

Understanding Slavery Initiative

How should primary school teachers approach using objects relating to this history with young children? (Video transcript)

Speaker: Jean Campbell

Time-code	Speech
00:00:08	Primary aged children are not psychologically equipped to deal with learning from objects of violence. That said, most museums have got a whole wealth of objects that can enable younger learners to get a grounding in this history. A foundation to their learning in this history.
00:00:32	For example, here's an object. What is it? Let's ask some questions. Remember, we use questions to engage with the objects. It's part of the handling of it. What's it made of? Well, it's definitely made of metal. What's it look like? Well, I really don't know. It looks a bit like an object of torture, doesn't it? But I know it's got a fancy design on this, and something has to happen.
00:00:58	It's a bit like a... pincers, aren't they? But if I tell you that it's in fact a sugar nipper, and it would have been used along with your sugar cone, which is how sugar was presented for use. In the 17th and 18th century, you would nip a little bit of sugar. So you'd see these gorgeous pictures of well-to-do ladies at their tables with their sugar cone on the table and their nippers to nip off a bit.
00:01:32	So here we have an object. Most museums will have one of these that are teaching the history. Very important object for students to engage with and find out about. Then we have this object. This object is a manilla. They were made in their millions in Britain for trading in Africa for people.
00:01:59	In fact, the very large sized ones, the queen-sized ones, which is the same shape as these, were equivalent of one person. Now, would you say that to young students? I would say, you don't need to go that far with students. But you can introduce them to this object without telling them the meaning of them in its deeper sense in relation to trading for people.
00:02:25	But they can get to know it in terms of an object that's used for trade, and the same goes for all the other objects I have I'm going to show you here. This is a tobacco twist. This shows students... a lot less people smoke now, but they may not know that tobacco is a leaf, and that they're bound together. And this is how they'd have been transported.
00:02:50	And then later on they're unwound and they're made into, well, if their dads are very rich, they'll smoke cigars. Here we are. This is a cocoa pod. Cocoa beans come in here. This is where cocoa comes from. Young learners can begin to understand about the nature of trade, that trade goods come from one place to another; that people have to grow these crops.
00:03:22	The sugar cane has to be grown. Essential foundation learning to this subject. They can find out about that from... they're very young. The same thing goes for this. What is this? What does it feel like? It has soft parts on it. It's also spiky. Most students and a lot of adults wouldn't know that this, in fact, is a cotton plant. This is where cotton comes from.

00:03:53	In the handling session, the questions you'd be asking students... is you'll be asking them to very gently feel here. They'll notice that it's sharp and spiky. Imagine you had to harvest millions and millions of those. That'd be quite difficult, wouldn't it? So you'd keep the thinking about it quite simple. But you'd make a relationship between this cotton and what they're wearing.
00:04:15	What's their t-shirts made of? They'll tell you it's made of cotton. They can see the link between the cotton and what they're wearing. The same thing, if the table has got a tablecloth on, what's the tablecloth made of? It's made of cotton. These are foundation learning to this history. Again, a key crop, key economic drivers of the transatlantic slave trade.
00:04:41	And the students have been introduced to this as part of the building blocks programme, which has been designed for primary learners. So through the exploration of the objects, from the production, the growth of the sugar cane, right through to a form that they will recognise. Here we have a bag of sugar, or a sugar cube.
00:05:12	So the students understand not only that this is key, a key area of the history of transatlantic enslavement, this is why enslaved people were transported to grow mainly this crop. But they are learning that there is a link between exploitation of people in order to grow and produce goods for consuming by people in another part of the world.
00:05:43	Foundation learning, very little ones can start to understand that. They also begin to understand about fair trade. And this sometimes enables students to understand about human rights from thinking about fair trade. So they're the kind of the linking lines that go... a link between these objects that relate to the history, but also relate to their everyday life.
00:06:07	And this is what you're doing with using these objects for younger learners. It's very important when you... when we're using objects like this that we have a whole range of other sources of information. For example, here is an image showing... these people actually are post the time of transatlantic enslavement, but not long past that.
00:06:27	But you see they're in a sugar cane field. Now, it's very difficult for students to get the idea of sugar cane growing. But if you have an image like this, they will instantly see the connection between this object and the crop that is growing here. So broadening, widening their understanding using the handling object, and then enriching that with texts and objects.
00:06:53	And making the connection with their everyday lives and things they're used to is... just makes absolute sense in learning with this approach.