

Talk4Meaning

Storytelling with a difference...

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A JOURNEY AROUND THE WORLD WITH THE GYPSIES AND TRAVELLERS

Children at Woodlands Special School in Harrow were treated to two days of exciting music and storytelling activities, to celebrate Gypsy, Roma and Traveller culture. Woodlands is a special school in the London Borough of Harrow, catering for primary school children with severe and complex learning needs, including autistic spectrum disorders. To celebrate Gypsy, Roma and Travellers' History month, the school asked storyteller Michael Jones to work with all the children in the school.

With help from Alexandra Georgaki, the school's Music Therapist, and Hilary Coombes from Harrow Traveller Education Service, Michael prepared a feast of Gypsy music from around the world, to reflect the journey of the Gypsy peoples that started from Rajestan 1000 years ago.

Each class started off in the school lobby in an improvised 'van' and then 'travelled' together to the music room, where they began by using percussion instruments to accompany Indian music. As the session progressed the children and staff visited Spain, Turkey, Hungary, Romania, the Balkans and Ireland, using instruments from various themed music boxes. As the 40-minute session came to a close, the children caught the plane back to India, where they had the chance to relax to a sound of a Hindi lullaby.

Michael spent a day preparing the rooms, selecting the music and working with staff and children to ensure that everyone got the maximum benefit from the activities. Each session was different, to reflect the children's needs and interests. Adults were as much involved in responding to the atmosphere as the children, with a member of staff treating classes to an impromptu Lebanese dancing session, a teacher singing a classic from the Gypsy Kings, and Spanish staff helping the children dance and clap to the Flamenco music.

Adults and children were highly responsive, and here are some of the teachers' comments:

"Great variety of resources, music and sequence of events. We all enjoyed it very much, taking part in exploring the music and dance, the instruments and the fabrics. The session was very well tailored to the needs of the class. The strong elements of music and dance worked very well with the whole group. It was great to have two classes together, (including children from the primary school next door). Michael created good dynamics, and it was a fun afternoon for everybody. This has given me a great idea for what we can do in our class, especially using music to reflect the children's cultures and interests."

Michael Jones... Storyteller with a difference

