



CASE STUDY

Sandford Award Criteria 4

There is attention to good management and administration concerning all aspects of the visit

At the Shire Hall Historic Courthouse Museum teachers are offered pre-visit guided tours to familiarise them with the building and facilities.

Shire Hall Historic Courthouse Museum, Dorset



Executed for arson. Transported for asking for fair pay. Given six months hard labour for stealing clothes. 200 years of justice, injustice, crime and punishment are brought to life at Dorchester's Shire Hall Historic Courthouse Museum. The new immersive museum enables visitors of all ages to explore the history of law and order, as well as past and present efforts to achieve justice for all people.

The Session: Dorset's Child Criminals – Key Stage 2

Exploring history, law and British values through the lives of Victorian child criminals

Walking in the footsteps of child prisoners Elijah and Harry

Entering the foreboding courtroom was a breath-taking moment for children and adults alike and its impact should not be underestimated. Once the children were seated in the public gallery the Learning Manager explained that this was a museum of the stories of everyday people rather than of objects, and that this was a real courtroom, not to be confused with American or cartoon versions of the same name!

She explained that during their visit the children would be detectives, collecting and using evidence taken from original documents and records to discover how the lives of two real children - Elijah Upjohn and Harry Parker - had been changed after the crimes they had committed had brought them into this very courtroom. Then the children returned to the Learning Room where, working in small groups, half the class researched Elijah's story while the other half looked into Harry's. They examined photocopied sheets from newspapers and prison registers and looked at photographs to find information about the boys' crimes, trials, sentences and punishments.

Discussion and debate

The Courthouse Team moved around the tables, supporting the children in their research by helping them to decipher Victorian handwriting, to find the meanings of words with which they were not familiar and to read statistical information from the registers. They also asked pertinent questions and encouraged discussion and debate with the children where and when appropriate. The children had ten minutes to assess each of the four sources of evidence before they filled in worksheets to record their answers and then summarised their findings to share with the class. Led in this by the Learning Manager the children were also encouraged to consider whether the boys' punishments were fair, whether they would have led them to lead a better life and how similar offenders might be treated today.

After a short break the children were divided into two groups. One group visited the museum and the cells where Elijah and Harry had been held, and then re-visited the courtroom where court procedure was explained in greater detail. The other group was given wooden dolly pegs, glue sticks and a selection of fabrics with which to make peg dolls, reminiscent of the sorts of toys played with by the two boys and their many siblings. The children took these back to school at the end of the morning.

Breath-taking moments

Each group experienced re-entering the building, as if by the back entrance, and going down to the cells. These were breath-taking moments for the children. Some children were clearly moved by what they saw and what they learned about being held in custody

in such unpleasant and depressing surroundings. Climbing up the steps from the cells and into the dock showed them just how frightening it was for Elijah and Harry (and many others like them) when they appeared not only before the judge but also before rows of spectators from all levels of nineteenth century society. Finding one of the volunteer Team suitably dressed and be-wigged, in the judge's seat, created a memorable impression, and the children's attention did not waver as he explained how a trial was conducted and the roles played by the occupants of various seated areas of the courtroom. Lives were changed irreversibly by the events that took place in this building.

What impressed the Sandford Award Judge?

Exploring primary sources to uncover the lives of real children

'There is no question that the children were engaged, informed and inspired throughout their visit to Shire Hall Historic Courthouse Museum. From their arrival at the grand entrance to their descent into the cells and emergence into the dock in the Courtroom they were drawn into finding out what life was like for children who lived at a different time in history as they took part in a morning of activities that were well planned, well paced and varied. Although the historic children, Elijah and Harry, came from nearby towns and were of similar age, they were alive at a time when society and justice were unlike anything we know today. Using primary sources to uncover the lives of real children, evaluating that evidence and then presenting the findings was skilfully managed by the very professional and experienced Courthouse Team.'

Harry and Elijah – what was their fate?

'The changes in tempo and learning styles - studying documents, making peg dolls, re-visiting the courtroom and visiting the Museum and cells - kept the children focused and mentally alert, ready for what was coming next. Especially interesting was the opportunity provided by the doll-making activity: the children were able to go back in time, to be creative and to have some time to talk amongst themselves about the lives of the two boys whose life stories they had discovered earlier in the day. The Learning Manager concluded the morning's activities by using further documentary evidence to relate what ultimately happened to Harry and Elijah, adding that research into them and their descendants is still on-going. This was very effective and a fitting way to end the morning.'

Attention to good management and administration

Booking arrangements

'All aspects concerning the management and administration of the visit were well planned, clear and helpful. The Learning Manager handles all enquiries and bookings and liaises directly with teachers to identify teaching and learning objectives, and to match and/or adapt them to the formal education programmes provided by the site. As this is a new museum, in the first year of its opening, it is strongly recommended that teachers make

a pre-visit. This includes a guided tour of the museum and its facilities, the chance to discuss any particular needs or requests and the opportunity to tailor the programme if required.'

'Teachers are also asked to supply information about children who have any special needs or mobility issues to ensure that suitable planning and preparation can be made well ahead of the visit. Upon confirmation of the booking a detailed programme and timetable, covering learning objectives, curriculum links and activities for the day, is sent out to the teacher. Accompanying this is an exhaustive and very helpful information pack, together with a thorough and very detailed risk assessment document.'

Welcome and orientation

'The Learning Manager and the Courthouse Team of four volunteers welcomed the class of 30 Year 4 children at the very impressive grand entrance to the Courthouse. Once inside the building the group moved quickly to the Learning Room where, after an introduction to the Courthouse Team, and a short explanation of housekeeping details (about fire drill, evacuation and visits to the toilets), the children left their coats and bags and were escorted to the courtroom.'

'The Learning Manager and the Learning Volunteers carry radios both for necessary contact and to ensure a smooth transition as groups move from one activity and/or part of the building to another. Careful time keeping by the Team ensured that each group had sufficient time for each activity before changing places.'