

BELONGING PROJECT: POVERTY & PUNISHMENT WORKSHOP

Materials Required

Archive resources (viewed during visit to Gloucestershire Archives)
Pens and paper

Aims & Objectives:

to encourage study of archive material relating to the historical experience of poverty and punishment in Gloucestershire, and to encourage reflection and comparing / contrasting to modern experience. To encourage imaginative creative responses in an archival context.

Introduction

1) Play main ‘POVERTY & PUNISHMENT’ intro film

2) Archive Study

Participants are encouraged to explore the resources and discuss them as a class or in groups.

Warm up exercise: Group oral task

ACROSTIC ‘GLOUCESTER’ POEM

This is mainly an ‘out loud’ exercise; the whole group discussing possibilities and contributing, with the workshop leader writing it up, either on a large sheet or on the whiteboard.

Introduce the concept of ‘acrostics’ (they should be familiar with them by yr 5/6); that you will write a poem using each letter of a word as the starting letter of a line. Lines can be long or short; the best is a mixture of both. They can be sensible or silly or, again, a mixture of both. THERE’S NO RIGHT OR WRONG!!

If wanted, the ‘acrostic’ idea can be introduced by getting participants to write one using their own name.

Write the word GLOUCESTER, in capital letters, vertically down the left hand side of the board, and then elicit lines from the participants.

You could read out this example, and then encourage them to do better, with their superior local knowledge.:

Golden sunsets over the Severn
Lots of good Indian spices
O so much better than Cheltenham
U can buy food from all around the world
Cathedral’s big, innit?
Eastgate is one gate and westgate’s another
Seems everyone prefers rugby to football
T
Everything
Right, that’s enough Gloucester.

3) Play WORKSHOP film, pausing as necessary.

The exercises are summarised below for reference, or in case the workshop leader wishes to run it themselves and not use the film.

Exercise 1: LETTER TO A PRISONER poem. (Individually, or working in pairs)

Participants to research names of prisoners from the archives. And their crimes and punishments and ages and as many other details as they can find.

(for my poem, I chose Edgar Kilminster, Gloucester's youngest prisoner. Participants could do the same)

Participants are going to write a 'letter poem' to their prisoner, from them 'now'- ie, it's a letter from the future. The idea is that they are going to send 'their' prisoner five things that will make them feel better, and make their life easier. Each of the five things is going to be tied to one of the senses- so, in effect, they're sending their prisoner a sight, a sound, a taste, a smell and something to touch. The final one- the 'something to touch'- is the only one that should be an OBJECT- a real, tangible item that will help them. As it's different to the 'abstract' other senses, and will probably be longer with an 'explanation', then it should go last as a nice twist. The other senses can go in any order. Here's my example poem:

Dear Edgar

Dear Edgar

I am sorry to hear
that you are in prison

And from the future
I will send
the sweet 'n' sour fizzy taste
of a big bag of haribo
the smell of a just-fried KFC
the sound of your cell door opening forever
the sight of Gloucester prison being knocked down
and a big metal plate
to shove down your trousers
and stop the sting of the birch

Title the poem 'Dear XXXX'

And then the line: 'I am sorry to hear you are in prison', or some other 'opener' of their own devising.

Using a repeating motif- such as 'the smell of', 'the taste of', 'the sight of'- can help give a nice rhythm, very simply.

Exercise 2: MAIN EXERCISE

IF WE RAN THE WORKHOUSE.

This can be done individually, or in pairs or small groups. As usual, creativity should be encouraged; if they want to ‘run with it’, let them! It’ll result in far more varied work. The following framework will however result in a satisfactory ‘poem’, even if the participants only add a few words / ideas of their own.

The idea with this piece is for participants to explore the workhouse experience in the archive from as many angles as they can, and then to imaginatively address some of these angles in a humane and considerate way. Start with a group discussion about the workhouse, and the historical experience of poverty in general. Is it fair? Should there be more fairness? Should people be helped, or punished?

They will then write a piece that is, in effect, a list poem ‘manifesto’ for how they might run things differently. Stress that it CAN and indeed SHOULD be fanciful and unrealistic and over-the-top; no-one is asking them to do cost-analysis- this is a colourful cry from the heart, a song for a better world. If they want to ride golden unicorns to the moon as part of a welfare package, then ride them they shall!

So, we’re looking for six verses. They don’t have to be as ‘involved’ as the ones in the example below, but do encourage use of good, rich, specific language and vivid description. And let them go where they want to go- they should enjoy doing it!

If We Ran The Workhouse

If we ran the workhouse
above the door would be written
‘Help not Punishment’

If we ran the workhouse
everyone could wear what they like
but waiting for every person
in their room would be a brand new t-shirt
that said ‘champ in the making’

If we ran the workhouse
everyone would wake up to the smell
of fresh coffee and a waiter
would appear at the door
waving a breakfast menu
that gleamed like pure gold

If we ran the workhouse
everyone would have a soft bed
and a sofa big enough to stretch out on
and on gold-fringed cushions
would be written ‘be who you want to be’

If we ran the workhouse
then it would be a holiday
from having to worry about money

it would be a place to dream
to gather your thoughts
to plan your next move
to get to feel strong again

If we ran the workhouse
then if people ask why?
We'd say 'because you're worth it'

1) Title 'If We Ran The Workhouse'- or a suitable line of their own ('The day the kids took over', for instance)

This line will be repeated at the beginning of each verse

2) A slogan for your revolutionary accommodation. Could be above the door, could be on a flag, could be tattooed on everyone's hearts, whatever the writer decides...

3), 4) and 5) Three verses, each of which addresses a particular 'angle' of workhouse life. In the example poem, we've dealt with clothes, food/drink, and furnishings. There could also be, for instance, exercise, socialising, punishment, work, daily routine, health, visitors, etc etc
Encourage them to really go 'out there'; this is as much about encouraging kindness and empathy as anything!

6) What it's all about. In this verse, participants are encouraged to elaborate on their manifesto, to put their philosophy in a nutshell. You might want another class discussion before participants tackle this verse.

7) If We Ran The Workhouse, then if people ask 'Why?'... is the opening line to this, which is the cue for a snappy summing-up of their attitude toward making a better and happier experience for people. It could even be just a repeating of the 'slogan' from the first verse.