

Year 6 Background knowledge

The Year 6 content begins by continuing the chronological narrative of British history. Children consolidate their knowledge of the Anglo-Saxons, developed in Year 5, by considering the impact of the first Viking raids along the British coast, and of the subsequent invasion and settlement of parts of Britain by Vikings. The chapters in the spring term extend children's knowledge of an aspect of British social history (medicine) beyond ancient times, into the Middle Ages and the modern era. The first chapter in the summer term continues in a similar vein, with a look at a significant turning point in British history: the Battle of Britain. The final chapter in Year 6 looks at early Islamic civilisation and draws comparisons with Viking society. While topics follow the chronological history of Britain and the wider world, core history skills should develop as children progress through the different topics and have been woven into the content planning.

Understanding chronology and timelines

In Year 6, children develop their understanding of chronology, considering events and civilisations that existed in different areas of the world within the same time period (Vikings in Britain running alongside the rise of early Islamic civilisation). They build on their understanding from Year 5 of how different historical periods fit together (the first Viking raids in AD793 to the death of Edward the Confessor in 1066). Children are given many opportunities to progress their skills in interpreting and constructing timelines to show when significant events occurred. They understand that these can cover short-term timescales (King Alfred's defence of his kingdom against the Vikings) or long-term timescales of over a thousand years (changes in medicine from Anglo-Saxon times to the present day).

Addressing and devising historically valid questions

In every topic, children have many opportunities to address historically valid questions (should Ethelred have paid the Danegeld? Why did the bubonic plague kill so many people? How did Edwin Chadwick advance medical knowledge? What was the strategy behind the Blitz?) using a range of reliable sources to find answers. Particularly when using the internet, it is important that children understand the difference between a reliable and non-reliable source of information and between fact and opinion. At the end of chapters 4 and 6, children are given the opportunity to devise their own historically valid questions and to carry out an independent investigation into an area of personal interest on the topics of medicine and early Islamic civilisation, sharing their findings through a project or presentation.

Constructing and interpreting the past from evidence

As children progress as historians, they view the past less in terms of facts and more as knowledge constructed from evidence. This evidence could be written (newspaper accounts from the Battle of Britain), from archaeological sites (digs in the Viking Age strata of York) or artefacts (early Islamic pottery), or even from eyewitness reports (interviews with elderly people recalling the polio outbreak of the 1940s and 1950s). In Year 6, children also progress in their understanding that evidence of the past is interpreted in different ways and that historical people and events can be viewed differently. Children begin to use the evidence to construct their own interpretations.

Understanding cause, consequence and significance

In the different topics, children have opportunities to consider the cause and consequences of different events (such as the events leading up to the Battle of Britain, and its immediate and longer-term consequences). Children examine the reasons behind events as well as the events themselves. This gives a good starting point for understanding which events can be considered historically significant (the discovery of penicillin).

Drawing comparisons

Throughout the scheme of work, there are opportunities for children to make observations and draw comparisons. In Year 6, they consider the similarities and differences between past civilisations (Viking burial compared with ancient Maya burial) as well as comparing life in the past with life today (the first hospitals compared with modern day hospitals).

Analysing change and trends over time

In Year 6, children develop the ability to analyse historical change and spot trends over time. As their knowledge base grows and they add to the knowledge they acquired in Year 5, certain historical themes and patterns emerge (social structure and slavery; invasion, oppression and assimilation of the existing population; the impact of technology).