**High Storrs Schools and the World**

One of the hardest things about educating in lockdown is the loss of the education that comes outside and around the curriculum. What on earth do I mean by that? Right now, I mean George Floyd and the events unfolding around the world in the aftermath of his death. As a school we would be taking about that and responding to these events in form time, in assemblies, in PSHE, in History lessons, in English lessons, on the corridor and more. I was googling ‘Colston’ earlier this week and it occurred to me that, in normal times, I would pause this week’s History homework and ask everyone to research him. And then we would discuss his statue and whether it should stand. And then we would discuss statues in general and who gets to decide which figures deserve that honour. With Y8s we would likely talk about our recent work on the Suffragettes and Suffragists and different forms of protest and their impact. With our Y9s we would talk about the Civil Rights movement in America and find parallels and origins in their protest. I can still set the homework question as home learning, but I can’t have all the rich discussion that starts with the homework and then spills out of the classroom into so many other conversations I would have round school. I do know lots of HSS families will have been discussing similar things in their homes, but High Storrs School is missing our chance to be a big part of this debate and discussion.

So, what can we do? Well, we have prepared and sent a Home Learning ‘Group Chat’ about the death of George Floyd. There is a slightly different one for Sixth Form. It has been sent out by Heads of Houses and the Sixth Form Team and invites students to note and record their response and share it with these colleagues. We had to craft the resource very carefully because the classroom interaction is missing and resources received ‘cold’ can be interpreted in different ways. Nevertheless, we felt it was vital that we do have a High Storrs response to events unfolding around us.

We can also remind the community and ourselves about the choices we do make with our HSS curriculum and the fact that our curriculum includes opportunities to learn about racism, protest, injustice and more. I could include detail about a number of different aspects of the curriculum here, but I will focus first on History. Not just because it is my subject and my passion but because the study of History is such a powerful way to understand the world around us, to find the roots of the problem, throw a light on them so that we understand where racism and hate came from.  There have been a few articles in the media about ‘decolonising the History curriculum’. It is such an important debate to have. Every department in every school should (and I think does) ask ‘why do we teach these topics and in this order? What does our local community need and want to learn about?’ The campaign has analysed the national curriculum and found it wanting and it has prompted us to reflect on our HSS History curriculum and hold it up to see if it serves the needs of our local, national and global community. Mr Doran, our wonderful Head of History, has been pondering that very question and wrote this,

*Considering recent events, I thought it timely to highlight what we currently do in our History curriculum to address some of the issues arising from the BLM movement.*

*It is History teacher’s job to ensure what we teach reflects and is representative of the local, national and international community we live in. We certainly do not shy away from the difficult questions our complex history raises. As such our History curriculum at High Storrs is always evolving. We have had many discussions formally and informally, particularly over the last few years, around questions such as,*

* *Does our History curriculum it meet National Curriculum expectations?*
* *Are we encouraging a love of History?*
* *Does it give enough background for students to be able to access and achieve at GCSE level and beyond?*
* *Do we cover enough local history?*
* *Does the History we teach represent our school community?*
* *Is it just about old white men? Is it diverse enough?*

*The last few questions have become particularly poignant in light the current situation. I certainly feel, as a team of historians, we have not hidden away from the challenges and responsibility of organising a curriculum which answers all these questions.*

*Whilst our curriculum is not perfect, it is ever changing in response to new evidence and historical scholarship. Below you will find an outline some of our work to show that whilst 1066, the Tudors and the World Wars are an important part of British History, it is not the only thing we are about! And We are always happy to engage with anyone who would like to know more in depth about the thinking behind our curriculum too.*

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| ***Our HSS History Curriculum – some key components to teach everyone’s History*** |
| *Y7 - 8 lesson unit on Empire. With the enquiry question, 'Who benefitted from the British Empire?' Study of what Empire is with a focus on British involvement in India.* |
| *Y8 – As part of our Life in WWI unit we study the role of British Empire troops.*  |
| *Y8 – A newly amended unit on Britain Post 1945. From NHS, to the Welfare State and role of immigrant groups in British society. Part of this unit covers lived experience of what it means to be British.*  |
| *Y8 – Our Holocaust unit also covers other genocides, specifically in Rwanda. The role of colonialism in Africa is explored here as a cause* |
| *Y9 - A Slavery to Civil Rights themed module has been developed over this last year to start in Sept 2020 (Previously these topics had been covered separately)* |
| *Y9 – Proposed new themed unit covering migration to Britain - from Roman Britain to present day* |
| *GCSE – Our Spain and the New World c1490-1555 unit covers impact of colonisation in Central and South America* |
| *A level - Modern History. Our Making of Modern Britain unit covers society in Britain 1951-2007 and looks at experience of immigrant groups alongside changes and continuities for women and young people.* |
| *A level - Modern History. Our coursework module covers Britain in India 1757-1857. Political, economic, social, and religious impact of British colonisation of India.* |

*Providing extracurricular opportunities for our students is also vital in making issues real. In the last few years, I am proud of the opportunities many of our students have had. In our annual* ***WWI Battlefields residential****, we ensure we give students a rounded view of who fought and why they died. A highlight being a visit to the grave of Herbert Morris. This extracurricular work also involves our team making connections with other historians. Last year we began working with* ***University of Sheffield PhD student Aunum Quyoum*** *on our Y8 Post 1945 unit. Aunum who was able to offer insight and ideas in how to mould our curriculum around our students and their families lived experiences of with being British means. In October, this year we were lucky to host a* ***visit by Mark Levy****, an American Civil Rights campaigner who took part in the sit in protests during the 1960s. Finally, this year we were in discussions with Sheffield Hallam University lecturer* ***Dr Robbie Aitken*** *a leader in the field of German colonialism and immigrant experience in Germany. He had planned, in May this year, to bring his exhibition from Cameroon to HSS and make available to all staff and parents. In addition, Robbie was due to work with our Y10 in studying the experiences of black people in Nazi Germany. Whilst this was put on hold due to coronavirus, we still plan to carry this work out in the near future.*

*To conclude, whilst we are proud of the work we do, there is always room for improvement, and we are always reflective and open to new ideas and collaborations. There is no doubt we are living in a time that is historically significant and I hope we can do it justice by guiding our students through in an informed way.*

Ensuring our whole curriculum reflects our local and wider curriculum is important too. I also asked our Subject Leaders for English and Art to share some detail too. Mr Caldwell, Head of English shared this,

*In English, we strive to teach a range of literary texts that reflect the diverse, multicultural, open-minded and outward-looking nature of our school community.  Our students study novels set in Germany, Ghana, Nigeria, the United States and Papua New Guinea as well as in the UK.  Writers of colour like John Agard, Grace Nicholls and Maya Angelou have long been central to our curriculum. The relationship between language and ethnicity is a central part of our A Level English Language curriculum, and students at all Key Stages explore social attitudes around language and the ways in which social conditions and attitudes dictate whose voices are heard and why.*

*We are proud of our curriculum, but we know that we can and must do more and better.  It is good that we explore the powerful and inspirational language of campaigners like Martin Luther King; but our curriculum needs to acknowledge that racial inequality is also a problem in modern Britain, which is why this year English Language GCSE students studied articles and speeches related to the Windrush Scandal and its roots in the slave trade.  It is good that we study literary texts that address the reality of prejudice and racism, like To Kill a Mockingbird and Of Mice and Men; but it would be wrong for us to explore these issues only from the viewpoints of white authors like Harper Lee and John Steinbeck, which is why we continue to add more texts by black writers to our curriculum, such as Purple Hibiscus by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie.  Our Key Stage Three English curriculum is currently undergoing a major redesign, and diversity, representation and the amplification of voices that have previously gone unheard will continue to be important priorities in this process.*

And Mr Parker, Subject Leader of Art, shared this,

*The overwhelming focus of KS3 is practical skills and once students have mastered the key skills they are then exposed, in KS4 and 5, to a vast array of artists . The study of these artists includes their often-complicated histories and the evolution of the ways in which they work/ed.
For example, a student looking at an image by Picasso for the first time (for those unfamiliar to his work) will often have a certain look of ‘I don’t get it?’ Part of our job is to develop students understanding on a purely visual level, to appreciate the work for its sophistication, the impressive use of media; composition/arrangements of forms, and all of its other aesthetic qualities, with an aim of getting past the initial ‘huh?’ or worst still, ‘I don’t like it because it doesn’t look nice!’ But another part of our role is to inform students of how Picasso (again for the purpose of this example) was inspired by African masks, art and culture - before Cubism was a thing! We would go on to explore how he appropriated the imagery and stole the style of those cultures (as exemplified in* Les Demoiselles d’Avignon*,) and how problematic it is that terms such as Primitivism were applied to this style of work, because how could art influenced by work that was not of European heritage be anything other than labelled as ‘primitive?’ See, problematic.*

 *But it is through this understanding and sometimes unsettling and uncomfortable knowledge, that we can expose students to more stimulus, to more thought and thinking, to more culture and more appreciation. Like most things, the Art world is deeply rooted and tangled in more than questionable traditions and a chequered history that most people would be unaware of, unless educated otherwise. Moreover, leading students to the understanding that Art is more than a pretty picture hanging in a gallery and that there is more to the image presented, is often the key to realising that Art is (and has for a long time been) a way in which the Artist documents the world in which the work was created. Visual culture and imagery is often how students interact with the world today (e.g. Instagram, Tik Tok, YouTube, all methods of communication, all ways of conveying messages both good and bad) and this visual culture is now, as it always has been, a powerful tool.*

 *If a student were to come to me wanting to process the tragic events of George Floyd’s death within their art, I would point them in the direction of Jean-Michel Basquiat’s Defacement (The Death of Michael Stewart) created in 1983, which eerily echoes the then experience of young Black Americans some 37 years ago. Unfortunately, police brutality towards marginalised groups as a theme is not something that is new. Basquiat, like many, many artists used his craft as a way to emote his experiences and process his emotions; this is because Art has that power, the power to question, to fuel protests and ideas, to defy, to inform and to bring awareness and understanding to the world and more importantly the individual.*

*So, to conclude, the Art curriculum at High Storrs allows students to explore and find their own answers and understanding of what they are looking at and engaging with. Knowing where the work has come from enables students to gain a better understanding of the world around them and the way in which other Artists have reacted to similar tragedies and social events through their work. Our aim is to not just equip students with the necessary tools to become excellent practical artists, but to also create a culture of understanding, knowledge, and the ability rationally question the images presented to them on a daily basis.*

Many thanks for reading this blog. Since I started working on it I received an email from a group of current and former students stating that the school, amongst other things ‘*needs to reflect the diversity called for in the curriculum and your teaching hierarchy, enable support for BAME staff to succeed and lead and support students to organise, enquire and learn around social justice’*. I do hope this starts to address their concerns and answers their questions. And that it gives everyone an insight into how keenly we want to ensure our curriculum teaches what our students need to learn whilst also noting that sometimes the power of individual schools to totally shape their curriculum is somewhat constrained. There is talk of curriculum freedoms in academies, but Ofsted still carefully check that the curriculum academies teach does cover the specified national curriculum. In the light of this fact it might be that campaigners fighting to change the curriculum focus energy on the government and the Department of Education. I would conclude that schools are doing the absolute best we can. We are not perfect, but we are really, really trying to ensure the education we provide enables the next generation to build an even better world.