

Case Study

Poetry Workshop for
Teachers

Beer Quarry Caves

The Jurassic Coast Teaching School Alliance



Working in collaboration with
The Poetry Society

The aim of this resource is to encourage teachers to inspire students to work with poetry on a given cultural education theme

How to:

Organize a poetry workshop using the poetry society

The Idea:

Having had previous meetings across the Teaching Schools Alliance we discussed what type of CPD would be helpful for teachers to develop projects that focused on Cultural Education. We agreed that our local Beer Quarry Caves would be an ideal stimulus for us to work on.

On meeting with the head of English at the Woodroffe School, the Director of Arts discussed what was required to launch the project. Inspiring students to engage with poetry became our focus and we contacted Lucy Wood at the Poetry Society in London for advice. We discussed different poets that she knew who were experienced in specifically working with teachers. We researched them on line and selected two

to come and run a workshop, which were Mandy Coe and Paul Hyland. We also liked the work of a third one, Greta Stoddart. When we contacted Greta she wasn't keen on leading a workshop but was very happy to be commissioned to write a poem on our topic, the Beer Quarry Caves. We agreed to pay her to write her own poem and we then asked if she would come into school after our yr. 8 students had all visited the caves and had spent a day off timetable producing their own poems.

We discussed with Lucy the idea for the work to be based on our local quarry as the stone from the quarry was used to build Exeter Cathedral, which we felt would provide us with rich and diverse material to inspire the students. The quarry cave also was the hiding place for bounty from

THE WOODROFFE SCHOOL
Uplyme Road
Lyme Regis, DT7 3LX

PHONE
01297 442232

WEB
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smugglers, providing sanctuary for priests in the reformation and above all the home to one of Europe's largest bat colonies.

The tour guides enjoy relating stories that date back from Roman times through to growing rhubarb and mushrooms during the 2nd World War. So we knew the wealth of material available should be ample to inspire the students to write.

The outline:

Having discussed our project with Lucy she considered the outline of the workshop from her experience of encouraging teachers to participate and create work within the session rather than just sitting back and listening to poets. It was important that the teachers were put in the same position as the students were going to be in and Lucy was very clear about the ratio of teachers to workshops leaders to generate the best results. We were anticipating approx. 30 teachers from our local schools so Lucy recommended we had 2 practitioners.

We then discussed how the workshop would be structured. Lucy suggested a short plenary from Mandy Coe, who introduced her own work and background as a poet, she read some examples of her work and then talked about how she would work with young people on a variety of starting points to get them started with writing poetry. Her work was very light hearted and fun, which was immediately engaging and would be very suitable to be used with younger students. In contrast we then had Paul Hyland speaking about his work as a travel writer and poet, who has vast experience writing about the Jurassic coast and Dorset. It was evident that Paul's work was better suited to the older and age range.

Both poets were engaging to listen to, and both had very different styles which was interesting when the group had to divide into two groups as the majority of the women teachers gravitated towards Mandy and all the men worked with Paul.

Securing commitment

Once we had our agenda we devised a poster, which we sent out to the 24 schools in our alliance. As we knew it would be difficult for schools to release teachers for a whole day we decided to hold the workshop from 1-00pm until 5-00 which would involve less expense for the schools regarding cover.



As we had the funding from the DfE we didn't charge for this workshop however if we repeat the idea we would have to cover the costs of the poets by charging the delegates. We do hope, however that having run a series of successful workshop that are free we will build up a reputation for providing high quality CPD opportunities that our local schools will continue to support.

Drawing up the plan

We devised the plan with advice from Lucy Wood from the Poetry Society along with the Head of English at The Woodroffe School. We had already agreed that we would be taking the whole of our yr. 8 on a visit to the caves and that we were going to have a day off timetable called "Everybody writes" to encourage all students across the year group to engage in creative writing for the day. We were including any sort of writing from poems to plays, to documentaries or flights of fantasy with the visit to the quarry cave as the starting point.

Securing the funding

Our funding for this workshop had been provided by a cultural education grant from the DfE, however in future we would select local poets who would be less expensive and as we now have a very clear idea on how to best organize an event such as this, we wouldn't need the lesson ideas that the poets created for us.

The cost of the poets including travel, overnight accommodation and expenses, plus their lesson plans and resource material came to approx. £2,000.

Resources

The most significant resource is teacher time and commitment and this should not be underestimated. This kind of project will take up a lot of your time – but it will be worth it.

We hope that with the work that the students generate we can hold an evening performance with parents buying tickets. At present we have an evening planned at Exeter Cathedral to include recitals of poetry and performances of music composed after visiting the caves.

How not to upset other staff

The planning for this project began 6 months ahead in November 2013 at a meeting where representatives from English, Art, Music and Drama departments from Secondary schools along with Primary colleagues brainstormed ideas for how to spend our cultural education grant across the alliance. Therefore when we launched the workshops all based around the Beer Quarry Caves all the schools in the alliance had ownership of the project and felt they had contributed from the initial idea through to attending the workshops. For secondary schools the most convenient time to hold an "Everybody writes' day would be in July after all the public exams were finished so in November we decided on July 1st for the day to send our yr. 8 students down the Caves and on June 15th for the music department to take their returning Lower 6th students. From then we worked backwards and booked in the dates for the CPD training sessions for the teachers in May. This gave them time to plan how they were going to use the materials they devised during the workshop and how they were going to organize the yr. 8 visit of 160 students.

Final preparations

The poetry workshop went off well with the teachers very excited about the prospect of taking the students down the caves and then working with them in Their English lessons to polish and refine the poetry written after the visit.

The staff then had to organize the visit – this meant



dividing the year group into 4 groups of 40 students with a bus leaving to take each group to the caves at hourly intervals, returning with one group and picking up the next. Amazingly this all went exactly to plan, with 'to the minute' punctuality from the bus drivers. The group leaders had to devise activities for before and after the visit as the first group left at 9-00am and the last one left at 12-15am. We divided the students up into approx. ability groups with the more academic students in the last group. The first group were offered the opportunity to make a shadow puppet show based on a story they devised on the caves, the second group were reporters writing up accounts of events that had happened in the caves in different styles, the third group worked on performance poetry and then devising their own based on the pace and rhythm of the work we studied. The fourth group had the longest time to wait to they walked down to the local church which was built of Beer stone and begun in Norman times. The teachers were then able to explain a lot of the history of the church and the caves and how the quarried stone would have been transported from Beer over to Lyme.



On returning to school all the students spent the afternoon writing poems, stories, songs and articles all based on their visit – they then were very confident in performing their work, albeit in its raw state, to the rest of the group.

Being impressed by the work the students had produced in such a short period of time (25 mins) we knew that producing a selection of quality pieces fit for public performance in Exeter Cathedral was going to

be achievable.



The next event is to host the poet, Greta Stoddart; we commissioned to write a poem for us. She is coming into school a week after the cave visit to read her poem to the students and to talk to them about the process she went through to write it. So we have booked the Cathedral – the next few months will be spent refining the selected pieces and working on how they will be performed. This is going to be a lunchtime activity with the teachers from the English, Music and Art department all working on the project offering support from their range of expertise. The music department had also taken their A level musicians down to the caves and using recording equipment they had then composed musical pieces using sounds recorded from the caves. We anticipate that the music work will also be a major part of the performance in the Cathedral.

Working with other schools in the alliance.

As the theme of the caves came out of an alliance meeting we ran workshops for teachers during May offering all the schools in our alliance the opportunity



to join us in our project.

We ran 4 workshops – The poetry one, a stone carving one for secondary art teachers, a compositional one for music teachers, and a gargoyle and print making one for primary staff. We have evidence of the work produced from each workshop on the JCTSA cultural education web site, with comments made by the staff.

So far I know the gargoyles have been made in our feeder primary school. Holyrood Academy have also sent their 6th form musicians down to the caves and created a fantastic piece of music, based on Gregorian chants, which is going to sound brilliant echoing through the Cathedral. We are also very excited to hear Colyton Grammar are also planning to take the whole of their year 8 into the caves in September and are devising an art, music and drama project. I am very confident, with the alliance schools working together, we will have material to host a spectacular cultural festival on 13th January 2015 in Exeter Cathedral.



Head of Year 8 and teacher of English Andy Brown says:

‘I can’t remember the last time I have felt such a buzz of excitement from students about my subject. The Cave project seems to have triggered of a real passion for creative writing, be it poetry, prose, animations, shadow puppetry, you name it, the students are talking about it. I have had actual goose-bump moments in the lessons following Cave day where I’ve seen people who have struggled all year to engage with imaginative, figurative and descriptive writing, suddenly draw on the experiences of the day and produce written work that has surprised both myself, and them!’

I can’t wait to see the end product in Exeter Cathedral; it

has the potential to be an eclectic mix of exciting projects that will showcase the ability of a broad range of students. Cave Day has put English back on the map!!'

D Wood

Director of Arts

The Woodroffe School, Lyme Regis, Dorset.

JCTSA.

