



CASE STUDY

Sandford Award Criteria 1

The education programmes are delivered in a way that engages, informs and inspires visitors.

Here's how the Learning Officer and volunteers at The Workhouse National Trust used immersive role-play and enquiry based activities to inspire and enthuse a class of Key Stage Two pupils.

The Workhouse National Trust, Southwell, Nottinghamshire



The Workhouse was built in 1824 to house the poor and destitute of 49 parishes around Southwell. It was designed to be “a hospital for the infirm, an asylum for the aged, a school for the young, but a terror to the idle and dissolute!” The interpretation of The Workhouse is set in the 1840s, this being an important phase in workhouse development and a period of great social change.

Session Description: The Victorians – Key Stage 2

Discover how the poor were treated in the 1840s and what life was like for those in The Workhouse.

Morning tour: To the Workhouse!

After receiving an introduction to The Workhouse and walking up the paupers' path, pupils are immersed in a role-play experience. Set in the year 1841, they meet characters from The Workhouse's past and experience the strict segregation of the building.

Girls and boys don workhouse uniforms and enter The Workhouse by different doors. They are then registered by the Master and Matron and meet the pauper inmates before their guided tour of the building. Their classroom knowledge and skill with a slate pencil is tested in a typical Victorian school-lesson, led by a strict Workhouse teacher.

Afternoon workshop: Who were they?

Information Gathering Workshop (suitable for Years 5-6). Pupils explore The Workhouse and gather information from genuine workhouse sources including the punishment book, local census and dietary record. This information is used to build a portrait of a child inmate and to help understand what life was like for children in the workhouse.

What impressed the Sandford Award Judge?

Pre-visit pupil preparation

'The learning activities are organised around two experiences however the site ensures student engagement before they even arrive. 'Pauper identities' are sent to schools at least a week before a visit so that students are allocated a role and learn the details. This ensures that, depending on the support given by the school to this process, all students arrive knowing about one former [child] inmate and are curious to find out more. When questioned on arrival, it was very clear that the students were very familiar with their roles and eager to discover the life they had experienced in the workhouse.'

Morning activity: To the Workhouse

'There are two dedicated education rooms that are light, warm and welcoming. The first is used to prepare the students for the morning activity ... where they role-play entering the workhouse in 1841 with [their] previously notified identity. The girls are dressed in pinafores, shawls and bonnets, all produced by a dedicated group of volunteers, who have thoroughly researched the topic. The costumes are clean, sturdy, and efficiently stored so the process is as quick as it can be.

The efficient briefing, costuming, introduction of the costumed volunteers and move into the environment of the workhouse ensured the students were effectively "transported" to the 1840's and provided a perfect setting for the students to learn about the workhouse, life at that time and empathise with their character.

The in-role facilitators are all volunteers, taking the roles of The Master, Matron, School teacher, and Paupers. Their costumes are excellent and their performances are well researched, responsive and engaging. They enhance the student experience and through careful question and answer they test prior knowledge, impart new information, develop an empathetic response from students as they lead a session in the schoolroom and tour the workhouse.

The building itself is outstanding. The schoolroom, dormitory and cellars are equipped with furniture to ensure students can imagine life in the 1840's in the workhouse. The workhouse is open exclusively to education groups in the mornings. This ensures that the student experience in-role during the morning is authentic, carefully managed and uninterrupted by members of the public.'

Afternoon activity: Who were they?

'The second room is used for the afternoon workshop. For this activity ... the students are in their own clothes and gather information from sources. The room is well equipped with new tables, chairs, storage facilities for the resources. The resources are effectively presented in folders, each including laminated print outs of census returns, punishment book, dietary details. All the resources are clean and efficiently managed.

The afternoon session ... was engaging and informative because it combined the emotional investment that the students had achieved during the morning's costumed experience and the source-based enquiry into the actual events of the characters' lives. Students were fulsome in their answers about the day, extolling the range of the things they had learnt, the insight they had achieved into the possible feelings of their characters and enthused by the experience, to the extent that they were inspired to ask more questions that could form the basis of future work in school.'

How did the workshop engage, inform and inspire?

'High quality teaching led by experienced volunteers, resulted in outstanding learning and engagement for all students. The range of experiences, including an immersive, in-role, costumed tour of the workhouse and lesson in the schoolroom. This was followed by an enquiry-based activity adding historical evidence to supplement their empathetic understanding ensured that this programme delivered an educational experience that could not have been replicated in a classroom.'