

History at Clifton Primary School

Subject lead: Peter Sawyer

Intent and rationale

“The past is a foreign country; they do things differently there.” — L.P. Hartley

The intention of the history curriculum at Clifton is to engender in our children a sense of understanding of themselves and our world through comparison and contrast with the lives of past peoples and cultures. We aim to develop the children’s sense of the past as a direct influence on us and as an ongoing story of its own.

Moreover, at Clifton we see the study of history as a vital component in developing the children’s critical thinking skills. In a world where information and misinformation are often presented with equal weight, it is essential that children are taught to weigh up evidence and examine the reliability of different sources with a healthy sense of rational scepticism.

At Clifton, we follow a topic-based approach for teaching history. Key stage 1 pupils have the chance to learn about significant events and people from the past such as the life and times of Rosa Parks and the Great Fire of London, through topics like ‘People from the Past’. They also develop their sense of the past through looking at more recent changes in people’s everyday lives in topics such as ‘Time Travellers’. Key stage 2 pupils add to this learning by studying pre-1066 British history and have the opportunity to contrast this with studies of Ancient Greek and Egyptian cultures, as well as looking at later periods of British history, such as the Victorians in Year 5’s ‘Time Tunnel’ topic.

Children are also taught to appreciate the rich local history all around them in Birmingham and Balsall Heath itself. Year 3 take part in a history walk around the local surroundings, contrasting the modern day Balsall Heath with that which was photographed by Janet Mendelsohn in the 1960s. Year 6 learn about the bombing raids that affected the Balsall Heath area in World War 2. Through showing this direct link between their local area and historic events, we aim to instil a sense of community and heritage.

Historical vocabulary is a vital part of our history teaching here at Clifton. As children progress through the school, their knowledge of the historical structures and concepts will be continually reinforced and enriched, building on their previous knowledge and making connections between different historical eras.

We endeavour to develop the children’s historical understanding, both from a point of view of knowledge of historical people and events and in terms of analytical and deciphering skills. We want them to be able to understand their place in history and what came before them. We will develop their knowledge and skills progressively as they move through the school, in line with National Curriculum requirements, and also in a way that sets them up for future historical learning. Children will be engaged in an exciting and fascinating history curriculum that will encourage them to be able to learn and understand history in an independent and self-motivated manner.

Implementation

At Clifton Primary School, we have developed our history curriculum in collaboration with all teaching staff to ensure progressing in learning from one year group to the next. Enquiry and interpretation skills increase in complexity and depth as students progress through the school. Chronology has also been made a major focus of our teaching and learning. Full coverage of all statutory historical eras has been ensured, as well as plenty of opportunities for studying local history. Historical vocabulary is also given careful consideration at Clifton. Our progression in terms of what vocabulary is taught when is clearly laid out for teachers and the constant referral back to previously learnt terms allows for embedding and deepening the understanding of certain historical concepts. Key stage 1 children learn about monarchs, such as James I being targeted by the Gunpowder Plot. This leads to later learning about Roman emperors and Egyptian pharaohs.

We encourage children to approach history from a variety of angles. Children are given regular access to a variety of sources, ranging from primary written sources (from the period being studied) and later historical writing, to photographs, paintings and artefacts from the past. Through this, children are taught to consider what information can be reliably learnt and to analyse what this means in the historical context. It is also key that children are taught to approach certain sources with a critical eye. When using ICT resources to research a topic, children are taught to sort reliable and safe sources of information from counterfactual and/or unsafe material, which is also in line with our school e-safety approach. Teachers will ask probing questions of children to encourage them to think more deeply about what can be learnt from a source.

Children are given many chances to ‘experience’ history at Clifton Primary School. Year 5 take part in an annual Victorian Day, where Victorian dress codes are observed and the teachers adopt the working styles and mannerisms of 19th century teachers. During Year 2’s famous people topic, the children have the opportunity to dress up as a famous historical figure for the day and are encouraged to research, and share information about their person. Year 4 is visited by Professor McGinty, who brings the history of the Egyptians to life! Teachers at Clifton will demonstrate an enthusiasm for history, modelling to children a zest for historical knowledge and showing them how fascinating a subject it is.

In their history learning, students at Clifton are given the opportunity to apply their history learning in a variety of ways. In line with our focus on developing the children’s oracy skills, pupils in different year groups may deliver presentations to their classes on information they have collected about events or people or in response to specific historical questions. Children are also asked to write about what they have learned, for example in the form of biographical pieces or arguments for and against a question. Cross curricular links are also established with English learning where possible.

Teachers at Clifton have high standards for learning in history lessons. All children are expected to make contributions in lessons and effective formative assessment is used in lessons, through the form of open questioning. High quality presentation in books is also non-negotiable in history lessons and this is checked through regular monitoring.