teachers can avoid taking risks with their teaching including the risk of teaching emotive and controversial history. Part of this may be due to uncertainty as to what emotive and controversial history encompasses. For example, black history has a growing presence in the curriculum, but how many history lessons deal explicitly with gay and lesbian issues?

## Constraints across particular key stages

### Foundation Stage/Key Stage 1

Few teachers appear to realise the full potential for addressing emotive and controversial history. The QCA/DfES schemes of work have often had a reductive effect on the curriculum. In general, the schemes avoid investigations that may cause controversy. For example, the scheme of work raises an important question — Why do we remember Florence Nightingale? There is little opportunity within the activities for pupils to compare her work with those of others living at the time, which would develop an in-depth understanding of significance and also raise controversial issues.

At Key Stage 1, the events and personalities linked to the schemes of work dominate the curriculum and provide few opportunities for extending pupils' knowledge of emotive and controversial history. Even Guy Fawkes is not portrayed as a controversial or emotive issue. Traditionally, Key Stage 1 has steered clear of controversial and diversity issues, such as the views of older people.

Lack of effective planning in many schools has led to pupils' knowledge and understanding of key events being piecemeal and fragmented. Planning teaching and learning related to progression of skills and conceptual awareness is needed if pupils are to engage effectively with controversial issues and to build on them through the Foundation Stage and Key Stage 1. There are particular challenges moving from the fairly holistic Foundation Stage curriculum to Key Stage 1 where specific history appears.

Schools often fail to address the relevance of history to children's everyday lives. The subject can be related to pupils' own families and communities with skilful analogies drawn between past events and ways of life and ways of life of pupils within their class. These represent important opportunities for introducing emotive and controversial history. However, many teachers feel that there can be too many difficulties and sensitivities dealing with personal and family histories.

Some teachers believe that it is not appropriate to confront young pupils with controversial and emotive issues, including those in the study of history. It is largely based on a belief that young pupils just accept situations, including controversial historical ones. For example, Totten (1999) argues that attempts to teach the Holocaust to young children should be discouraged as it is too complex for them to understand and too horrific. Piagetian models of cognitive development suggest that

young children are unable to think in the abstract or deal with fairly sophisticated concepts. These ideas act as a barrier to emotive and controversial history teaching as some teachers do not believe it should be planned for.

The influence of the Plowden Report of 1967 and its central message that "learning should always begin with the child" has exerted a strong belief in pupils learning about and through first-hand experiences. Consequently, some teachers have been unwilling to teach about times in the distant past since they are removed from children's immediate experiences. A further limitation on selecting emotive issues was identified by Holden (2005) as a concomitant to greater parental choice and influence. She notes that some primary teachers' reluctance to engage with possible controversial issues can be related to concerns about "what parents might think" if anything political was to be discussed.

### Key Stage 2

Some primary teachers believe that Key Stage 2 pupils still lack the cognitive ability and background knowledge to deal with emotive and controversial history. The Primary National Strategy has also acted as a barrier in some schools. On the surface, the Strategy has encouraged cross-curricular links between literacy and history with an apparent increase in time dedicated to the subject. However, Ofsted has recently reported that standards in the teaching of history have slipped compared to other subjects because, while history subject knowledge is covered in cross-curricular planning, the rigorous teaching of historical skills is neglected. Whilst Ofsted reports good links with literacy, in a number of instances, history acts merely as a servicing agent for literacy or "history-flavoured literacy".

This impacts directly on tackling emotive and controversial history. A critical approach to history where pupils question, weigh evidence and engage with sources and interpretations takes time and teacher confidence, as well as a belief in the capability of the pupils to cope with such matters. Where this belief is lacking, history teaching is reduced to a model where teachers merely transfer factual knowledge to pupils.

There is the added challenge of teachers not recognising the emotive and controversial issues arising from what they teach. Missed opportunities arise when not confronting terms such as "invaders", "settlers" or perceptions about "Tudor greatness" or whether Drake was a "hero or pirate".

### Key Stage 3

The Key Stage 3 QCA/DfES schemes of work have never been adopted to the same extent as in primary schools,

but they tend to have encouraged a “safe” approach where they are used. For example, in QCA (2000) Unit 14, students are required to consider the impact of the British Empire on indigenous peoples, but there is relatively little focus on areas of controversy.

Addressing emotive and controversial history effectively requires an understanding of student misconceptions. Without this awareness of misconceptions about events such as the Holocaust, appropriate learning strategies are rendered impossible. Students often bring misconceptions and stereotypes with them. For example (in relation to the Holocaust), the beliefs that all Germans were Nazis, that the Nazis invented anti-Semitism, that all Jews were helpless victims and that all the victims died in gas chambers.

Problems can also occur when teachers fail to take into consideration student perceptions, values and attitudes towards history. Trail (2006) found that alienated Afro-Caribbean pupils wanted their history to be seen as a greater part of the mainstream narrative of British history rather than being treated separately. Other research with students of this age indicates that many have an interest in history, but teachers often face challenges in demonstrating the relevance. Therefore, relevance to their world needs to be established before engagement can occur.

As with other key stages, teachers lack incentives to take risks even when they recognise the relevance of addressing emotive and controversial content and themes, such as Islamic history. Recent events have heightened tensions both within the Muslim community and between Muslims and between Muslims and non-Muslims. Yet never has an understanding of Islamic history seemed more vital. At present “Islamic civilisations” (from 7th to 16th centuries) is an optional choice for a “world study before 1900”. Few choose it. Many schools have considered Islamic history too difficult, alien or complex to teach. Most pupils do not study Islamic history at all, other than a glance at the Crusades from a western perspective. Schools with Muslim pupils face particular challenges in negotiating the interface between community history and school history. Not all Muslims are happy with the idea of Islamic history being taught by non-Muslims. The relationship between a communal, mythologised history adhering to one narrative sits uncomfortably with a critical history that is open to multiple interpretations and perspectives.

#### **Key Stage 4**

Key Stage 4 history usually means GCSE, except for when parts are addressed through citizenship, other areas of the curriculum or when covered as part of an

entry-level qualification. At GCSE, there is no explicit need to explore issues that are emotive and controversial within the content specifications of current GCSEs. The assessment objectives do not require pupils to examine multiple perspectives or explore issues from alternative standpoints.

The objectives are essentially focused on acquiring knowledge and understanding of the human past, using sources critically, understanding interpretations and organising and communicating their understanding of the past. Reference is made to potential citizenship opportunities and the opportunities for spiritual, moral, ethical, social and cultural issues within the specifications. Assessment objective 3 does refer to competing interpretations, but that can be at the level of historical debate and may well lack any emotive and controversial “bite”. There is little incentive for teachers to actively pursue emotive and controversial history.

Time for such matters is usually limited because of the examination pressures. To teach emotive and controversial history requires managing and handling debate and discussion. However, research literature suggests that teachers’ ability to understand the process of debate and how to get pupils to discuss issues effectively is weak. For example, should the teacher take a neutral stance in a Holocaust debate that might give a false legitimacy to Holocaust denial? Few schools have a clear rationale for the approach to teaching GCSE History (or any other subject), such as whether one aims for objectivity, a consensual or partisan view of the past.

Many teachers also lack the confidence or desire to raise too many controversial issues. There may be constraints caused by the ethos and belief of certain types of schools, such as faith schools. Many also aspire to avoid alienating or humiliating pupils whose ethnic/cultural groups were responsible for past atrocities. They worry that opening up certain content will reinforce or give a platform for existing prejudices and stereotypes.

#### **Post-16**

As with Key Stage 4, this usually means external examination specifications. If anything, opportunities to address controversial issues have declined with the demise of programmes such as the Cambridge History Project, ETHOS, AEB673 and Edexcel syllabus E. While there is scope in coursework and the personal study, the actual teaching of emotive and controversial history is limited in practice. Even here though, students are not rewarded for selecting personal studies that cover more controversial areas. With the need to interpret a range of texts, the tendency is to choose well-resourced, popular themes. Whilst many offer opportunities for delving into more emotive and controversial aspects, this dimension is avoided.

Beyond this, opportunities are very limited. On the whole, specifications are Eurocentric and, even when available, many students and schools steer clear of more controversial areas. Even in Ireland, less than half the students choose to study Irish history and most study Europe in the 20th century. At AQA, only 2.5% of candidates who sat the examinations at AS level studied the Islamic option.

Student emotions also play a part. There is evidence that many can feel inhibited taking part in debate and discussion, especially when they are establishing new friendships and relationships, for example, in a sixth form college setting. Despite their years in compulsory education, many lack debating skills, even if the time allowed for covering the specification was adequate. With results being of importance for schools, colleges and students, few cases can be found of senior leadership teams encouraging a worthwhile and extensive approach to covering emotive and controversial issues.



# 5

## Good practice and case studies

This section examines the characteristics of good and effective practice in the teaching of emotive and controversial history — the ways in which one can have “a curriculum with bite”. Some of these features are generic and apply across all settings. Others are more appropriate or restricted to certain key stages.

### Good practice across all key stages

1. Teaching emotive and controversial history does not occur in a vacuum. It needs to be taught at whatever level in the context of developing individual values. Effective teaching of such history requires **clarity of purpose and a rationale** for the school that emphasises identity, values and diversity.
2. The best practice also emerges when history is taught both as a **body of knowledge and as a form of knowledge**. It is not enough to give pupils the facts about emotive and controversial history, nor is it sufficient to teach historical skills in isolation from the body of factual knowledge relevant to the content of the topic. For example, at AS/A2 level, giving details to students about the atrocities of Joseph Stalin is an essential component of teaching this emotive and controversial period of Russian history. However, this factual knowledge would need to be integrated into a process of study, which included such features as examination of original source material, a range of contemporary opinions of Stalin and an appreciation of how and why historical interpretations of Stalin have changed over time, up to and including the present.
3. Good practice also results when there is a strong emphasis on **independent enquiry** with its own procedures and conventions, ensuring that emotive and controversial issues are taught within a secure pedagogical and historic framework. The importance of good questioning is paramount.

For example, at Key Stage 2, pupils are sometimes taught about the Kindertransport in the late 1930s, which permitted some Jewish children to escape Nazi persecution by travelling to Britain. Such teaching

might be based round certain enquiry questions that lead the sequence of learning. These might include: *Why did the Nazis hate Jewish people? What was it like to be a child on the Kindertransport? Why did the British government let in Jewish children, but not their parents?* etc. The enquiry questions help convert factual content into historical problems that students can seek to resolve, partly by the examination of original source material. The process of enquiry also involves skilful use of questioning within lessons so that learners are encouraged to think independently and critically.

4. These enquiries take **time**. Probing such complex issues cannot be done easily without time to reflect and to cover the different perspectives and beliefs involved. Much of the best practice seen involved teaching in depth. Where done fleetingly, learners failed to see what the historical problem was at all about an issue. Effective teachers are aware of the need to consider how to make emotive and controversial history accessible to all ages and abilities, and not to see it as a niche part of the subject.
5. Good practice matches **clarity** with recognising the **complexity** of emotive and controversial history. Content and issues are selected so that students appreciate the complexity of what is studied and are capable of viewing the same content from a variety of perspectives. This includes the differing perspectives of types of people contemporary to the period studied. For example, at Key Stage 3 in the study of the British Raj, students would be taught about the differing range of British and Indian views of the time.
6. An emphasis on exploring multiple narratives and the past from different perspectives is another feature of good practice. Planning to address **interpretations**, on how people in later times have reconstructed and presented the past, on the purpose of different historical interpretations and on the relationship between an interpretation and available contemporary evidence is important. The teaching of emotive and controversial history is seriously compromised if pupils do not see history as a subject that is open to debate and argument as they study different and competing views of the same events.

Progression in teaching this dimension needs to be understood and systematically planned for.

7. **Balance** is also associated with good practice, both across a theme or topic and across a key stage. For example, a study of the abolition of the slave trade at Key Stage 3 would not present the causes of abolition as a single narrative, attributed to exclusively white abolitionists or solely due to black resistance and economic factors. Particularly in a multicultural educational setting, the single narrative would risk alienating pupils of a variety of backgrounds. In the same way, including the black abolitionist, Olaudah Equiano, as a focus of study alongside white abolitionists, such as Wilberforce and Clarkson, would be both inclusive and an accurate reflection of those participating in the abolition movement.

8. Another vital requirement is **engaging the students at a personal level** so that they see the complexity

of the issue, its relevance and that they care about it. It is possible for content to appear vastly removed from students' everyday experiences or for atrocity figures to be so great that they are difficult to relate to on a personal level. The skilled teacher of emotive and controversial history concentrates on "making the strange familiar and the familiar strange" as a way of connecting their learners to the material being taught. For example, homing in on the single story of an individual figure from the period can be a means of learners identifying with the plight shared by many thousands or millions of people.

9. **Resources** matter if the practice is to be effective. Learners at all levels appreciate exposure to a rich variety of appropriate and stimulating resources, such as music, film and pictures. Quality resources can be a means of making personal engagement more likely.

## Good practice across particular key stages

### Foundation Stage and Key Stage 1

Much history at Foundation and Key Stage 1 is likely to involve personal and family investigation with an emphasis on change. This is not without considerable challenge as they try to come to terms both with differences between families and sometimes with difficult and challenging circumstances in their own families, which can include issues such as family breakdown, life-threatening illness and death. A number of different approaches are possible, such as sharing stories, pictures and artefacts about their own lives. This can enhance children's awareness of similarities in experiences that they share with others. They also allow opportunities for children to explore differences.

Pre-school children can use the pictures in their profile books to reflect on difficult occurrences in their own lives. For example, one mother placed a picture of her child as a baby in a coma since she recognised that his fight for survival had been a considerable achievement. Teachers can also explore the historical concept of similarity and difference. A case study from QCA available on their Respect for All web site draws on children's own experiences to explore similarity and difference between different lives and allows questions to be raised such as: *Who am I? Who are you? How are we the same? How are we different? What hurts us when we are excluded? And let's celebrate our uniqueness.*

Play-based activities are important for developing and reinforcing children's knowledge and understanding of the past, and they offer ways for children to explore potentially emotive and controversial issues. A classroom play area provides opportunities for children to act out their developing historical understanding. Through play, children may explore stereotypes that may be controversial. For example, different gender roles within the home or attitudes to child-rearing. They may develop awareness of different lifestyles and values.

Stories are central to the development of young pupils' understanding of history and represent another effective way to address emotive and controversial history. They can introduce pupils to different beliefs and values, what people in the past thought was important, what motivated them to act as they did and, in doing so, enabling pupils to reflect on their own undertakings and things that are important to them, as well as to appreciate other people's points of view. Stories also introduce learners to a range

of emotions, such as joy, sorrow, anger, love, hate, fear, security, and to concepts, such as good and bad. Children can act out situations in a story that they have heard. Freeze-framing enables them to reflect on particular events within a story. Children can retell the story in their own words and can be helped in this by props from a story sack. 'I'd like to ask' and hot-seating are valuable ways to develop children's questioning skills.

Folk tales may be used to explore human emotions and different beliefs and values. For example, in the story *Goldilocks*, was it right for her to steal the porridge, break all the furniture and then run off? Surely the giant was right to become angry with Jack for stealing the golden goose? These are initial questions that introduce young children to some of the processes and thinking skills, which are needed in addressing learning about controversial and emotive issues in history. Stories which provide alternative explanations of well-known stories are also important here, for example, the story of the *Three Little Pigs* from the wolf's point of view or the wolf's version of *Little Red Riding Hood*.

The celebration of diversity can be done through activities such as developing a story about a world that was the same — the purple world with the children thinking on what they might feel like living in this world. Afterwards, they might discuss differences they see between themselves and others in the class. Similarities and differences between classmates can be noted as the teacher instructs them with statements such as "Stand up and cross the circle if... "You're wearing short socks or you like mangoes or you like parties". Children might also be asked to think about occasions when they had been hurt because a difference had been noted and to devise responses.

Puppets can be used effectively to discuss sensitive and emotive issues as they allow some distance to be placed between the child and the issue. For example, the puppet 'did this' or 'thought this' or 'this happened to the puppet' are all possible ways to enable children to distance themselves from the events and emotions being expressed. Using puppets can also encourage children to offer advice: *What would you have done?* and suggest resolutions to conflict.

Planning effective enquiry questions can help show pupils that historical issues are not always straightforward. Existing topics often taught at Foundation level and Key Stage 1 can be given a controversial and reflective edge with sharper enquiry questions. For example, *did everyone have toys like this? If not, why not? Or how were these toys made?* Similarly the QCA unit on 'What were homes like long ago?' could be made more relevant by drawing pupils' attention to the differences between rich and poor people's houses in the past and providing an opportunity for pupils to reflect on the disparity in lifestyles.

The recently published assessment materials for history at Key Stage 1 pose some enquiry questions, which provide opportunities for pupils to consider the nature of historical interpretation and of historical significance. For example, the unit on ‘How should we remember Mary Seacole?’ explores questions such as *why did British people remember Florence Nightingale, but forget Mary Seacole?* and *how should we remember Mary Seacole?*

Selecting content for diversity, alternative viewpoints and ways of life is important in helping pupils begin to grasp the nature of controversy in studying history. The checklist produced by Wood and Holden is useful in promoting an understanding of gender and cultural diversity in the early years. The checklist has been adapted below to help teachers plan for controversial and emotive issues in history.

Has the planning ensured the following?

1. The experiences of ordinary people (men, women and children) are included (*including some of their diverse experiences and experiences that have created controversy or conflict*)
2. Examples of images and situations that challenge stereotypes are included (*Native American female chiefs, female explorers, pioneers, social activists, black soldiers in the World Wars*)
3. A variety of teaching strategies that actively involve children are used (*opportunities for questioning and reflecting on puzzling situations, exploring alternatives and drawing conclusions*)
4. Past and present links are made, showing a continuum of experiences (*use of timelines, past to present*)
5. Issues of justice, fairness, respect, identity are introduced (*rights of people to their land, rights to vote and have an education, issues of disparity in wealth and opportunities*)
6. The histories of minority groups (including the views of the minority group) are portrayed (*voices of different communities and their experiences*)
7. Local-global links are demonstrated (*trading links now and in the past, movement of peoples*)
8. Children acquire language to enable them to reflect and communicate their ideas to others in sensitive ways (*talking in different contexts, vocabulary and phrases to support children in recognising different opinions and being able to express their own views sensitively, use of tentative words, such as probably, perhaps, might have*)

The Ireland in Schools project supported by Professor Patrick Buckland — <http://iisresource.org/default.aspx> — has produced teaching material exploring the relationship between Britain and Ireland. One Focus of Study as an alternative to Florence Nightingale as a significant woman is Grace O’Malley, a female Irish pirate who first resisted the Tudor conquest of Ireland and then worked on behalf of Elizabeth I. Teachers who trialled the materials commented on Grace’s “enthraling story... raised challenging questions about both the choices facing individuals and the nature of sixteenth century society and politics”.

Good books and other resources and guidance aid effective teaching of emotive and controversial history. There are a number of printed texts that deal sensitively with issues. For example, *Granpa* (1984) by John Birmingham tells the story of a grandfather who finally dies, which is shown by his empty armchair. Jeannie Baker’s *Window* (1992) depicts environmental change over time through changes in the landscape through a single window. Although 3 and 4-year-old pupils in Northern Ireland were unaware of differences across nationalist and unionist communities, by age 6 identification with religion and flag was more prominent. Research appears to indicate that the use of cartoons can assist in teaching emotive and controversial history. There are several examples of good practice on the QCA’s Respect for all web site for effective teaching of emotive and controversial issues with the youngest pupils.

Such approaches are effective as they allow young children to reflect on their own lives, as well as thinking about other people’s lives in their community. Using imaginary lives can also help reduce the sensitivity without diluting the ideas and provide the opportunities to explore histories which are different to their own. They can also provide recognition for those children who have experienced hardship and danger. Evidence suggests that such approaches do result in children listening to each other, demonstrating mutual respect and taking care not to cause offence. Circle time often proves to be a valuable device for promoting respect for diversity and to raise issues, such as those relating to anti-racism and the benefits of living in a multicultural community. Looking at other children’s lives can also deepen children’s awareness of difference and touch on potentially sensitive issues.

## Case Study: Significant people. Year 2 activity

### Context

This history activity was carried out at Wilberforce Primary School in west London. This school has approximately 400 children on role. It is housed in a 1870s boarding school building in an inner London borough with many social and economic challenges. According to Government statistics, this borough has one of the highest rates of mental distress among adults in the whole country. 80% of the children are from minority ethnic groups, 60% are eligible for free school meals, 76% have English as additional language and roughly 25% are refugees or asylum seekers.

### How it is taught

This case study is based largely on the work of Hilary Claire, which was published in Claire, H. (2002) 'Why didn't you fight, Ruby? Developing Citizenship in KS1 through the history curriculum, *Education 3–13*'. June 2002. Pp. 24–32. It is also available on QCA's Respect for All web site [www.qca.org.uk/1581\\_2466.html](http://www.qca.org.uk/1581_2466.html).

The scheme of work was designed for Year 2 pupils and based on the lives of **Ruby Bridges, Bessie Coleman and Frederick Douglass**. Activities include timeline work, identifying significant events of these people's lives and developing knowledge and understanding of different ways of life in the past. The scheme of work concludes with children selecting significant aspects of these people's lives and why they should be remembered.

The scheme of work addressed a range of issues. These included the following:

1. The Civil Rights Campaign in the 1960s — 'Why didn't you fight, Ruby?' This theme allowed a range of emotive and controversial issues to be explored including discrimination, the moral arguments about injustice, resistance through non-violent means, non-violent responses and moral courage in the face of outright abuse, the importance of solidarity in confronting injustice and the importance of white support in confronting racism. It also allowed pupils to empathise with a child dealing with discrimination, show racist people softening their attitudes and consider the long-term outcomes of a campaign for justice, overall the optimistic possibilities for change and discrimination against racism. Activities included reviewing key points of Ruby Bridges' life on a timeline, pupils devising questions they might like to ask her and gathering thoughts and ideas for inclusion in a book, *Why we remember Ruby Bridges*.
2. A young black woman confronts discrimination and convention and achieves her dream — *Fly Bessie Fly*. Pupils reviewed the life of Bessie Coleman, looking at other aspects of early 20th century life, such as early aviators and planes. Their teacher assumed the role of Bessie and was hot-seated by the class who subsequently talked about why Bessie is remembered and for her determination. This activity allowed exploration of the limitations on people's experience and life chances through racism and sexism, the importance of goals and determination to succeed and the role of non-racist and non-sexist people who support such goals.
3. A slave escapes to freedom, teaches himself to read and write and becomes an abolitionist leader — *Frederick Douglass – The slave who taught himself to read*. Activities placed Douglass' life in context, making connections to the stories of Bridges and Coleman and role-playing young Frederick's efforts to learn to read and write. The last session involved a whole-class discussion. Children talked about what they had learned about the three people and how they had tried to change their lives. They each chose one person and identified three things that they thought were significant about their person. They shared their ideas with each other and the teacher recorded their different ideas. Lastly, the children produced a drawing with a caption of their famous person. A number of emotive and controversial issues can be considered here including understanding and debating the nature of slavery, the injustice and personal hurt of someone growing up under slavery, the importance of literacy and persuasion as a tool for countering injustice, the possibilities for even the most disadvantaged to make a difference to their own and other people's lives, and solidarity in different campaigns for equality.

By covering such issues, the children also had the opportunity to develop a range of history skills, including the placing of events and objects in chronological order, understanding terms relating to the passing of time, motivation, the consequences of actions and events, change and continuity and skills in using historical evidence and in communicating knowledge of history.

### Reasons for effectiveness

The teaching programme was effective. As Claire noted, 'People chosen allowed the teacher to do related work concerning children's own goals and hopes for life, about the power of prayer, forgiveness, courage and concern to help other people'. As young children learned about these people, they appear to have developed their understanding of how 'non-violent change can be managed through solidarity between white and black'. Interestingly, Claire noted that girls and boys responded



differently to the injustice suffered by Bridges, Coleman and Douglass. It was only the boys who questioned why Ruby had not fought back and this raises the possibility that young children might recognise non-violence as a 'strictly female' response to injustice. To address this, it might be appropriate to engage with other individuals whose histories would counter such stereotypes, for example, Ghandi and the salt march or civil rights demonstrations led by Martin Luther King.

Studying the lives of Bridges, Coleman and Douglass also had resonance with children's own lives. Many children focused on Ruby Bridges talking to God to gain courage as she walked through the mob into school. The importance of belief and of a higher power was shared by children of different faiths. As they wrote their stories and drew their pictures about Ruby, children talked about their beliefs and Claire notes that this provided opportunities for children to appreciate difference and become more tolerant.

Covering the childhoods of the significant people also helped give to them greater relevance. The young children were interested in the childhood of the people they were studying and were able to identify with them and also to recognise unfairness in people's lives. Children's questions to these people reveal how children built on their existing notions of fairness as is evidenced in questions posed by young children to their teacher in the hot seat as Bessie Coleman. Questions were asked, such as: *When you were little, why did you have to pick cotton and white children went to school? It wasn't fair.* Or *Why was that (white) man rude to you when you wanted to learn to fly?*

The effectiveness was helped by the teaching approach. It was greatly helped when the teachers listened to what children said and were prepared to intervene to challenge their misconceptions.

## Key Stage 2

Many of the features of good practice identified for the Foundation Stage and Key Stage 1 are also applicable for effective emotive and controversial history teaching at Key Stage 2. In addition, the following issues deserve a mention.

Children at this age are more likely to be able to challenge stereotypes and stereotypical interpretations of past events. Key Stage 2 history topics can sometimes be taught so that they present a single interpretation of a period. Teaching of the Victorians, for example, can perpetrate the stereotype that all children in Victorian schools encountered the same experience. In addition, those from ethnic minorities are rarely represented in contemporary accounts or sources, although we know they were present. Sometimes pupils get the impression that all children who worked in industry in Victorian times had the same experience and that negative experiences of work were confined to urban areas.

When planning a Key Stage 2 history topic, the balance of content within the topic is important in communicating the relative importance of different aspects of the time to pupils. If, for example, the Tudors are taught so that there is little reference to the role of women and children in society, religious issues of the period or the role of the wider world in the development of the prosperity of the period, then children are likely to have an incomplete and possibly stereotypical understanding of history. Making a decision to include an aspect of a particular period is an important part of teaching emotive and challenging history.

Even the terminology used can result in sensitivity and controversy, for example, terms such as invader, settler for the 43AD–1066 period. The words and ideas they engender are emotive and controversial in society today. Therefore, topics need teaching in a positive and inclusive way, challenging stereotypical ideas and interpretations of 'goodies' and 'baddies' and of 'us and the other'.

Hilary Claire (Claire, 2002) examines this topic in detail. She suggests that teachers choose aspects and approaches of the substantial subject matter in this topic that challenge commonly held stereotypical interpretations. For example, she suggests that we introduce and challenge the traditional negative interpretation of invaders as violent, particularly in the case of the Vikings. This could be done by posing sharp enquiry questions, such as: *How far can we trust what Saxon monks said about the Vikings?* or *What did Victorians invent about Vikings?* or *How did Viking people make money?* or *Did the Saxons and Vikings ever live in peace?* The themes could also be explored by

using stories involving women and children including Boudicca. The multicultural nature of groups and society can be emphasised by drawing attention to the presence of Africans in the Roman army. Good use can be made of fictional accounts, such as Kevin Crossley-Holland's, *Sea Stranger, Fire Brother, Earth Father*. At Duxford Community Primary School in Cambridgeshire, Steven Mastin, Head of History at neighbouring Sawston Village College taught a scheme of work to a Year 5/6 class with the title, 'How do we remember John Lennon?' Pupils analysed a very favourable web site about John Lennon under the enquiry question 'What does this web site want us to think about John Lennon?' Evidence is then presented to pupils that contradicts the web site or introduces controversial evidence about Lennon that the web site interpretation has left out. (See [www.historytransition.org.uk](http://www.historytransition.org.uk) for materials.)

Linking history to the development of citizenship also offers opportunities to consider emotive and controversial history. Issues about citizenship are often covered in primary schools in links with the local community, in circle time and other PSHE activities and as part of cross-curricular work. For example, historical knowledge is important in understanding concepts, such as politics. Democracy is not an easy concept to understand. Comparisons of new and ancient versions of concepts, such as from the autocratic versions of democracy in ancient Greece through to the fight for universal suffrage in Britain in the Victorian and Edwardian periods, can help pupils to explore what it means to live in a democracy.

## Case Study: The place of Britain in the wider world in Tudor times

### Difficulties involved in the teaching

The Key Stage 2 history unit on the Tudor period can be taught within a very traditional framework, stressing the successes and achievements of the monarchs, Henry VIII and Elizabeth, the golden age of Elizabethan exploration and the beginnings of English greatness. If history is taught from exclusively one interpretation like this, it is not meeting the requirements of the National Curriculum. While pupils should be introduced to the idea of the Tudor period as a golden age, they should also be given the opportunity to challenge this interpretation. Otherwise, they will be left with a very

partial Anglocentric or Eurocentric view of the period, which sees events and personalities through a single lens and leaves out evidence that does not accord with it.

### Context

This unit described by Cooper (2000) is designed for Years 5 and 6 and explores the topics of houses and ships. The study of the Armada within a Europe-wide context is particularly useful in challenging the idea of Elizabethan England as a great civilising power in early modern Europe.

### How it is taught

Cooper suggests a range of teaching approaches and these can lend themselves to a number of sharp enquiry questions.

Constructing a timeline	How important was the Armada in the history of the Tudors?	Pupils examine the relative significance of the Armada compared with other landmark events
Using portraits as sources	What did this painter want people to think of Phillip II?	Pupils observe details from a Spanish portrait of Phillip II and deduce from it what the painter wanted people to think of the King
Group writing tasks	How successful was Emperor Akbar?	Pupils complete a mind-map in groups, collating the successes of the Mughal Emperor Akbar
Analysing pictures	How do we know what Tudor ships looked like?	Pupils compare a modern picture of a Tudor ship with archaeological evidence from the Mary Rose
Drawing and designing tasks	How did Tudor ships improve?	Pupils sketch and label an early Tudor ship suggesting ways in which its design could be improved
Visits to historical sites	How did Elizabeth I live at Hampton Court?	On a visit pupils find out how Elizabeth I lived at Hampton Court

The plan for the unit involves the children in individual, group and whole-class activities. This, combined with the wide variety of activities, should mean that pupils with a range of learning styles should be able to engage with the topic.

A number of constraints need to be overcome including the stage of child development, the curriculum, resources and teacher expertise. A number of resources can illuminate the non-British aspects of the story of Tudor prosperity, such as those that link to the Indian sub-continent and the Mughal empire. For example, a comparison of life and technology between Tudor England and Mughal India is an effective means of putting relative Tudor achievements into a non-European perspective. Cross-curricular links can usefully be made with geography and mathematics and there are some good opportunities to practice a range of English and art skills. The real strength of this example in teaching emotive and controversial history topics is that it challenges a purely Anglocentric interpretation of the Tudors, and allows the pupils to put the Tudors in a much wider historical context.

Resources that are particularly noted for their usefulness are:

- ◆ School council booklet, *Akbar and Elizabeth*
- ◆ The Globe Theatre web site
- ◆ Extracts from the film, *Shakespeare in Love*

This range of resources emphasises the importance of a multimedia approach to teaching resources.

### Reasons for effectiveness

In the case study, several examples of children's work are reproduced. The unit asked children to work collaboratively on a newspaper front-page about the Armada. These examples demonstrate that the children not only learned a range of subject knowledge that is relevant to the topic, but crucially that they engaged emotionally with the stories. One child demonstrates an ability to empathise with the King of Spain:

*'(T)he Duke of Palma mucked up our invasion plan because he was not ready in Dunkruk to sail. Phillip II was very angry when he found out. On the other hand Phillip was pleased with the Duke of Medina Sidenia because he had reached Calais but losing too many ships and not having a sea battle with Englande'* (Cooper, 2000)

In the children's work, it is possible to see evidence that they have engaged with a variety of perspectives, both British and non-British, during the topic.

## Key Stage 3

Teaching controversial history with students of this age benefits from some **risk-taking teaching**. McCully and Kitson (2005) identified teachers in Northern Ireland as “containers”, “avoiders” or “risk-takers”. These categories can probably be applied to teachers elsewhere. A head of history in a northern comprehensive school discussed the recent controversy over the wearing of veils by Muslim women in her multicultural classes. She deliberately planned to set up an enquiry for her pupils, looking at a range of Muslim historical sources, which reflect diversity of Muslim practice on the wearing of the veil over time. This head of department is a risk-taker.

Peter Duffy, Head of History at a comprehensive school in Anfield, Liverpool, teaches mostly white, working class pupils. In his setting, he struggles to engage his pupils by directly teaching emotive and controversial history as a means of making the subject interesting and relevant to them. He can also be regarded as a risk-taker. Lloyd Brown, Head of Humanities at Chesterton Community College in Cambridge, teaches about the transatlantic slave trade and its abolition in depth, debating the range of interpretations of the causes of abolition with his pupils. When asked, a sample of multicultural pupils from his school felt Lloyd’s teaching did justice to both white and black contributions to abolition. He is also a risk-taker. In each case, there are clear benefits from taking some risks.

**Creating quality historical enquiries** requires rigorous and critical thinking about learning outcomes and the kind of learning that teachers want to take place. This goes hand-in-hand with effective practice at Key Stage 3. Effective teachers provide a clear rationale for their planning and are mindful of the questions that pupils themselves want answered. Alison Kitson (2001) found evidence of a question that did concern pupils of this age in relation to the Holocaust: *How could it have happened?* She followed this up with an approach using this as the overarching enquiry question and sequencing a number of smaller enquiry questions that enable pupils to develop a broad and deep understanding of the Holocaust: 1. What was it like to be Jewish in Europe before 1933? 2. How did Hitler change anti-Semitism? 3. What is the real opinion of the German people? What was the Final Solution? Who could have stopped the Holocaust?

*Better understanding of historical interpretations* is needed if pupils are to engage more fully with sensitive issues and issues of legacy. Prior to the opening of the British Empire and Commonwealth Museum in Bristol, the city held a temporary exhibition on its links with the slave trade. Wrenn (1999) collected various local responses from the

general public to this first exhibition and made analysis of them a focus of the pupils’ work.

Engaging and challenging learners is another essential component of effective practice — not always an easy thing in Key Stage 3. Lessons that have an emotional as well as an intellectual impact on pupils and that encourage pupils to use their imagination to consider other people’s experiences often underpin successful teaching. Maintaining an individual and personal dimension is a way to elicit an effective response that balances and supports cognitive work. Some of the most effective resources for use in schools often focus on individual narratives and experiences. Powerful images — music, drama, pictorial and fiction can help engage the pupils with extreme views as can informed debate and role play.

Some history departments ensure a special place in the curriculum by providing broader and richer learning experiences for their pupils. At Holbrook High School in Suffolk, the Head of History, Dale Banham, set up a cross-curricular history and citizenship project looking at the historic reputation of abolitionist, Thomas Clarkson, aimed specifically at gifted and talented pupils. At Cottenham Village College, near Cambridge, the Head of History, Geraint Brown, organised groups of Year 9 pupils on a collapsed history and citizenship day into workshops where they decided how countries such as Germany and Japan might commemorate the Second World War. Schools invite Holocaust survivors into school and link pupils’ work to religious education, English, art, music and school assemblies. Some teachers are able to make careful yet illuminating parallels between past and present.

**Locating quality resources** is part of the process for effective Key Stage 3 practice. There are a number of high-quality resources for teaching emotive and controversial history at Key Stage 3. For slavery, a new Understanding Slavery web site (launched July 2006) provides a range of resources to support teaching ([www.understandingslavery.com](http://www.understandingslavery.com)). The British Empire and Commonwealth Museum in Bristol sell Voices of the Transatlantic Slave Trade ([www.empiremuseum.co.uk](http://www.empiremuseum.co.uk)) and [www.blackhistory4schools.com/slavetrade](http://www.blackhistory4schools.com/slavetrade) has many links and resources.

Well-used Holocaust resources include lessons from the Holocaust, Holocaust Educational Trust, [www.het.org.uk](http://www.het.org.uk), Reflections, a teacher’s resource pack for the Holocaust Exhibition, Imperial War Museum ([www.iwm.org.uk](http://www.iwm.org.uk)) Approaches to Teaching the Holocaust, The Holocaust Centre, Beth Shalom ([www.bethshalom.com](http://www.bethshalom.com)). Extensive resources from the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum are available on [www.ushmm.org](http://www.ushmm.org).



While resources for teaching Islamic history are currently sparse, Michael Riley, Jamie Byron and Christine Counsell are in the process of writing a textbook for Pearson called *Meetings of Minds*. Included in the content is an enquiry entitled ‘Threats from beyond. How can we know what Muslims thought of Crusaders and invaders?’ It seeks to understand the period between 1095 and 1295 from the contemporary Muslim point of view. While teaching much about the critical skills of an historian through the proper treatment of sources, the enquiry places the Christian threat to Islam in the period in the setting of the much greater threat of the Mongols. The enquiry models the kind of rigorous approach to Islamic history that teachers should bring to bear on all emotive and controversial history.

## Integrating emotive and controversial history into mainstream teaching

As it has been said earlier, research shows that Afro-Caribbean students can feel alienated and disconnected if the only black people they encounter in the history curriculum are passive victims of the slave trade or protesting for civil rights in the USA. Such students and their families would prefer to see regular references to black faces in the mainstream narratives of British history than, for example, in a Black History month, however, well-intentioned one can be.

Henry Compton School has been aware of this need to avoid tokenism with regard to black history. Instead, the school planned a series of 'short bursts of relevant black history dripped into the curriculum at the appropriate moment'. Black history is integrated into the mainstream history curriculum, avoiding both tokenism and artificially-created opportunities for black history. For example:

- ◆ A single lesson in Year 8 where pupils study Elizabeth I's concerns about the increasing numbers of Blackmoores living in England and her attempts to repatriate them in 1596. Pupils use a range of written sources from the National Archives web site and take part in a role-play to explore the perspectives of the Queen, Lord Burghley, a black servant and a black vagrant. The lesson concludes with a comparison of attitudes towards race and immigration in Elizabethan sources and in recent British newspapers. The study not only debunks

the myth that black people only arrived in Britain in recent times, but also provides a springboard for discussion about racial prejudice in the local community. In one class it led to a challenging discussion about the issues facing the Somali community in London.

- ◆ A series of lessons to help pupils understand the contribution of soldiers from Africa, Asia and the Caribbean to the First World War. The lessons are based on a web quest in which the teacher provides a framework to support pupils in using the Internet as a resource bank. The web quest asks Year 9 pupils to imagine that they have been commissioned to write a booklet for primary school children about the contribution of black and Asian soldiers to the First World War. Pupils select and synthesise the material from different web sites in order to write for this particular audience.
- ◆ An enquiry on Olaudah Equiano as a way of studying the transatlantic slave trade. Working in teams, pupils take part in a web quest in which they are challenged to create web pages that update Equiano's autobiography for a 21st century audience. Pupils research Equiano's life using a range of web sites, write the narrative under different headings and design the web pages for the school's history web site. By focusing on the life of Equiano in this way, pupils are provided with a positive and motivating context for their study of transatlantic slavery.

## Case Study: Islamic history

### Difficulties involved in the teaching

Teaching Islamic history in modern Britain poses some major challenges as already outlined. The case study from Manchester below illustrates some of these. Some students find it difficult to make connections between the history they study at school and current political issues. Often they have fixed ideas and hardened attitudes, in particular, the idea among some Muslim students that there is one truth does not always sit comfortably with the critical and pluralist perspectives that underpin much school history. Moreover, the history department is acutely aware of the risk of alienating the minority of white students, many of whom under-achieve.

### Context

At **Abraham Moss High School** in Manchester, Alison Stephen, the Head of History, has embraced the challenge of teaching Islamic history at Key Stage 3. This work lays the foundations for a challenging piece of GCSE coursework on the Arab-Israeli conflict that students undertake in Year 11. Up to 70% of students at Abraham Moss School come from ethnic minorities and over 50 different languages are spoken in the school. Approximately 60% of the children are Muslim. The largest group is of Pakistani origin and there are also many Arabic speakers.

### How it is taught

Four key principles underpin the planning of a unit of work on Islamic history.

- ◆ **A focus on the positive aspects of Islamic history**  
For example, the department has recently changed the core assessment from an explanation of the spread of early Islam to a study of the achievements of early Islam and their significance. This emphasis on the positive achievements of all cultures, including Britain, underpins much of the history curriculum at Abraham Moss.
- ◆ **A determination to help students to understand complexity**  
They are encouraged to explore the diversity as well as the unity within Islam. Students also move beyond an undue focus on conflict between Islam and the West, studying, for example, the ways in which Muslims and Christians learned from each other during the time of the Crusades.
- ◆ **Critical thinking**  
Students are taught to engage critically with sources and interpretations. Learning is focused on exploring stereotypical views through the analysis of visual sources. They are also encouraged to consider

different interpretations of events and people in the past. An enquiry, for example, requires students to examine different interpretations of Richard I and Saladin.

- ◆ **Debate and discussion in a safe environment**  
This is a strong feature of most history lessons and enables students to debate contemporary emotive and controversial issues in a wider arena. For example, on the outbreak of the war in Iraq, students researched the issues and led a debate in a school assembly. More recently, students have contributed to an online discussion forum about Internet images of the Prophet. In this way, Muslim students were able to explain the offence caused by such images.

A unit of work that exemplifies these principles is the picture challenge that students undertake at the outset of their study of Islamic history. They are given a series of stereotypical Western views of Islamic history:

1. *Muslims were not allowed to draw people, so their artwork is unimpressive.*
2. *The Muslims were too busy being religious to achieve anything else.*
3. *Muslim women always stayed inside and were busy with domestic duties.*
4. *Muslims and Christians were always fighting.*

In small groups, students then use a series of digital images to challenge the statements. From a range of pictures they select the ones that are most useful in undermining the stereotypical view, using these images to create a PowerPoint presentation in which they explain their choices. The activity encourages them to explore the complexity of Islamic culture in the past and to develop their historical, ICT and discussion skills.

### Reasons for effectiveness

The overall effectiveness is not always easy to detect, although the school believes that tensions are reduced and the students are prepared to discuss and confront a range of sensitive and controversial issues. There is a greater readiness to take risks than they might normally expect and to consider other viewpoints. Yet, what the history department really feels has made the difference is that the risk-taking in exploring diversity, difference and controversy is done in a safe and sensitive environment. The alienation of many from the Key Stage 3 history curriculum has not been felt at the school. The conscious attempt to balance positive and negative images has helped. The students are encouraged to see beyond the surface issues to confront the complexity of events and situations.

## Key Stage 4/GCSE

Good practice at Key Stage 4 results when the planning of emotive and controversial history is explicit within the context of the theme or unit. This means exploring multiple perspectives and challenging commonly held misconceptions. For example, in relation to the teaching of the Holocaust, students are taught that Nazi persecution of the Jews was part of a wider policy, which included other groups. They are therefore provided with a context, which sets the Holocaust alongside other genocides and the history of anti-Semitism. In attributing responsibility for the Jewish Holocaust, care is taken that all Germans are not labelled as anti-Semitic. Rescue, resistance and the cultural diversity of Europe in the period are studied, particularly to counter the stereotyping of Jews as helpless victims, awaiting extermination.

One school involved in teaching the Holocaust is Ounsdale High School in Wombourne. It has about 1,250 pupils on roll, covering the full social class and ethnic groups. The majority of pupils come from socially advantaged areas, although there are pockets of significant social deprivation. The pupils are from overwhelmingly white British backgrounds with a small proportion coming from ethnic minority families. The department is involved in the new OCR Pilot History GCSE and teaches the Holocaust as the focus of the International Study Option. The local area has also seen growing activity from the British National Party and the Freedom Party. Given this political context, the department feels there is a need to teach the Holocaust in depth to tackle issues relating to prejudice and racism.

As part of their early work to provide a broader context for the Holocaust, pupils study the Armenian genocide. The starting point for this was the BBC programme *Who Do You Think You Are?* with David Dickinson and his difficulty in exploring his Armenian roots in Turkey. To provide a local element in the study, students look at Oswald Mosley who was born locally. To introduce this element, the song *The Ghosts of Cable Street* by The Men They Couldn't Hang is used to introduce Mosley and the 1936 Battle of Cable Street. This is used to show that anti-Semitism was not simply a German or continental European phenomenon.

There is also a strong focus on victims, bystanders and perpetrators. This gets students to look at events from alternative perspectives. For example, one sequence of lessons requires pupils to examine a deportation of Jews from these different perspectives and explore what happened and how people could have reacted. This is designed to get pupils to appreciate the complexity of the issues involved and is supported by a visit to the Holocaust Gallery at the Imperial War Museum. The final

task is for students to create their own exhibition about the Holocaust using only ten panels, as in a museum display. They have to justify their choice of materials and have to explain what it reveals about the significance of the Holocaust. It has been possible to draw on a number of useful resources. The IWM's teaching pack 'Reflections' is utilised a great deal, as are a number of web sites, particularly those of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum and Yad Vashem.

Informal feedback from colleagues in other departments suggests the unit is working well. Two PE and one Science teachers have reported having detailed discussions with pupils about the Holocaust and being amazed by the depth and quality of insight provided by these pupils.

At another school, Abraham Moss in Manchester, the history department follows the AQA Modern World specification, studying the Arab-Israeli conflict for both its coursework units. The scheme of work starts with an overview of the conflict from the early days of Zionism right up to the present, including the role of Yasser Arafat and the establishment of the Palestinian Authority. This provides a strong context in which to explore the issues relating to the conflict. Students are therefore likely to gain an understanding about how and why the state of Israel came into existence. They consider multiple perspectives on the issues covered and come to acknowledge the concerns that exist on both sides of the conflict.

Culpin (2005) offers guidance on planning to tackle modern conflicts in their historical context. Essentially he says that teachers need to provide factual context at the start (judgement comes at the end of the enquiry), look for the roots of the current situation, expect sources to be unreliable, expect several different points of view and to ask big "why" questions. The Schools History Project (SHP) web site also offers further advice on planning to teach controversial content, specifically looking at modern-day dictatorships. The question asked is: *How does the world deal with Rogue Rulers?* ([www.leadstrinity.ac.uk/shp/teach\\_guides/docs/MWS%20eight%20steps.doc](http://www.leadstrinity.ac.uk/shp/teach_guides/docs/MWS%20eight%20steps.doc))

As with other key stages, emotional engagement is necessary to challenge mindsets. The rigour of historical methods of enquiry is essential, but not powerful enough in themselves to necessarily overcome prejudice and stereotyping. Emotional engagement forms a significant partner in the structuring of activities. The use of local history, reconstructions, a focus on child labour and making deliberate links to the present is how one history department seeks to hook pupils' personal engagement.

As part of the teaching of Arab-Israeli coursework at Abraham Moss School in Manchester, students take on

the role of UN commissioners given the task of dividing Palestine in the late 1940s. They are reminded of the horrors of the Holocaust and the likely impact on world opinion. The students also consider how the survivors of the Holocaust would respond to the question *Why did I survive?* and how that might have impacted on the desire for a Jewish state. A timeline of events and information about who lived in the area and attitudes of different organisations, states and peoples are provided to help pupils consider the division of land. Given the predominance of Muslim pupils in the School and the existence of potential anti-Jewish sentiment or ignorance of Jewish culture, this task presents a complex challenge. The results are very interesting. The vast majority of students partition the land evenly between Arabs and Jews, even though the Jewish population was far smaller, and they establish Jerusalem as a neutral zone. The reasons pupils give for their decisions vary, but they are predominantly associated with the following: issues of fairness, acknowledgement of the suffering of the Jews in the Holocaust, a recognition that Jews had lived in the region for centuries before the Arabs, and a desire to find a solution where both sides could live in peace.

Another lesson at this school is designed to encourage students to appreciate the value of particular places to different groups. This is an important issue for students to understand as this is a source of much tension in the region. Starting with a local landmark, they are asked to write about what it meant to them, therefore establishing the idea that a sense of place is important and has different significance to various groups and that this significance can change or alter in intensity over time. With this idea established, students are then asked to explain what different places mean to the Arabs and Jews. This deepens pupils' understanding about the difficulties of finding a peaceful solution to the conflict.

The research of McCully and Pilgrim (2004) in Northern Ireland is also pertinent to the issue of emotional engagement elsewhere. Previous research there has shown that teaching history through purely empirical methods had not shifted the deep-seated prejudices and highly partisan communal versions of history brought by teenagers from the opposite sides of the religious and cultural divide to the history classroom. Within an empirical framework of agreed values and procedures, the researchers created two fictional teenagers holding opposing nationalist and unionist views of their common part. Classes began to explore the reasons why these surrogate teenagers might hold the views they do. This approach did not challenge the personal views of students head-on, but allowed two alternative narratives to be analysed in a way that was not personally threatening. They engaged with this approach and the researchers found it helpful in making more of a real impact on student thinking. It is possible the same approach might work in challenging other partisan histories.

However, debate and discussion need to be handled with care and skill. Other research into methods investigated by Short and Reed (2004) suggest that, in the case of the Holocaust, it is unacceptable for a teacher to adopt the role of the neutral chair. It may indicate that the teacher is indifferent to the event being discussed or could result in revisionist, anti-Semitic Holocaust denial being given an equal platform alongside mainstream historical debate.

Whilst emotional engagement is crucial, effective practice suggests that it needs managing carefully, although what this entails is itself controversial and has divided history educators. Brett (2005) sees the cultivation of moral outrage explicit in some topics as a way of promoting social and moral debate, whereas Haydn (2000) and Kinloch (2001) prefer more history grounded approaches.



## Case Study: The War on Terror

### Context

Kingsfield School is an 11–18 school in Bristol with over 1200 students on roll. Many of the pupils come from homes that are both educationally and economically disadvantaged. Its latest Ofsted inspection in 2003 rates the school as satisfactory, although the history department is described as very good. The school intake is predominantly white working class.

The history department follows the OCR Schools History Project. The department focuses on the War on Terror for one unit out of the two pieces of coursework that have to be completed. The decision to do this work was made in 2005, so the department is only in its second year using these materials.

When interviewed, the head of department said that *'7/7 happened and I can't not do this. I feel I have a responsibility'*. There is a clear sense that the topic is relevant, and particularly as the school serves a predominantly white intake that the students need to understand the multicultural world in which they live. The unit can bring home to students the importance of history in making sense of the world and help them to realise that, according to the head of department, *'history is about now and the future and the scariness that we are part of a chain of events'*.

### How it is taught

The department spends nine or ten weeks teaching and completing the coursework. The students explore the possible reasons for the 9/11 terrorist attack on the USA, covering areas such as al-Qaeda, long-standing problems in the Middle East, US foreign policy, emergence of militant Islamic extremists and the situation in Afghanistan and Iraq. In addition, they examine the aims and objectives of the War on Terror and are asked to consider whether it is likely to be successful.

To provide an initial starting point to the topic, students are encouraged to share their prior understanding as a class. The initial aim is to provide a chronological outline of significant events. On the surface this seems to be a very simple task, but students are then challenged to explain why each event may have contributed to the start of the War on Terror and/or to identify any questions that may arise.

A new approach to teaching in the department is the use of circle time or a community of enquiry approach. The purpose of this is to allow students to share their ideas in a supportive environment. They are encouraged to

express their views, and ideas are then open to debate, challenge or elaboration from other students in the circle. This is seen by the department as an effective way for all to contribute and have their ideas valued, as well as opening up a range of ideas and opinions where the pros and cons of different views can be considered.

The problem of resources was largely solved by devising materials drawn from the Internet and media current affairs coverage. There were sensitivities to navigate concerning copyright, provenance and student exposure to extremist views. The teachers writing the coursework materials had to commit themselves to extensive research in an area where they lacked subject knowledge with no subject specific in-service training or time given. This research was also necessary in giving teachers the confidence when countering strongly held student views. On occasions, it became essential to challenge student attitudes and knowledge. Many bring very little contextual knowledge to draw upon when studying the topic. Their views are shaped by current media coverage or family views. In a few cases, anti-Muslim prejudice needed challenging.

### Reasons for effectiveness

Student questionnaire responses have proved overwhelmingly positive. They commented on their new insight into the topic and their coursework grades, which appear to have boosted their confidence and self-esteem. The A level take-up of the subject was much better as a result of students having studied the coursework unit. The feeling from the department is that students are more engaged and interested in their work on this unit, and are able to make much greater sense of the issues surrounding the War on Terror. Alongside this, the department sees other benefits. The unit has been particularly popular with boys. Students show a greater sense of self-confidence in discussing issues. They show signs of becoming more independent learners and thinkers and there seems to be a real sense that the students are enquirers. The coursework grades achieved on this section are much higher than would be expected.

## Post-16

Emotive and controversial history is most effective at AS and A2 level when it is integrated into the broader, mainstream narratives of particular periods. A model for doing this may be women's history, which was itself emotive and controversial in the 1980s. Now, for example, it is possible to find the letters of Margaret Paston as an integral part of the documentary evidence for teaching the medieval period.

At the same time, students at this level engage more effectively with emotive and controversial issues if engaging with issues of more direct personal relevance rather than vicarious content. Foster, for example, (2004) contends that to study Civil Rights in America as a way of studying Black History for Afro-Caribbean students is a sop and less likely to engage them. Teachers might prefer this aspect of American history as being more comfortable, but the students are likely to be more engaged if focusing on issues such as the slave trade or the history of migration to Britain and the treatment of minorities in the 1950s as highlighted by Andrea Levy's *Small Island*. Lyndon's model of integrating black British history into the National Curriculum may be a useful one for post-16. For example, his work on Elizabeth's attempts to repatriate the Blackmoores in the 1590s could be used in the AQA case study on 'The problem of Poverty in Tudor England' (Unit 6W).

Some schools do, however, address American Civil Rights with success. At Netherhall School in Cambridge, the students are set the Edexcel specification and Civil Rights in America is one of the options chosen. Whilst there is an emphasis on preparing the students to succeed in the examination, the teaching and learning goes further than that. A method they use to conclude the unit is to ask the students to design a civil rights museum, which makes them focus on such things as:

- ◆ What are the really key issues and themes?
- ◆ Who are the key leaders and how do they compare?
- ◆ How best is the civil rights movement remembered?

This encourages the students to probe deeply and see the importance of interpretation and representation in history. It assists their understanding that history is complex and that it is largely a construct with reasons for the way that it is depicted and portrayed. The issues they address include the extent to which such exhibitions or museums are for commemoration, education, preservation or attraction. It might be assumed that this is a distraction or a pleasant way to round off the theme. On the contrary, the activity produces some high-quality

work demonstrating evidence of deeper thinking and recognition of the complexity and significance of the issues. Students give very serious consideration to the selection and they are forced to identify criteria for measuring significance and what matters — something that they claim helps them with their deeper understanding of other historical content.

AS and A2 history students need access to a variety of viewpoints and interpretations of the same events built into their courses. For example, Shrewsbury Sixth Form College teach slavery as part of the background to the British Empire in Year 13. Students access 'The Wrong Empire', an episode from Simon Schama's *History of Britain*, a newsnight debate on the rise of compensation/reparation for slavery and research web sites on the same issues. In Norwich, some A2 students use a range of sources to show Christian and Muslim perspectives on the Crusades. Books such as Thomas Madden's *The Crusades* also include articles by Arab historians.

Engagement also seems to be improved when the teacher manages debate and discussion effectively. Researchers and educationalists, such as Berg, Graaf and Holden (2003), identify a range of options to consider such as committed, objective or academic, devil's advocate, impartial chairperson and a declared interest role.

## Case Study: Russia in the 1920s

### Difficulties involved in the teaching

The focus in this case study is an example of a sensitive issue relating to Russian famine in the early 1920s. So much of the emphasis on Russian history focuses on the Bolshevik Revolution and the regimes of Lenin and Stalin. One example that is particularly sensitive though is the issue of famine that led to some cannibalism.

The emotive issues are obvious — it can depict human beings at their worst. The material can be very graphic and harrowing. Even students in Years 12 and 13 can be disturbed by these photographs, accounts, pictures etc.

### Context

One institution that confronts this issue is Horsham Sixth Form College in Sussex. The course is taught as part of the Edexcel A-level specification. Although the college has a varied intake, it has a history of successful results at AS and A2.

### How it is taught

Students are warned ahead of the lesson(s) that they will find the material harrowing and the warning is repeated during the lessons, in advance of being presented with photographs, accounts and other pictorial evidence. They are warned that they may be upset and that they are at liberty to leave the lesson or talk to staff afterwards.

The context of hunger and deprivation is usually conveyed through first-hand accounts, discussed in class and analysed for homework. The discussion centres on what the students would do in the same situation. The extracts are full of nasty detail that can be translated into exact quantities of bread, handfuls of bark/moss and torn clothes in class. It does give the students a good idea about what people ate.

The second lesson focuses on photographs and graphics of the period and these include starving peasants, cannibals and human remains as well as statistics. The visual resources tend to be discussed in relation to student information on other famines and instances of cannibalism. The photographs include a cart with corpses, a family with the children in tattered clothes, the cannibals with the body parts around them. The lesson tends to take a scientific, practical and legal direction about famines and cannibalism. Students go away with an extract from *A People's Tragedy* to read in advance of the next lesson.

The third lesson contrasts the historical account with a short extract from a dubbed Russian film, which deals with the famine in an objective fashion. The reasons,

worth and morality of the commentary are discussed. The topic ends up in a formal debate, for example, 'Sometimes the ends justify the means: the famine of 1921 was an unfortunate, but necessary factor in the survival of Russian Communism.'

Until 2006–2007, this unit was spread across two terms. It was allocated less time per week than the other two units. Key Skills assignments were also offered within it and used it to support the source and essay-writing skills for the other units. The approach has now changed. This unit is taught by two members of staff and confined to the Spring Term. Up to three lessons are justified in that the famine links up with the destitution of War Communism and turmoil of the civil war. The sources and photographs apply to all. Famine is analysed with reference to government policies, war and disruption. The debate also has a wider implication, combining with the Communists' teleological arguments.

### Reasons for effectiveness

The college considers that the emotive and controversial issues are addressed successfully. The students engage with the topic and are judged to emerge with a greater understanding of the issues. The graphic and disturbing nature excite opinion and judgement, and the students admit the images and accounts are memorable and thought-provoking. The questions about the photographs, which are beamed up on a big screen, always elicit a balance between morbid interest and thought-provoking concern.

It helps students understand the processes and tentative nature of history, especially when confronting questions such as:

- ◆ Why are the man and his family dressed in rags?
- ◆ Why is the family assuming this position?
- ◆ What has happened to their home?
- ◆ Why is the mother's hand extended?
- ◆ Do the cannibals/flesh traders' expressions attest to their state of mind?
- ◆ Why are children particularly vulnerable?

It might be natural to assume there would be some complaints from parents, other staff or students, but this has not been the case. There are also opportunities to link the past with the contemporary world with students discussing similar and different situations in places such as the Sudan.

# 6

## Latest historical thinking on some emotive and controversial issues

### Britain and the Slave Trade

Between 1640 and 1807, the British carried over 3 million Africans into slavery in the West Indies. This forced migration created a shared history, but one in which dispositions of power and wealth were highly unequal. It also nurtured slave resistance and, ultimately, public outrage and abolition. Tensions over the ownership of this history still remain stark and provoke major controversies about its interpretation. The increased presence in Britain today of people of African descent — one of the legacies of transatlantic slavery — gives added significance to such controversies.

Controversy is intrinsic to many aspects of slave trade history. One surrounds the racial structure of transatlantic slavery. This differentiates it from most other histories of slavery. It provokes arguments over the meaning of race and the impact of racism in shaping patterns of exploitation in the modern world, including Britain. A related issue is the impact of the slave trade on Africa and African identity. Although the numbers of Africans taken to the West Indies may be estimated, the total number affected by the slave trade in Africa is incalculable. Some guess 50 million or more were affected; others assume much lower figures. For some historians, notably John Fage and David Eltis, the slave trade's impact on Africa was localised, but for some scholars of African descent, notably Walter Rodney and Joseph Inikori, it provoked widespread and long-lasting devastation, amounting to something akin to the Holocaust and, together with later European colonisation, laid the foundations of Africa's current poverty.

Where Africa and Africans lost, Britain gained from the slave trade. How much is contested. Debate centres on the relationship of slavery to one of the most defining changes in British history, the Industrial Revolution. Often considered marginal by economic historians, slavery was given centre place in British industrialisation by the West Indian scholar, Eric Williams. He pointed to the large profits made from slavery and the links between Liverpool, Britain's slaving capital, and Manchester, the

cradle of the factory system. Arguments that slavery underwrote modern British wealth fuel demands from groups of African-Caribbean descent for an apology and reparation by Britain to all the slave trade's victims, past and present. Prime Minister Blair's 2006 statement of regret about the slave trade was deemed inadequate by such groups. It was seen as unwarranted by others who noted that slave-trading was legal until 1807 and involved partnership with African traders.

Similar controversy surrounds British abolition of the slave trade in 1807. For a century after 1807, the mainstream view was that abolition was the outcome of religiously-inspired political action by enlightened heroes such as William Wilberforce. This argument was challenged again by Eric Williams. He argued that slavery was in economic decline by 1807 and that abolition involved essentially a re-calculation of Britain's global commercial interests linked to free labour and free trade. This challenge to the moral roots of abolitionism was reinforced by Williams' fellow West Indian, CLR James, who emphasised the impact of slave resistance on emancipation. This contest for the soul of abolitionism is reflected in recent biographies of Olaudah Equiano and William Wilberforce, as well as the forthcoming film about Wilberforce entitled *Amazing Grace*.

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- HS Klein, *The Atlantic Slave Trade* (1999)
- J Walvin, *A Short History of Slavery* (2007)

## The Russian Civil War and the Period of the New Economic Policy (1917–1928)

### Current research issues and historiographical background

The Russian Civil War never generated a level of debate among Western scholars to match that surrounding the October Revolution of 1917. A degree of consensus was reached that the Bolsheviks were triumphant in the war largely as a consequence of the political ineptitude of their major opponents, the Whites (led by ‘Supreme Ruler’ Admiral A.V. Kolchak). That notwithstanding, however, that a notable feature of Western scholarship was its tendency to emphasise the military leadership of Leon Trotsky as head of the Red Army, perhaps as a deliberate counter to Soviet scholarship on the subject that ignored or maligned Trotsky’s contribution in the aftermath of his expulsion from the Soviet Union in 1929; or, perhaps, out of an innate sympathy for his famously grizzly fate. However, certain issues have been contentious. Recent studies by Swain and Mawdsley cite October, or even August, 1917 as the beginning of the Civil War, thereby implying that the struggle was not forced upon the Bolsheviks by ‘counter-revolutionaries’ and the ‘imperialist’ intervention in Russia of the Allies, but was deliberately fostered by Lenin in order to consolidate Soviet rule and to destroy all moderate-left alternatives to Bolshevism. Following on from that, increasing attention has been paid recently to the fate of the ‘democratic’ alternatives to Bolshevism. Accordingly, the Red–White struggle has been de-emphasised in Western writings.

In post-Soviet Russia, by contrast, the Whites have generated a not always very wholesome, even neofascist, following. Hagiographical lives of the White leaders have been published in droves and their use of terror against their opponents (Bolshevik, socialist and liberal) has been downplayed. Symptomatic of this were moves by right-wing organisations to have Kolchak officially rehabilitated: a regional military court denied such a request in 1999 and the Supreme Court refused another in 2004. Nevertheless, monuments dedicated to Kolchak have been erected in St Petersburg (2002) and Irkutsk (2004), while an Irkutsk brewery produced a ‘Kolchak’ beer in the 1990s. Much patriotic emotion and concomitant Bolshevik-bashing was also generated in Russia by the reburial (1998) and canonisation (2000) of the murdered tsar, Nicholas II, and his family.

The late-Soviet (Gorbachev) period unsurprisingly produced a wealth of scholarship in both Russia and abroad on supposed ‘alternatives’ to Stalin and

Stalinism, with particular attention paid to the ideas of N.I. Bukharin (executed 1938, rehabilitated 1988), the champion of the mixed-economy NEP. Interestingly, though, an influential strand of Western scholarship has developed that takes a starkly different approach, seeking to demonstrate the degree of popular, working-class support that Stalin enjoyed in ending the NEP and instituting the collectivisation of agriculture in the late 1920s.

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## The Holocaust

**The Holocaust** is the most commonly used term (although others prefer the Hebrew word '**Shoah**' which, unlike Holocaust, does not have connotations of sacrifice) to describe the systematic, state-sponsored persecution and murder of Jews during World War II. After coming to power in Germany in 1933, the Nazi party placed persons persecuted on ethnic, racial or political grounds into **concentration camps** in Germany. As Germany occupied other countries in Europe during World War II, persecution broadened and intensified. It was the period 1942–1944 that saw the largest number of killings as millions of Jews were transported from across occupied Europe to specially constructed **death camps**, the largest and most famous of which was Auschwitz-Birkenau, where over 1 million Jews were killed by poisoned gas in 32 months. By the end of the war, Nazi Germany and their collaborators had killed around two-thirds of the pre-war Jewish population of Europe. The exact number will never be known, but historians estimate that between five and six million Jews were killed during World War II as part of an intentional extermination policy.

Despite overwhelming evidence to the contrary, some have queried these figures, with so-called **Holocaust deniers** seeking to downplay the numbers of Jews killed or the extent of Hitler's knowledge of the Holocaust, motivated by a racist extreme right-wing agenda and a desire to rehabilitate Hitler and the Nazis. Perhaps the most recent infamous case is that of David Irving, who lost the libel case he brought against the historian Deborah Lipstadt in 2000, who had accused Irving of being a Holocaust denier. Irving hit the news again in 2006 when he was imprisoned in Austria, which is one European country that has made denial of the Holocaust as being a criminal offence. The recent conference hosted in Tehran in 2007, which gave a platform to Holocaust denial, points to its importance in the Arab and Muslim world, given the perception of the links between the Holocaust and the justifications for the establishment of the state of Israel.

Although in broad agreement about the numbers killed, historians still debate the precise timing of the decision to initiate a European-wide policy of mass murder, although most see the decision to kill Europe's Jews being made in the summer or autumn of 1941, and would suggest that Hitler and the Nazi elite played a critical role in the radicalisation of anti-Jewish policy. It is clear that anti-Semitism was a central plank of Nazi ideology, but many historians suggest that it is overly simplistic to explain the Holocaust in terms of anti-Semitic ideology alone. In particular, in explaining why individuals chose to kill Jews, one prominent historian, Christopher Browning, has argued that they did so for the most ordinary

of reasons — peer pressure and a desire for career advancement.

Historians have pointed to the complexity of motivations behind the killings, as well as to the complexity of the events themselves. In many countries, the Nazis were helped by native collaborators. Some members of the local population (often described as **bystanders**) saw the persecution of the Jews as a chance to settle scores or enrich themselves. Others sheltered Jews; most did nothing. The Jewish victims themselves responded in a variety of ways to the increasing pace of persecution. In the city of Warsaw, thousands fled the ghetto (closed residential district) and hid outside its walls. In 1943, the small number of Jews, remaining in the Warsaw ghetto after the majority of the ghetto population had been transported to the death camps, staged an armed revolt against the Nazis.

Although the Holocaust is a term used specifically to refer to the Nazi persecution and murder of Jews, many other victim groups both within and outside of Germany were targeted by the Nazis on ethnic, racial or political grounds. These included Poles and Russians, Gypsies, homosexuals, Jehovah's Witnesses, those deemed 'asocial' or 'inferior', and perceived political opponents of Nazism. Most historians would see the murder of Jews as distinctive given its systematic, Europe-wide nature, but it is important to acknowledge that not all victims of Nazism in the period 1933-45 were Jews.

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#### Web sites

[www.ushmm.org](http://www.ushmm.org) has a range of excellent resources, including many specifically aimed at teachers  
[www.yadvashem.org](http://www.yadvashem.org) has a wide range of resources, with a particular focus upon victim perspectives

#### Books

Debórah Dwork & Robert Jan van Pelt, *Holocaust. A History* (London: John Murray, 2002)  
Elie Wiesel, *Night* (London: Penguin 2006)

## Teaching emotive issues concerning Muslim history

This short note highlights some emotive and controversial issues related to Muslim history in order to facilitate the teaching of this subject.

To begin with, a teacher may find that the very idea of history can be a point of misunderstanding in the class. For many Muslims, as for their counterparts in other religious traditions, human history is enveloped by a sense of the sacred, an attitude summarised in a Qur'anic formula, "Truly! To Allah we belong and truly, to Him we shall return" (2:156). Set within this context is the image of a pious history of Islam that millions of Muslims live with and which many students bring to the class. The critical historiographical tradition when applied to the history of Muslims, and which the school curriculum may draw upon, often yields results that may clash with this image.

One topic where this clash is clearly visible is the Qur'an. The Qur'an is the most sacred book for Muslims. It is accepted as the Word of God, given to the Prophet Muhammad and through him to the community of Muslims. On the one hand, there are scholarly attempts to place the Qur'an in history through the application of historical and textual studies. This exercise raises questions about the compilation and the making of the Qur'anic text. The proclaimed results of such research have sometimes been offensive to some Muslims. In response, there has been an effort by Muslims to establish the authenticity of conventional Muslim claims about these same issues. The image of the Prophet and the details of his life are equally sensitive. The recent cartoon controversy can also be seen as a reflection of different understandings of the idea of history.

The understanding of the evolution of Muslim history is another area where controversy may occur. The defensive stance of many scholars leads them to overplay the unity of Muslim historical experience with regard to values, beliefs, institutions and norms. Students would also often have this understanding of Muslim history. The actual historical experience of Muslims was, however, a fascinating mixture of rich diversity of opinions on almost all significant issues — doctrinal, rituals, philosophical etc. — that were held together by an underlying reference to foundational sources of Islam, the Qur'an and the Prophetic model. Perception of the *Sharia* is an example. While many consider the *Sharia* to be a divinely ordained code of life, it is in fact a historical institution that developed and continues to evolve through debates and writings among Muslims.

The past is not another country in Muslim contexts. Rather, many contemporary tensions are viewed in

Muslim societies through a reference to historical experience. Thus, the feeling of siege that many Muslims feel vis-à-vis the conditions in Palestine, Iraq and Afghanistan, supplemented by their perception of cultural invasion through global media, is often seen as the continuation of the Crusades and the colonisation experience. In countries with Muslim minority, episodes like the destruction of the Babri Mosque have often reinforced the feeling of alienation from society at large in the minds of Muslims. The efforts of goodwill through aid and NGO work are often washed away by the re-enactment of historical memory through a continued sense of injustice in contemporary times. In this regard, it is interesting to note that about a century ago many in the mainstream Muslim leadership did not carry a hostile attitude towards Europe; rather there was a sense of admiration and desire to engage with its scientific and social achievements. Therefore, it is important that while discussing extremist tendencies in some Muslim contexts, attention must be given to the wider social and economic realities that form their backdrop.

Finally, it can be noted that scholarship of Muslim cultures, past and present, is in transition. Shifts can be noted in terms of research methods (from predominantly philological to increasing application of social science and humanities), themes (from political and doctrinal focus to social and cultural history), geographical reach (from Arab-Persian centric to encompassing all regions with Muslim presence) and participants (from Europeans in Oriental Studies to a multinational enterprise). The result is a vibrant field of study that is both deepening its conventional subject matter and experimenting with fresh perspectives.

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# 7

## Main recommendations

If the teaching of emotive and controversial issues in history is to be more extensive and effective, it is axiomatic that the status quo will not lead to that eventual outcome. Many of the opportunities and examples of good practice need to be communicated more effectively and the impediments addressed through relevant actions. It has to be recognised that not everything can be done quickly and without resources, although some can. It is also the case that no one group has sole responsibility to bring about improvement. Individual teachers and support staff, subject departments, schools, local authorities, higher educational institutions, the DfES, QCA, awarding bodies, publishers, the media and the wider community all have a role to play.

A number of these recommendations apply across the whole 3–19 age range. The main ones comprise the following.

- 1. Give more attention to the teaching of emotive and controversial aspects in initial teacher education and through continuing professional development**  
Ofsted and others have pointed out that the professional development available in history is generally limited as schools devote scarce training resources to other areas. The new standards provide greater encouragement for ongoing training and development, but the importance of this dimension needs to be made explicit and given high-level support, even to the extent of an entitlement that all teachers have for sustained and continuous professional development. It also has implications for those responsible for training potential and existing teachers in this area, for example, those in ITE, advisors and consultants, advanced skills teachers and excellent teachers who will need support and guidance to assist them in their work. This support needs to embrace subject knowledge and pedagogy and be available in different formats such as distance support through journals, web sites such as QCA's *Innovating with History* and Teachers' TV, school, network, local authority and regional support as well as through higher-education accredited programmes such as the Postgraduate Professional Development (PPD) initiative. Research shows that there are effective ways to manage and promote high-quality classroom discussion, but it needs further development even with experienced teachers.
- 2. Ensure that the teaching of emotive and controversial issues is a whole school issue and not an aspect addressed sporadically through individual subjects**  
If such issues are taught piecemeal, at best, the impact is lost and, at worst, students confused. Schools as a whole need to consider a strategy for teaching emotive and controversial issues within the context of the Every Child Matters agenda and its own aims and values. It needs to be considered as part of an overall rationale for the whole curriculum and curricular organisation with history's contribution being considered within that broader context. Within this context, however, it is important to ensure that sufficient time and status are accorded to history to provide the time and resources for emotive and controversial issues to be addressed effectively.
- 3. Plan themes and approaches to ensure that emotive and controversial history is taught in a coherent way**
- 4. Provide teachers with both encouragement and guidance to improve teaching and learning of emotive and controversial history**  
This would include guidance on how teachers can improve emotional engagement to address the thoughts, values and feelings of others, how they can address historical interpretations and multiple perspectives, how they can address explicitly student misconceptions and perceptions and how they can devise better enquiries, activities and questioning approaches including the investigation of links between historical issues and modern-day parallels. More guidance and encouragement is also needed with regard to the teaching of local and community history. **Teachers also need to be encouraged, rather than penalised, for encouraging debate and risk-taking in the classroom and schools given support when facing challenges from parents and communities.** Such approaches need to be given specific endorsement by those monitoring schools including Ofsted.
- 5. Improve the range and quality of resources available to allow schools to introduce a more varied and relevant curriculum for their students**  
In part, this means providing incentives for

resource providers to move beyond the current, safe mainstream themes to consider producing resources that make an impact. Official endorsement of such approaches, new QCA schemes of work and coverage in new specifications are likely to help this process. Nor is it enough simply to produce new resources.

**Better ways need to be found to communicate the range and effective use of such materials.** To supplement the commercial market, it is likely to be necessary for resources or sponsorship to be provided for online or other types of resources that can assist schools in teaching emotive and controversial history.

**6. Improve the research and evidence base related to the teaching of emotive and controversial history**

This project has hopefully provided a starting point, but it has unearthed the need for more high-quality research, for example, on what the issues and concerns are of different individuals, families and groups and which need to be understood by those teaching history. This should include an investigation of the ideas and perspectives of students, teachers and parents' attitudes towards the teaching of emotive and controversial issues in history including the relationship between personal, community and school history. The research should also extend to pedagogical aspects such as what the characteristics of progression are with regard to emotive and controversial issues so that teachers and schools can benchmark progress against national criteria.

## Recommendations for specific key stages

### Foundation and Key Stage 1

Teachers and others can improve the teaching and learning related to emotive and controversial history by:

- ◆ placing more stress on the differences between people and their lifestyles, such as homes and customs;
- ◆ planning for structured play-based activities, where appropriate;
- ◆ helping children to make links and connections between what they already know;
- ◆ using story to explore issues;
- ◆ focusing more on speaking and listening including planning activities for talking in a variety of contexts, in supporting children's talk and providing alternative models of discourse;
- ◆ making distinctions between different answers to enable children to learn about different ways in which questions may be answered;
- ◆ encouraging children to explore different points of view and to explain the points of view that they have;
- ◆ discussing any disagreements or inconsistencies with children that they find in the answers they have given;
- ◆ modelling talk including specific phrases and vocabulary and responses to different sorts of questions;
- ◆ considering the different roles of the teacher in developing children's appreciation of the issues (the neutral chair approach, the balanced approach and the stated commitment approach);
- ◆ making more use of the personal histories of others in different parts of the world, both past and present;
- ◆ giving more thought to the useful links between subjects including citizenship and human rights education and planning for progression across different curriculum areas;
- ◆ talking more to families to ascertain their views, aspirations and attitudes.

### Key Stage 2

Teachers and others can improve the teaching and learning related to emotive and controversial history by:

- ◆ drawing out the opportunities for emotive and controversial topics in the areas of study that most lend themselves to this approach, including using ideas related to the Romans, Anglo-Saxons and Vikings to undermine assumptions and prejudice about modern-day natives and immigrants or how ideas from elsewhere have influenced British development such as in Tudor times or through discussing issues of right and wrong during World War II, the contribution of different groups such as women and allied soldiers from outside the warring countries or the tensions relating to evacuation of children;
- ◆ ensuring that resources give a balanced and realistic image when teaching Key Stage 2 themes such as stressing the multicultural dimension with invaders and settlers. For example, there were black troops stationed on Hadrian's Wall and that Egyptians were black;
- ◆ using the opportunity to introduce historical fiction to support the teaching of emotive and controversial issues;
- ◆ making best use of the opportunities presented by new curricular freedoms such as the new revised Framework including avoiding history-flavoured literacy.

### Key Stage 3

Teachers and others can improve the teaching and learning related to emotive and controversial history by:

- ◆ supporting all attempts to avoid the marginalisation of history at Key Stage 3 by defending its need for a secure place with sufficient time and a key role at the heart of a humane curriculum that empowers students to develop their own attitudes, values and identities;
- ◆ giving explicit attention to firing students' curiosity and imagination, moving and inspiring them through the dilemmas, choices and beliefs of people in the past and making the subject relevant through consideration of how the present has been influenced by the past;



- ◆ providing more opportunities to study the students shared colonial heritage and their investigation of the histories of different cultures and civilisations;
- ◆ improving awareness of the sensitivities involved in teaching themes such as the transatlantic slave trade and the Crusades;
- ◆ demanding better resources to address emotive and controversial issues. Whilst the Holocaust is generally well-resourced, it is currently a different picture for the British Empire, Islamic history and the history of other cultures;
- ◆ investigating the perceptions and issues, particularly in relation to England's Muslim communities;
- ◆ integrating black history into mainstream teaching.

#### Key Stage 4

**Teachers and others can improve the teaching and learning related to emotive and controversial history by:**

- ◆ ensuring GCSE specifications have more support and guidance, including better highlighting of significant content and considering whether weight should be attached to assessment objectives with regard to debating emotive and controversial issues, such as analysing multiple perspectives and why competing views and interpretations exist and still matter. Consideration might also be given as to whether students should use sources to explore controversial issues;
- ◆ supporting the rationale and elements of the OCR GCSE Pilot as a model for constructing future specifications;
- ◆ considering whether internally set work can provide effective ways to explore controversial issues in depth;
- ◆ taking advantage and extending the scope of specific training and development opportunities such as the Imperial War Museum Holocaust Education Fellowship Programme;
- ◆ demonstrating that there is a need to develop and publish materials that are not solely targeted on the needs of the examination;
- ◆ improving opportunities for lower-attaining students through encouraging them to engage with emotive and controversial issues such as through entry-level courses.

#### Post-16

**Teachers and others can improve the teaching and learning related to emotive and controversial history by:**

- ◆ supporting better signposting of the opportunities in AS/A2 specifications to engage the students with emotive and controversial issues in existing specifications;
- ◆ ensuring better comparability between specifications and options with regard to emotive and controversial issues;
- ◆ supporting a higher weighting given to the issue of significance and interpretations at AS/A2, which allows time to develop an appreciation of the controversial elements in specifications;
- ◆ encouraging a greater role for the personal study or other forms of internally designed work with regard to emotive and sensitive issues;
- ◆ taking advantage and extending the scope of specific training and development opportunities, such as the activities of the Holocaust Education Trust with its seminars and visit programme to Auschwitz.

Some of these recommendations can be addressed fairly quickly, whereas others are long-term and depend largely on planned reviews. The following summarises the recommendations above by separating some of the more straight-forward and immediate from some of the still necessary, but long-term suggestions.

#### Short term

1. The Government and key agencies, including QCA and Ofsted, reinforce the importance of the teaching of emotive and controversial history;
2. Give more attention to the issues and strategies in initial teacher education;
3. Provide more opportunities for teachers to access training and ideas as part of their continuing professional development including at external courses and through distance learning such as the QCA's, Innovating with History web site;
4. Provide guidance on the strategies for addressing good practice outlined in the key stage specific recommendations above;
5. Commission the production of resources for schools and training including web resources and through Teachers' TV;

6. Provide guidance and support on planning the teaching of emotive and controversial history as a whole school/curricular issue;
  7. QCA produce more schemes of work where emotive and controversial issues are addressed explicitly and where historical issues are linked to modern-day parallels;
  8. Communicate the range of resources more effectively, which can support the teaching of emotive and controversial history including the existing fellowships and visits;
  9. Commission more research into the issues, perspectives and concerns held by different individuals, groups and societies, including the relationship between personal, community and school history;
  10. Devise criteria for progression with regard to emotive and controversial issues, so that teachers and schools can benchmark progress against national criteria.
7. Develop strategies that allow all students, including the lower attainers and the gifted and talented, to address emotive and controversial issues in challenging ways;
  8. Alter the culture in schools so that risk-taking and debate are encouraged and teachers feel supported and confident about engaging all students emotionally and challenging perceptions and misconceptions;
  9. Work with publishers and others to improve the range and quality of resources;
  10. Consider opportunities for effective work linking different curriculum areas to improve the knowledge, skills and understanding with regard to emotive and controversial issues.

### Long term

1. Consider the benefits of an entitlement for history teachers to sustained continuous professional development;
2. Devise courses that allow teachers to be accredited through developing their understanding and skills with regard to the teaching of emotive and controversial issues such as through the Postgraduate Professional Development initiative;
3. Require schools to have a rationale for the teaching of emotive and controversial issues, which is monitored such as by Ofsted and by others such as the School Improvement Partners;
4. Ensure that history has the status and time in schools to enable justice to be done to the teaching of such issues;
5. Make the importance of teaching emotive and sensitive issues more explicit and prominent when reviewing the National Curriculum, GCSE, AS/A2 or other specifications;
6. Evaluate the lessons of the GCSE Pilot in terms of

# 8

## Acknowledgements

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