

Year 5 and Year 6 at Nettlebed Community Primary School, Oxfordshire, responding to 'Frog and the Stranger'

Dorothy Wyatt, class teacher with a combined Year 5 and 6 class

'Paint your waggon': Making Gypsy waggon models

"I asked the children to work in pairs and look at the model waggon. They should consider the intricacy, comfort factor, and how the waggon works, and to replicate it in their own way. Importantly, I didn't want them to draw a design, as I felt this would 'kill' the enjoyment of the activity. There were a few false starts, when pairs jumped into the task without thinking it through, but basically children worked well together and were cooperative and absorbed in working together.

Over a period of four days we spent about three hours, with a third of the class working on their waggons at any one time. I am satisfied that we covered several curriculum areas, including speaking and listening, art and design and technology, maths (including measurement, spatial awareness where children are visualising and carrying out their plans, and repeating patterns), and PSHCE.



What was important was the discussion that came out of this work. For example I asked the children who they thought might live in a caravan. "Gypsies, Travellers, Hippies" were the main responses. The discussion was positive, and children had been looking at caravans when they went to the circus and local fair.

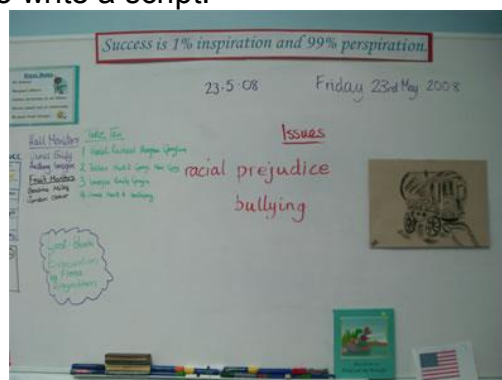
I was very pleased with the children's responses, how they worked together and am delighted with their work. You can't get this level of response from children unless they are stimulated, and Michael's show and artefacts provided the initial excitement that fired their enthusiasm."

Discussing issues from Michael's performance, and developing themes in Drama

"After Michael's performance and workshop with my class, I took Max Velthuis' book, 'Frog and the Stranger' home to look at closely. I had in mind to do some improvised drama work with the class. The book lends itself to being broken up into discreet scenes, and I divided the story into scenes and made notes.

The next day I read the book to the class, and we looked closely at the characters, their personalities, their feelings and their prejudices.

I divided the class into small groups and gave each a scene to act out. Some were able to ad lib, while others wanted to write a script.



When this was prepared we sat in our groups in a large circle in the hall, and acted out the drama. Whether they were ad-libbing or acting from a script, the result was the same: all the children put their heart and soul into what they were doing.

I think it was important that we didn't decide to perform it as an assembly, or to share it with another class, as this would have made it into a performance, and we would have lost some of the essence of what we had created."

(For more information about Max Velthuis and his work, see <http://books.guardian.co.uk/print/0,,5082518-110738,00.html>)

... and Literacy

"I went to the Oxfam website

www.oxfam.org.uk/education/resources/bullying/ and adapted their ideas to meet the needs of my class, so we could focus on the aspect of bullying that is a central theme of the book.

We shared the book again, and looked particularly at how Rat was as a character, and how he responded to Pig's hostility. Rat seems to epitomize for Pig all the cultural prejudice that there is against rats in general. Yet in this story he emerges as the hero, even though he was part of a disliked group.

I asked the class to produce newspaper articles, including descriptions of the fire in Pig's house, with interviews with witnesses, and comments about pig's personality. I also suggested they write articles for the local parish magazine, letters to the newspaper editor, and a letter to the local MP.

This work took a whole day, and I was delighted with the responses. Children of all abilities were fully involved, and showed that they had a deep understanding of the story, the characters, and most importantly the issues addressed in the book.

Yes, this was a Literacy activity, but above all it was a way that the children could express creatively what they had understood about these important issues."