# **Educational Engagement Strategy: The Powder Monkey**

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## **Overview**

## I was tasked to identify and collate the Opportunities where themes within The Powder Monkey can actively complement and enrich areas of the curriculum. As I understand it, The Powder Monkey incorporates a contemporary opera of world music instruments, with an innovative interactive set. The stage set, much like an installation exhibition, also has the potential to tell a great story and provide an immersive experience for visitors. In early conversations with Brolly we discussed the role of the stage set **in between** the performances – will/could it incorporate archive information or artefacts from the museums, along with rich audio and visual elements from the story. Many of the ideas explored in this report stem from the idea that schools may visit the museum outside of performance times and might still be able to experience / explore the themes in an educational sense through interacting with the set/exhibition.

After reviewing the National Curriculum and a range of other education literature, two powerful strands of The Powder Monkey strongly complement two curriculum areas: History and Music. The performance and set/exhibition space have the potential to increase curiosity and motivate new learning in these subjects. These are the main focus of this research report.

Furthermore, many elements and undertones of the rich story, and the multi-dimensional layers of the characters and their past, link well with the teaching of PSHE and could also offer teachers many cross-curricular writing ideas that would link to the teaching of literacy skills. A simple outline of the PSHE curriculum has been set out, along with some ideas and options for teachers to develop written work.

The focus age group in this scoping of curriculum links is currently broad – from Key Stage 1 to 3 and GCSE – however we have discussed focusing in on opportunities for a specific key stage, e.g. upper Key Stage 2 (years 5 & 6, ages 10 and 11).

### **History**

General notes:

* It seems that although transatlantic slavery could be a part of the British history element in primary curriculum, particularly in KS2, schools find it hard to cover the sensitive subject matter (according to a few primary curriculum discussion websites).
* National Curriculum mentions ‘slavery’ specifically in KS3 (secondary) but for KS2 (Primary Years 3,4,5 and 6) the curriculum references local studies and exploration of British history where a moment of change took place. These could be potential ways in for Brolly.
* Excellent learning resources: [Understanding Slavery](http://www.understandingslavery.com/index.php-option=com_content&view=category&layout=blog&id=129&Itemid=190.html) (interestingly in terms of Powder Monkey, the resources are supported by National Maritime Museum, National Museums Liverpool and others):

### **History curriculum links:**

Primary KS1 (years 1 and 2)

* Understanding where events fit in within a chronological framework
* Understanding the difference in lives now and then
* Understanding ways to find out about the past
* Significant historical events in the local area

Primary KS2 (Years 3, 4, 5, 6)

* Continuing to develop chronologically secure knowledge and understanding of British, local and world history
* Note connections, contrasts and trends over time
* Address and devise historically valid questions about change, cause, similarity, difference and significance.
* Understand ranges of sources that construct knowledge of the past
* A local history study – e.g. a study over time tracing how several aspects of national history are reflected in the locality.

Secondary KS3 (Years 7, 8, 9)

* gaining historical perspective by placing their growing knowledge into different contexts, understanding the connections between local, regional, national and international history; between cultural, economic, military, political, religious and social history; and between short- and long-term timescales.
* understanding historical concepts and frame historically-valid questions and create their own structured accounts, including written narratives and analyses.
* Exploring ideas, political power, industry and empire: Britain, 1745-1901

(E.g. Britain’s transatlantic slave trade: its effects and its eventual abolition)

* a local history study (E.g. a depth study linked to Britain’s transatlantic slave trade, its effect on the locality)
* a study of a significant society or issue in world history and its interconnections with other world developments

GCSE (years 10, 11)

* understanding of the key features and characteristics of the periods studied in relation to second order historical concepts of continuity, change, cause, consequence, significance and similarity and difference within situations
* understanding of the relationships between different aspects within the periods studied, making connections, drawing contrasts and analysing trends. Examples of the related aspects include all or some of the following examples: between local, regional, national and international history; between cultural, economic, social, political, religious and military history; and between short and long term timescales

### **Music**

General notes

* Powder Monkey proposes a dynamic mix of international instruments and operatic styles.
* Draws on the traditional music of West Africa, the Indian sub-continent, the folk forms of Northern England and maritime creole work songs.
* Powder Monkey could present a chance for teacher to explore listening activities with children – developing evaluative language
* Could be used to extend understanding pitch, tempo, communication of story, history and traditions.
* Connections with school choirs who would not normally experience opera

### Music curriculum links

Key aims for the National Curriculum from KS1 to KS3

* …review and evaluate music across a range of historical periods, genres, styles and traditions…
* understand and explore how music is created, produced and communicated, including through the interrelated dimensions: pitch, duration, dynamics, tempo, timbre, texture, structure and appropriate musical notations

Primary KS1 (years 1 and 2)

* listen with concentration and understanding to a range of high-quality live and recorded music
* play tuned and untuned instruments musically (only relevant if practical activities follow/precede the performance, either at the event or in school – see ideas later in this report)
* use their voices expressively and creatively by singing songs and speaking chants and rhymes (As above, this would be relevant in the context of the ideas for engaging in the exhibition, outlined later in this report)

Primary KS2 (Years 3, 4, 5, 6)

* appreciate and understand a wide range of high-quality live and recorded music drawn from different traditions and from great composers and musicians
* develop an understanding of the history of music
* develop an understanding of musical composition
* improvise and compose music for a range of purposes using the interrelated dimensions of music (NB, this would be relevant in the context of the ideas for engaging in the exhibition, outlined later in this report)

Secondary KS3 (Years 7, 8, 9)

* improvise and compose; and extend and develop musical ideas by drawing on a range of musical structures, styles, genres and traditions (NB, this is relevant in the context of the practical ways students might engage in the performance/exhibition, outlined later in this report)
* listen with increasing discrimination to a wide range of music from great composers and musicians
* develop a deepening understanding of the music that they perform and to which they listen, and its history

GCSE (years 10, 11)

* broaden musical experience and interests, develop imagination and foster creativity
* develop knowledge, understanding and skills needed to communicate effectively as musicians
* develop awareness of a variety of instruments, styles and approaches to performing and composing
* recognise contrasting genres, styles and traditions of music, and develop some awareness of musical chronology
* develop as effective and independent learners with enquiring minds
* reflect upon and evaluate their own and others’ music
* engage with and appreciate the diverse heritage of music, in order to promote personal, social, intellectual and cultural development

### Personal, Social and Health Education (PSHE)

General notes:

* In [Understanding Slavery](http://www.understandingslavery.com/index.php-option=com_content&view=category&layout=blog&id=129&Itemid=190.html), specialist advice for teachers indicates that encouraging people to express what they feel about such emotive topics as slavery is important, especially for children. The interconnection of PSHE in the teaching of transatlantic slavery is a powerful cross-curricular opportunity.

Broad areas of PSHE programme of study for KS1-3, which could be explored through experiencing Powder Monkey:

* Identity
* Diversity and equality
* Rights (including the notion of universal human rights) and responsibilities (including fairness and justice)
* Change and resilience (the skills, strategies and ‘inner resources’ we can draw on when faced with challenging change or circumstance)
* Power (how it is used and encountered in a variety of contexts including online; how it manifests through behaviours including bullying, persuasion, coercion and how it can be challenged or managed through negotiation and ‘win-win’ outcomes)
* Essential Skills and Attributes: Empathy and compassion
* managing own feelings and recognising the feelings of others

### **Art and Design**

General thoughts:

* We must acknowledge art and design as a potential curriculum theme - it is a strength of Brolly’s productions with art, illustration, design and digital technology forming a core methodology of their practice.
* In an education landscape where the teaching of arts subjects, including music and drama, is reduced and politicised, it would be remiss to not highlight the value of the arts element of Brolly’s performances and the rich learning potential for children / young people experiencing the interactive hybrid spaces for performance, set and exhibition. I propose further research into the arts curriculum links, exploring ideas for how the experiential, visual and digital elements can support young learners, classroom practice and inform ideas for teachers. Importantly there is great value for pupils in meeting performers, artists, directors to understand the career potential beyond school.
* The specialist teaching resource videos by the [Understanding Slavery](http://www.understandingslavery.com/index.php-option=com_content&view=article&id=1155_video-training&catid=133_video-tutorials&Itemid=148.html) initiative state that you are less likely to remember an object (e.g. historical artefact) than if you have ‘done a drawing of it’ (e.g. draw round it, draw a response to it) – this alludes to the power of the arts (which extends beyond drawing, to written, musical, and/or dramatic etc responses) to support pupils to navigate ideas and help historical concepts land.
* Meantime - broadly, the area of the arts curriculum that connects immediately with Powder Monkey would be:
* evaluate and analyse creative works using the language of art, craft and design

## How schools can engage with Powder Monkey

How will schools experience Powder Monkey? School groups may connect with Powder Monkey in a number of different ways. They may attend a **performance**, see the interactive **set/exhibition**, or they may visit the **microsite** online.

We could suggest to schools a number of starter ideas for activities for teachers and develop some simple resources for schools that choose to experience Powder Monkey through visiting the museum, encasing their visit with open ended ideas for pupil exploration of the themes. Importantly these will not require facilitation from Brolly, and can be done in schools’ own time.

The following sample ideas are aimed at younger children, 10-12 years old (years 5 and 6, or upper KS2) and can be adapted for older ages. They are informed by some of the curriculum links mentioned above.

### **Prior to visiting the museum/ performance event/exhibition**

* Option – develop ‘Teacher notes’ with a synopsis of the story, themes and curriculum links potential, and suggestions for ways to introduce the sensitive topic to class.
* Archives are an important source in history studies, working with them, exploring, what do objects say? Bring in our own objects into the class, what do they say about us? (History – introduces the ideas of artefacts/museums – could be done before class leaves for the museum, gets everyone ready to explore).
* Powder Monkey’s character has been informed by historical records. Can a similar historical character or someone with a connection to slavery be the focus of a study for class / independent project work. (Schools commonly select a historic and influential individual for the focus of class study during Black History Month).
* Develop a list of Feelings words (This is a good PHSE activity – pupils about to explore an emotive subject can prepare by expressing the range of emotions that might arise. Also develops empathy. These words can then become a word bank or word cards for drawing upon to explain how they think someone is feeling and/or to use in writing exercises later.)
* Explore the musical instruments that are used, to explore different cultures and traditional music, encourage understanding of interrelated dimensions. (Music).
* Teachers play a selection of different styles, genres and traditional music from the areas/genres that have inspired Powder Monkey’s score – Discuss what we feel and notice. (For KS3 and GCSE: independent research into, for example, the history of sea songs/shanties, music of workers and enslaved, international music traditions.)
* Compare with another opera (pre-visit), pupils talk about differences (post-visit). (Music).
* Children talk to each other about what they think slavery means, who, why, and what it feels like, then write an answer to the question ‘what do I already know/think about slavery?’ (History - supports an assessment of existing knowledge. The question might be adapted depending on age group).

### **Activities a visiting class can do at the Powder Monkey performance or within the interactive set/exhibition:**

* Locate the Powder Monkey story’s countries on a map.
* Mark their journey.
* What do we know about the physical aspects of these countries?
* Discuss/develop ideas about life on board the ship – how long, how comfortable, food, weather.
* Explore characters’ range of feelings and whether/how music has represented feelings – (drawing upon the Feelings words developed before class). Pupils could write feelings on luggage tags and leave them around the set? (Music, PSHE).
* Option – we could develop a Character sheet which can be available in the exhibition for schools and indeed families (e.g. draw one of the characters, where are they from, what lines do you remember they said, are they happy, sad, kind or nasty? [One simple example](https://www.tes.com/teaching-resource/character-analysis-sheet-plays-11263561)). (Assesses comprehension of the performance story. This is also a tool that teachers can also bring into their own creative writing activities in class to develop pupils’ own characters - literacy).
* Primary schools often teach pupils about a ‘blurb’ (e.g. to develop a short description of a story of their own). Children could begin to create ideas for a review or ‘blurb’ for the story and/or musical score – discussion then writing a draft (can be left in the exhibition). Exploring evaluative language and history concepts. (History, music history and knowledge of cultures and traditions in music, and literacy).
* Children pose questions, either to characters or about something arising from the experience (leave them in the exhibition/ set somewhere? These could inform a post-performance discussion/symposium event for other audiences, if one is planned?)
* Summary of experience - Teacher could ask, what happens next (for the characters, for slavery, for the local area’s connection with slavery and trade, etc. depending on age/preferred focus of work). (Story comprehension, history).
* Discussion about musical knowledge and critical appraisal, the overall sense of story and individual characters’ journeys. (Music).

### **Back in classroom – ideas for follow up activities, extending the learning and further exploring the themes**

* Complete the blurb (draft begun at the exhibition). (Literacy, comprehension)
* Records and accounts have informed the characters of Powder Monkey, could the characters (their roles on the ship/in trade) be explored by pupils independently as a piece of follow up writing? (History, literacy).
* Develop writing, e.g. diary entry, life on board the ship. (Literacy, History).
* Research local history (London, Liverpool, Chatham) and its connection with Transatlantic slavery. (History).
* Research abolition of slavery. (History – KS3)
* Composing challenge, drawing on traditional and contemporary music forms according to students’ choice. (Music – KS3).
* Discuss and write an answer to the question ‘What do I now know about slavery? What have I found out?’ (History - Supports an assessment of learning. The question can be adapted to suit different age groups).