



Centre: The Story Museum

Adviser(s): Isy Mead

Level: Discover

Context

The Story Museum is an arts organisation celebrating great ways to engage with great stories in all forms, situated in the heart of Oxford city.

This project, Start, was delivered with support from Children & The Arts and enabled Year 6, 7 and 8 students from an area of higher than average social deprivation to visit Oxford city and explore The Story Museum as well as more established museums such as The Natural History Museum and The Ashmolean. Before the project, our baseline data stated that 12 of 383 students had visited cultural venues before, and 9 of these were the local museum. The schools had not worked in partnership with a cultural organisation before.

Our delivery model at The Story Museum has a particularly distinctive approach: our mission is to create 'great ways of engaging with great stories.' By starting with the story rather than the form, we are then a gateway to all forms of art, be it oral storytelling, installations, puppetry, songwriting, textiles, or creative writing. This approach allows Arts Award students to explore any art form they choose in order to tell a story that they enjoy and that best speaks to them.

'The Story Museum has made me expand my creative mind.'
- Sana, Year 6.

Approach

For Part A: discover, the students visited The Story Museum and identified as many different types of art as they could. They participated in a workshop in which Learning team members told a traditional oral story from India and the students worked in groups using different art forms - including clay modelling, drama, comic strip, song - to retell the story and decide which art form they liked best. The students also encountered further types of art at the Ashmolean and The Natural History Museum.

'I learnt that there are lots of art forms other than art. Many include years of experience and practice. They also take a lot of patience because you can't just get good at something overnight. Another thing is to know what works best you have to work with everything possible and see where things went wrong.'
- Muneebah, Year 6 student

Students explored the Story Museum's immersive story spaces for inspiration to create a piece of art. Many students opted to write stories inspired by the 'Narnia' space, while others produced collages, paintings and sculptures, as well as storytelling and drama.

'I have learnt all the different skills we need for our production...Thinking about how things in the Narnia room were made and what skills were needed is helping me for more ideas for our Jungle Book production. The story planning helped me create a setting for the story I wrote at school.' – Erin, Year 6 student.

For Part B: find out, students identified an art form they liked and told The Story Museum their preferences. The Story Museum then used their extensive networks to connect each student with a real arts practitioner. The students wrote letters to the art practitioners in question, asking questions to find out more about their arts career, to which the art practitioners responded. This authenticity was highly popular with students.

'I learned that many people pursue photography as their career and that made me realise I can do it. I liked that I could try it out for myself so I knew I was good at it. I will definitely carry on with photography and I would love to turn it into a career.'
- Faith, Year 6 student

'I learned many things but one thing is that some famous authors are friends in real life. I really enjoyed the wonder walk because it's different and we explored the wonderful environment. I liked seeing the colleges that authors went to and seeing all the different rooms in The Story Museum.'
- Harriet, Year 6 student

To share what they had done for Part C: share, students gave class presentations showing their pieces of work and what they enjoyed about the project. They also wrote reflections for their portfolios.

The students had yellow scrapbooks for their portfolios which they liked very much as they could personalise them to reflect their own taste. As they are less formal than school exercise books, they spoke more of enrichment, and did not feel like a 'worksheet.' They had the freedom to decorate and present as they liked.

Impact

'Seeing their artwork and creativity work towards a real goal that goes beyond our school has inspired and motivated children to spend time on pieces of work they maybe wouldn't have before. Seeing The Story Museum sparked interest in reading and encouraged children to seek books out that they hadn't read before.'

- Year 7 teacher

The most popular element was writing letters to artists, as this was so personal and authentic for the students.

'Don't underestimate the impact that receiving letters from real arts practitioners had on children. They were thrilled to receive them and it created a real buzz.'

- Literacy Coordinator

One primary school is planning a 'Story Bus' to go in their playground, inspired by the project and The Story Museum's immersive spaces.

Teachers have reported that the project has been especially popular with EAL students newly arrived in the UK, as the art forms are accessible and it is also a good introduction to English heritage.

'One student in year 7 – Lillie-Mae has begun to see connections between the different Art experiences she has had both out of and in school. Through the project, she has been able to connect the activities she does for fun, for example, going to a concert, with the work on art and stories we are doing in school. I feel that through this connection – which has only come about through the project – the work we are doing in school has more meaning for her and should enable her to make better academic progress in future.'

It has also sparked interests in writing and history, with one teacher commenting, *'one boy in my class did some incredible writing after The Story Museum visit and is now in my higher ability group.* and Layla, a Year 6 student saying *'The History Museum trip (Ashmolean) changed how I look at the past and what I can take from it It has made me more respectful towards ancient objects as they actually hold more than one story behind its crumbling shell.'*

Another teacher felt that through being involved in the project *'my skills and knowledge on writing to engage and entertain have improved. We talk about being authors and how we want readers to think and feel rather than just what targets we are trying to do...The project has helped us to think more about how to enrich the children's learning.'*