



# CASE STUDY

## Sandford Award Criteria 5

*Educational resources and facilities are provided which enhance the quality of the learners' visit*

At the Tower of London experienced and convincing costumed interpreters engage pupils with historical information about this unique primary resource.

### **Tower of London, London**



When William the Conqueror built a mighty stone tower at the centre of his London fortress in the 1070s, defeated Londoners must have looked on in awe. Now nearly 1000 years later, the Tower still has the capacity to fascinate and horrify. As protector of the Crown Jewels, home of the Yeomen Warders and its legendary guardians, the pampered ravens, the Tower now attracts over three million visitors a year. Here, the Ceremony of the Keys and other traditions live on, as do the ghost stories and terrible tales of torture and execution.

## **The Session:** Imprisonment, Execution and Escape - KS3; Knights, Castles and Kings - KS1

### **Inspiring awe and wonder at the Tower**

The strength of a learning session at the Tower is that children experience history where it happened and interpret the heritage, both built environment and landscape, onsite. Being able to touch the place where history happened outdoors on the visitor route, meet historical characters and ask questions enables children to experience awe and wonder.

### **KS3 Imprisonment, execution and escape**

In this clearly structured session, KS3 students heard exciting stories of the Tower's dark Elizabethan history. This included discovering where Kings and Queens slept and died; the Crown Jewels were kept; Walter Raleigh was imprisoned and many other historical facts. They were encouraged to question why people were in trouble for being the 'wrong' religion and investigated the spaces used as Tudor prison cells. They considered whether it was possible to escape and were guided around the Tower to investigate the unique conditions in which Elizabethan religious prisoners lived and died.

The Past Pleasures costumed interpreter seamlessly introduced Tower related themes and encouraged the children to move around the site, following him to different locations where he shared interesting information. He quickly established a rapport with the children and initiated their curiosity. The session was very well paced and engaging.

### **Encouraging curiosity and reflection**

Students were particularly curious to find out more about the conditions for prisoners in the Tower. They used words to describe what they thought the environment was like: salty, cold, vacant and dirty. Their perceptions were challenged when they discovered that noblemen like Walter Raleigh experienced very comfortable conditions. The costume interpreter skilfully and physically moved students around to ensure they stay focused. Children were taken on a journey in the footsteps of history. For example, to demonstrate religious upheaval, they were made to reflect and think via a game of football analogies that involved them swapping sides in order to discover ways in which people were affected by religious laws in Tudor England.

They applied new knowledge and understanding to find out about life for prisoners in the Salt Tower. They examined graffiti on the walls and were both fascinated and concerned when they found out about different methods of torture. They interpreted signs and symbols in the graffiti (stigmata) and were able to reinforce the point that the Tower was a comfortable space for prisoners when they spotted a fireplace and glass windows.

The interpreter kept their focus in a very busy, cramped room, as he shared the story of Father John Gerrard a spy who was tortured in the Salt Tower but escaped using invisible

orange juice as ink. There were times when it was difficult to move in rooms due to the volume of tourists and the interpreter had to use various strategies, including skilful questioning, to hold the pupils' attention, which he did successfully. The lead teacher was very impressed and felt that he kept them together very well. Children said that it was "10 out of 10. A great tour" and "It's important to come here to learn about our heritage and discover what people lived like." The majority of children were surprised to learn that the cells were "nicer than we all thought."

## **KS1 Knights, Castles and Kings**

Pupils were transported back in time to a world of knights, castles and kings. The interpreter, in character as the knight Sir James, captivated them with true tales and myths from the Tower's colourful history. Children learned about the chronology and how the site changed over time, the Tower's use as a castle and what life was like for a medieval knight. They were visibly inspired by stories and myths linked to the Tower.

### **Interpretation techniques**

Their favourite parts included being initiated as pages and then knighted with a traditional oath in King Edward's bedchamber. The interpreter's techniques included repeating new concepts and words, showing his broad sword, establishing the timeline and acting out relevant scenes, e.g. getting the guards drunk in order to plan a great escape. Some of the children were getting tired but he paced the session well and sat them in front of the White Tower. Once they were comfortable, they were entranced and engaged finding out stories about the Tower and were able to concentrate with full focus for around twenty minutes.

### **Questioning and participation**

The interpreter's talk contained an effective balance between asking questions, imparting information through storytelling and participation. For example, to enable understanding, he made relevant comparisons to everyday life e.g. comparing the Shard as the tallest building in contemporary London to the Tower, which was the tallest building in the past. He asked: "why were the White Tower's steps made of wood?" and helped the children to work out that they could be set on fire to prevent enemies entering the fort. To involve them in the story of a daring prisoner escape in a barrel of wine, he had them toasting with a wassail and rubbing their bellies in drunken delight! They were, of course, delighted to find out that part of the successful escape involved him falling on a pile of sewage outside the Tower's walls!

The highlight was going to a King's bedroom to learn to be a knight and discovering that at their age they would learn to be a page and the art of chivalry. Choosing classmates to take on roles of Lady Sophia and her ladies proved very popular and all the children were included in bringing her food. This was the fourth time that the teacher had brought her class as it "is very informative and covers exactly what we would like the children to know about." She described the talk as "very interactive and fully engages the children...they were almost hanging onto the speaker's every word!" The children were very interested in the facts they found out and many said that it was the best part of their day at the Tower.

## **Educational Resources and Facilities – What Impressed the Sandford Award Judge?**

‘Experienced and convincing costume interpreters from Past Pleasures deliver the sessions. They had a clear sense of purpose and were able to impart a huge amount of historical information in an engaging way. They expertly shared many facts about the Tower’s history with the children and encouraged them to ask questions and participate in activities to discover more from this unique primary resource.’

‘There is a wide range of learning and education programmes including object handling, dressing in costume and a new object-based learning handling session with real artefacts devised by a curator. The Learning and Education Programme Managers are continually evolving and developing the programme to ensure it is of the highest quality and effectively meets teachers’ needs. The aim is to give the children a “call to action” to encourage problem solving and finding creative solutions so that they make meaningful decisions.’

### **Teachers’ resources**

‘Teachers’ resources highlight specific curriculum links so that sessions are tailored and relevant. [The website includes] quality historical resources, video material, an image library, downloadable teachers’ notes, biographies of key individuals and a chronology of events.’