

Foam Timeline Chronology Activity

Introduction:

This activity helps children build up a 'Big Picture' of the history they have studied. It can be used very effectively to encourage them to see how everything fits together, and to explore *similarities* as well as *differences*. Whenever you finish one period you can easily refer to the preceding one. Over the whole of Key Stage Two this helps pupils to build up their own coherent picture of the past.

Chronology is often tricky for pupils. History can appear to be a series of disjointed units studied almost randomly. This activity can help pupils make sense of it all, by showing *how* and *when* things fit together. We all know learning best takes place when it builds upon existing knowledge. Building up their own chronological map of the past helps to do this. It is essential that pupils are encouraged to see links and patterns between the topics they are studying.

At the simplest level, chronology is about sequencing events. Hadrian's Wall comes before the Antonine Wall in Scotland, for example, when studying the Romans. If I can sequence these events then I can begin to understand Roman Britain. The foam timepieces for each topic can be used in this way, and the dates on the rear of each event help overcome uncertainties.

To develop a real chronological understanding however, sequencing events is not enough. Duration is also important. Many pupils think, for example, that the Romans left Britain and the very next day the Anglo Saxons arrived. This is where the blank foam timepieces come in. Pupils can insert blank pieces into their sequence to show how far apart each event was. You can use each blank piece in a flexible way - they might be used to represent a year, a decade, or even a century. This provides a great opportunity to develop appropriate historical vocabulary. You can encourage this with questions like 'how far apart do you think these events should be?' It is common, for example, to ask whether the Vikings were raiders or settlers. Initially, from around the raid on Lindisfarne in 793AD, they were raiders but, increasingly, after the arrival of the Great Heathen Army in 865AD many settled. It is only by understanding the passing of time that pupils can begin to make sense of these distinctions.

So far, we have only talked about using the foam timepieces for one individual topic. Another aspect of chronological understanding is how the different topics pupils study sit together. Which comes first? Where is there an overlap? As each topic is finished, you can use another set of foam timepieces to build up a comprehensive timeline. Asking questions about events that happen at the same time - for example building Stonehenge and the Pyramids, - helps pupils fix in their own mind what was happening elsewhere and how they fit together. How are they similar? How are they different? What are the links and patterns?

This is a very flexible resource. It can be used at the end of each topic as a recap/test activity. It can also be used cumulatively after a sequence of topics, to help pupils to see how events fit together. It can then be used at the end of Key Stage Two to reinforce learning and discover just how effectively pupils have built up their own 'Big Picture' of the history they have studied. It is a fun activity with a very serious purpose.

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