

Teaching and learning approaches for different audiences

As with any other subject USI has found that different audiences have different needs. Formal and informal learning audiences will have varying expectations: school sessions require a specified set of learning outcomes while family groups may simply come across a learning session during a museum visit. Devising the appropriate content of any session is dependent on the individual nature of collections and varied expertise of staff. However, some key recommendations are as follows:



We have found that active learning is a very useful way for young people to understand the full extent of this history. Interspersing physical work to demonstrate the facts of the history can be very powerful. For example, we have worked with the archive of a local jazz dancer and had workshops leaders use his style to illustrate ways in which movement and dance were often used as a secret code by the enslaved for non-verbal communication. Allowing students to understand these aspects in active ways helps embed the learning.

Museum Senior Education Officer

Before a learning session, clearly establish the ground rules for the session, including an explanation for why ground rules exist.

Museum Exhibitions Manager

Ask yourself why you and your organisation are tackling the subject. What can you and your resources (collections, expertise etc.) contribute that others can't? And understand your own audiences and how they might respond.

Museum Exhibitions Manager



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Teaching approaches



- Piloting sessions before making them a definite part of a museum learning programme will provide an opportunity for review and modification.
- Offering a range of sessions/modules with a specific focus and delivery style, to support various learning needs, will enable museums to meet audiences' expectations.
- Providing pre-visit material for schools can be vital in setting the tone for an on-site museum session. This will give teachers the time to introduce students to the main components of the history and discuss the sensitivities; particularly the brutality, subjugation and racism. Pre-visit preparation would ideally be obligatory.



For teachers: Do your research – there's plenty of material to help you and just do it – talk to colleagues and seek advice from professionals. It's too important to avoid and it may open up whole new ways of working and enable a more open and honest dialogue in the classroom.

Museum Learning Manager



A key recommendation is to always consult your audience. From our perspective in education, working closely with teachers has ensured that our learning programmes are relevant and meet the needs of staff and students who will be using them.

Museum Education Officer

- Suggesting post-visit approaches for schools can enhance and extend the learning experience and support further discussion and debate. Such opportunities can also provide students with space to express their emotions.
- Offering suggestions for cross-curricular schemes of work for KS1, 2 and 3 sessions will enable teachers to develop projects with students beyond a museum visit.
- Devising a set of ground rules and a safe space for discussion and debate is imperative. Audiences should be clear about the dignity of the history and understand that respect is a necessity, particularly as many of the issues involved are relevant today. For example, it is important to make the distinction between recounting/reciting an historical viewpoint about race and expressing a modern opinion: in short, what was acceptable then is not acceptable now.



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Teaching approaches

- Teaching this subject to children under ten years of age needs to be carefully considered. USI partner museums have been developing modules which introduce a younger age group to the themes, history and legacies which surround the transatlantic slave trade. These include justice; what is fair and unfair; African traditions such as masquerade and storytelling; and living in multicultural Britain. This approach provides a context without exposing them to the disturbing parts of the history. It can also work with families.
- Peopling the history – presenting biographical data and including information on historical landmarks that are linked to the transatlantic slave trade – prevents the history being perceived as something abstract. Making specific references to any connections in an audience’s local area can also broaden the scope of what a museum offers.
- As well as developing empathy as a response to learning about this subject, other key learning outcomes should include building critical thinking, research and analytical skills. Engagement, discussion and debate need to be anchored in a thorough and sound understanding of the subject, as with any historical or contemporary issue.

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I have seen genuine inter-cultural debate and dialogue, and have personally come to see this as all our history rather than differentiating or polarising it into black history. I have begun to see signs of the subject becoming mainstreamed. It has made me personally realise there are so many legacies and so many perspectives that bring to bear that you cannot be all things to all people; but by bringing these together it starts to become inclusive rather than divisive.

Museum Education Officer

