

ELENA STEVENS

# 40



**TO DIVERSIFY**  
**THE HISTORY CURRICULUM**

**A PRACTICAL HANDBOOK**

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# INTRODUCTION

In 1989, historian Arthur Marwick outlined the essential role that history plays in the construction of identity. Marwick argued that neither individuals, communities nor societies could exist without knowledge of the past: 'Without memory, individuals find great difficulty in relating to others, in finding their bearings, in taking intelligent decisions – they have often lost their sense of identity. A society without history would be in a similar condition ... . A society without memory ... would be a society adrift.'<sup>1</sup>

History as a school subject has great potential for helping to develop pupils' identities. It provides opportunities to engage with ideas, values and practices in such a manner that – many education writers suggest – equips young people to navigate the challenges of adult life.<sup>2</sup> History offers young people the chance, as Marwick put it, to find 'their bearings', or to anchor themselves in the present whilst claiming inspiration and affirmation from the past. Helping pupils to do this seems to be one of the most important goals of history education.

However, it is important that we carefully consider the types of identities we want to help pupils to develop, and the histories that might be chosen to promote such a project. The nature of our multicultural society demands a broadening of traditional understandings of Britishness, and recent cultural and political events (including developments in the Black Lives Matter movement, prompted by the murder of George Floyd and the toppling of the Edward Colston statue) have challenged us as teachers to rethink the ways in which we transmit notions of local, national and even global identity. We realise the need to construct curricula that reflect the diversity of society around us; to plan enquiries that acknowledge a range of perspectives, yet remain accessible and engaging, and to teach lessons that are firmly historical – rather than political, ideological or civic. Faced with such challenges, however, it can be difficult to know where to begin.

This book aims to provide history teachers with ideas and strategies for diversifying the curriculum and for weaving new, unfamiliar voices into topics that are

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1 Arthur Marwick, *The Nature of History* (New York: Macmillan, 1989), p. 14.

2 For example, Keith C. Barton and Linda S. Levstik claim that history promotes 'democratic citizenship'. See Keith C. Barton and Linda S. Levstik, *Teaching History for the Common Good* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2004), p. 35.

widely taught in secondary schools. It outlines forty case studies that represent starting points for introducing new or perhaps overlooked individuals into teaching at Key Stages 3, 4 and 5. Reflecting the diversity of pupils' own backgrounds as well as that of British society, it helps teachers to expose the presence of women, the working classes, Black, Asian, minority ethnic, disabled and LGBTQ+ communities in the past, as a means of pluralising and opening up notions of identity. It is intended as a contribution to the decolonising project that has swept through history education in the last few years, although the individuals included in the book have not been chosen because they represent a particular political or theoretical viewpoint; instead, they act as alternative lenses through which to teach popular topics and episodes of history.

Debate about the selection of content within the history curriculum has been ongoing since the introduction of the first national curriculum in England in 1988. Recently, it has come to focus on the importance of broadening frames of reference to include non-British and non-European histories, and to move beyond the traditional narratives of power, nationality and political action – a curriculum characterised by historian Peter Mandler as 'Hitler and the Henries'.<sup>3</sup> Much of this debate has emerged in response to the perceived failings of the national curriculum's most recent iteration. In 2010, Michael Gove's espousal of the 'island story' sought to move the history curriculum in a rather exclusionist, self-congratulatory direction. As secretary of state for education, Gove argued that the existing history curriculum denied pupils the opportunity to learn 'one of the most inspiring stories I know – the history of our United Kingdom'.<sup>4</sup> Though Gove's draft curriculum was hewn of some of its more jingoistic overtones, the final 2013 curriculum nevertheless prescribed a diet composed largely of British history. Reference was made to a 'significant society or issue in world history', but this seems to have been envisaged as something of an adjunct to the more coherent history of 'these islands' from 'the earliest times to the present day'.<sup>5</sup>

Pupils do, of course, need to develop an understanding of the societies in which they live. It is important that history lessons help young people to gain a sense of place, and to appreciate the social, political and cultural forces that shape modern

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3 Peter Mandler, 'History, National Life and the New Curriculum', *Schools History Project* (23 December 2015). Available at: <http://www.schoolshistoryproject.co.uk/ResourceBase/downloads/MandlerKeynote2013.pdf>.

4 Michael Gove, 'All pupils will learn our island story', Conservative Party conference [speech] (5 October 2010). Available at: <https://conservative-speeches.sayit.mysociety.org/speech/601441>.

5 Department for Education, *History Programmes of Study: Key Stage 3* (2013), p. 1–5. Ref: DFE-00194-2013. Available at: [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/239075/SECONDARY\\_national\\_curriculum\\_-\\_History.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/239075/SECONDARY_national_curriculum_-_History.pdf).

## INTRODUCTION

British life. However, two aspects of Gove's vision are problematic. The first is the notion that the history of our United Kingdom and world history are distinct from one another. The story of Britain is the story of movement, heterogeneity and integration; Britain has been shaped by successive invasions and migrations, and different peoples have coexisted for hundreds, if not thousands, of years. British history *is* world history. Secondly, Gove presumes that 'our island story' is one that ought to 'inspire' pupils, with its litany of heroic characters conceived as contemporary role models. In reality, the history of Britain and British people is much more complicated. It is punctuated with stories of exploitation, violence, corruption and rejection. It is also strewn with complex individuals, whose lives cannot be taken to exemplify a certain theme, idea or experience. People in the past did not exist simply to stand for one thing or another, and it does a disservice to these people's lives (and to the discipline of history) if we reduce them to archetypes or caricatures.

The best history is history that illuminates the complexity of the past. History is an exciting, dynamic discipline; new evidence and interpretation can offer up perspectives that shift our understanding, or make us think about events, people or ideas in new ways. The same is true of history teaching. If our lessons can expose pupils to new histories – or even shed new light on histories with which young people have become familiar by the time they enter our classrooms – then we have gone some way towards exposing the complexity of history. This mission was summed up well in the Swann Report of 1985, which commented on the education of children from minority ethnic backgrounds. The report concluded that education ought to represent 'something more than the reinforcement of the beliefs, values and identity which each child brings to school'.<sup>6</sup> History lessons can serve a vital role in challenging preconceived ideas about people in both the past and the present, equipping young people to combat deeper and more problematic misconceptions.

Of course, we do not operate within a policy vacuum; as teachers we are guided by the recommendations made by the Swann Report and other documents. For example, the Race Relations (Amendment) Act (2000) stipulated that schools must actively promote race equality and relations between people of different racial

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6 Committee of Enquiry into the Education of Children from Ethnic Minority Backgrounds, *The Swann Report* (1985), p. 364. Available at: <http://www.educationengland.org.uk/documents/swann/swann1985.html>. According to the report, this mission would help to 'combat racism' and 'attack inherited myths and stereotypes'.

groups.<sup>7</sup> The Equality Act (2010) clarified the unlawful nature of both racial and gender discrimination, providing schools with guidance for the advancement of equal opportunities for all pupils.<sup>8</sup> Though the implications of such policies are evident on a school-wide level, there will be plenty of opportunities to address these priorities within the history curriculum – and, indeed, to help to advance a more nuanced understanding of race, equality and discrimination as both historical and contemporary concepts.

The case studies offered in this book aim to complicate aspects of Gove’s ‘island story’, and to enhance pupils’ experiences of diversity and equality within the curriculum. I think it is important for pupils to understand *why* certain histories are chosen or prioritised, too. As Christine Counsell explains in the chapter ‘History’ (part of a 2021 edited volume entitled *What Should Schools Teach? Discipline, Subjects and the Pursuit of Truth*), the selection and transmission of all stories is an ‘interpretive process’; it is essential that pupils develop some understanding of the discipline of history, and the processes that contribute to its formation.<sup>9</sup> As such, the case studies included in this book often provide opportunities for building activities that make visible the historiography surrounding the individual or topic. Discussion might be initiated, for example, on the ways in which members of society, public commentators and historians have viewed people like Emma Hamilton or the Chevalier d’Eon in the past, to help pupils recognise some of the ways in which historical interpretation might change depending on the social, cultural, political or ideological context. In this way, the case studies aim to strike a balance between content knowledge and disciplinary awareness, recognising that knowledge is – to some extent – ‘constructed’.<sup>10</sup>

Counsell also underlines the power of well-chosen disciplinary frameworks for the delivery of contested histories. Referencing the history website *Another History is Possible*,<sup>11</sup> she recounts one history teacher’s decision to switch from the causation-focused question ‘Why was slavery abolished in 1833?’ to the change/

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7 See <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2000/34/enacted>.

8 See <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2010/15/contents>.

9 Christine Counsell, ‘History’. In Alka Sehgal Cuthbert and Alex Standish (eds) *What Should Schools Teach? Disciplines, Subjects and the Pursuit of Truth*, 2nd edn (London: UCL Press, 2021), pp. 154–173 at p. 156.

10 Nick Dennis, ‘The Stories We Tell Ourselves: History Teaching, Powerful Knowledge and the Importance of Context’. In Arthur Chapman (ed.), *Knowing History in Schools: Powerful Knowledge and the Powers of Knowledge* (London: UCL Press, 2021), pp. 216–233 at pp. 218–219. Citing the work of Michael Young, Nick Dennis argues for the benefits of history education that charts a route between the transmission of knowledge (referred to as ‘Future 1’) and the rejection of the status of all knowledge (‘Future 2’). Young’s ‘Future 3’ rejects the idea of knowledge ‘as a given’, recognising that ‘there is an element of construction regarding knowledge, which is fallible and open to change’.

11 See <https://anotherhistoryispossible.com/>.

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continuity question 'Was there more continuity than change in British–Jamaican relations between 1760 and 1870?'. Counsell argues that the new question helped to complicate the notion of an uninterrupted forward trajectory in the abolition movement, as well as making space for formerly neglected stories of Black agency.<sup>12</sup> The framing of appropriate questions is important, then – and in this book, many of the enquiry questions either reference the idea of interpretation, or draw upon the second-order concept of significance as a means of making explicit the problematic claims that have been made about certain individuals in the past, as well as the rationale behind exploring their stories from alternative points of view.

The events of 2020 and 2021 have underlined the importance of challenging received histories of empire, slavery, abolition and race, in particular. The murder of George Floyd by a police officer in Minneapolis, Minnesota in May 2020 sparked global outrage and inspired a wave of activism; many protestors marched and campaigned in the name of Black Lives Matter, a movement which – since 2013 – has worked to bring about justice and an end to racism. In the UK, a number of protestors tore down or defaced several statues dedicated to individuals who had links to the slave trade – most notably, a statue depicting the Bristol merchant and slave trader Edward Colston. Some commentators have likened the impact of George Floyd with that of Rosa Parks and Emmett Till, suggesting that these individuals all provided the fuel for a global race movement. Of course, in the case of George Floyd it was the collective uproar on social media (particularly Twitter) that really helped to funnel public anger at the specific injustice into broader calls for political, institutional and cultural change.<sup>13</sup> In the wake of these activities, schools were urged to rethink the manner in which certain histories were delivered. The notion of decolonising the curriculum (already established as an area of focus within university and academic circles) was popularised, and Twitter was awash with initiatives and inspiration for rethinking the manner in which Black history is delivered within British schools.<sup>14</sup>

For me, the most important message to come out of the recent decolonising initiatives has been the importance of allowing lessons, activities and enquiries to be

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12 Counsell, 'History', p. 158.

13 Mary Blankenship and Richard V. Reeves, 'From the George Floyd Moment to a Black Lives Matter Movement, in Tweets', *Brookings* (10 July 2020). Available at: <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/up-front/2020/07/10/from-the-george-floyd-moment-to-a-black-lives-matter-movement-in-tweets/>.

14 For an overview of some of these demands for change, see Matt Bromley, 'Black Lives Matter: How Schools Must Respond', *SecEd* (25 November 2020). Available at: <https://www.sec-ed.co.uk/best-practice/black-lives-matter-how-schools-must-respond-curriculum-racism-george-floyd-teaching-colston/>.

led by the stories or histories that are being introduced. It is not simply a case of inserting a Black abolitionist campaigner into a scheme of work on the abolition movement, or a female scientist into an enquiry on the development of modern medicine; truly diverse, decolonised history is not built on tokenistic reference to marginalised individuals simply for the sake of it. Doing so would only underline the impression that certain identities are peripheral to the story of British life and society. Instead, the decolonising project has taught us that these histories – as well as our pupils – are best served by incorporating the experiences of overlooked individuals into the main narrative, and even allowing these individuals' stories to alter this narrative, if necessary. Quoting the work of Michael Rothberg, Nick Dennis refers to this as 'multidirectional' history. Rather than viewing, for example, Black history as 'separate, superficial and distracting from the *real* history that needs to be taught', the approach involves constant reappraisal, renegotiation and cross-referencing of the past, facilitating greater creativity and complexity when it comes to planning and re-planning schemes of work.<sup>15</sup>

The same is true of women's history and histories of gender and sexuality; it is important to avoid creating the impression that the experiences of women, for example, were (or are) necessarily distinct simply because of their gender, or that it is only relevant to explore the lives of women through certain historical prisms (like social and domestic history, for example). This problem was recognised by Mary Kay Thompson Tetreault in 1985, when an investigation into depictions of women in American high-school history textbooks highlighted a tendency to explore the contributions of 'notable women' or to focus simply on the ways in which well-known or exceptional women have overcome oppression – approaches that Tetreault referred to as 'compensatory' or 'bi-focal' history. Tetreault found very little evidence of 'multi-focal, relational' history – a much more desirable approach, according to which women's and men's experiences are explored as part of a 'holistic view of human experience'.<sup>16</sup> Adopting the former approach not only risks the dissemination of skewed, unrealistic models of femininity, but it also gives the impression that there exist separate spheres of male and female history. It suggests that whilst men have existed (and continue to exist) in the public spheres of politics, power and commerce, women are generally confined to the

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15 Nick Dennis, 'Beyond Tokenism: Teaching a Diverse History in the Post-14 Curriculum', *Teaching History* 165 (2016): 37–41 at 37–38.

16 Mary Kay Thompson Tetreault, 'Integrating Women's History: The Case of United States History High School Textbooks', *The History Teacher* 19(2) (1986): 211–62 at 215–217.

## INTRODUCTION

private worlds of marriage and domesticity – and are only worthy of serious study when they manage to transgress these domains.

In a 2016 edition of *Teaching History*, Bridget Lockyer and Abigail Tazzymant examine lingering misconceptions concerning the place of women in history. They conclude that, in spite of curriculum changes and wider initiatives, the 'dominant narrative' remains that 'men (or at least a certain type of man) and men's experiences are presented as the norm, women as the *other* and ultimately a distraction.'<sup>17</sup> Lockyer and Tazzymant offer some useful suggestions for ways in which this might be challenged, including the use of women's history to explore 'larger themes', and the explicit investigation of stereotypes.<sup>18</sup>

Some inspiring work has, therefore, already been done by writers and teachers wishing to diversify or complicate the delivery of content relating to marginalised histories. Where this book differs is that it aims to introduce characters and stories that might enrich existing topics – particularly those commonly taught at Key Stages 3, 4 or 5. Whilst there are opportunities for building longer enquiries around the case studies outlined (and these opportunities are indicated throughout the book), it is recognised that the process of curriculum development is a time-consuming one, and making small additions and changes across the curriculum is sometimes more realistic (and, in fact, more impactful) than attempting to entirely overhaul a topic or unit. This book aims to provide ideas and activities that can be implemented in the short term, as well as pointing to resources that might be explored by teachers wishing to develop the case studies into deeper or broader enquiries – or, indeed, teachers wishing to hinge entire topics off of the individuals explored within these pages. For each of the suggested enquiry questions listed (two for each case study), the second-order concept through which the enquiry might be most easily taught is also given; this might be significance, causation, consequence, change and continuity, similarity and difference, evidential understanding or interpretations. A summary of some suggested activities is given for at least one of the two enquiry questions listed per case study, and the footnotes, bibliography and final chapter (Conclusion: Planning for a Diverse Curriculum) point towards resources that might be used by teachers wishing to plan their own enquiries around the case studies.

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17 Bridget Lockyer and Abigail Tazzymant, "Victims of History": Challenging Students' Perceptions of Women in History', *Teaching History* 165 (2016): 8–15 at 14.

18 Lockyer et al., "Victims of History", p. 14.

The book is organised according to six different themes, with a number of case studies contained within each. Increasingly, it seems that teachers and departments are structuring their Key Stage 3 curricula by theme – perhaps partly in response to the introduction of the thematic unit at GCSE, which typically requires pupils to assess the changing nature of health, power, migration, warfare or crime and punishment over time. History at Key Stage 3 often explores the changing nature of, for example, power; pupils might examine the power of monarchy in Year 7, before going on to examine the shifting nature of political power in industrial and modern Britain in Years 8 or 9. Similarly, the theme of conflict is either explicitly or implicitly present in pupils' exploration of the English and/or American Civil Wars, the French Revolution and World Wars One and Two. Migration is an increasingly popular choice for the GCSE thematic unit, and this book suggests ways in which this theme might be explored at Key Stage 3 – or, indeed, enriched at Key Stage 4 with new and insightful case studies. Particular emphasis is also lent to society and culture – themes that can sometimes be sidelined, but which present fruitful opportunities for broadening the diet of history that pupils receive at secondary school.

In line with the diversifying ethos of the book, the case studies presented here do not represent *notable* individuals. Although some of their experiences may appear extraordinary from our modern vantage points, many of the individuals would probably have considered themselves to have led rather ordinary lives. Their names would not generally appear within lists or encyclopedias of significant figures from history and, more often than not, I learnt of their stories by accident, perhaps as part of a different piece of research. This, really, is the whole point: if we want to lay claim to a truly diverse curriculum, we need to make room for stories that move beyond the traditional focus on heroes, conquerors and pioneers, exploring instead the real, lived experiences of a whole range of individuals. Fundamentally, we also need to emphasise the value of these kinds of stories, encouraging pupils to conceive of history in the broadest possible terms. By adopting such an approach, pupils will begin to recognise themselves in the people of the past – and this will prove invaluable in the process of identity construction in the present.

# A PRACTICAL COMPENDIUM OF ENQUIRIES AND CASE STUDIES TO HELP HISTORY TEACHERS DIVERSIFY, REIMAGINE AND DECOLONISE THE HISTORY CURRICULUM.

In writing this book, Elena Stevens' aim is to respond to widespread calls for a more diverse curriculum – calls which have become more insistent following the reinvigoration of the Black Lives Matter movement, the #MeToo movement and other landmark events.

Highlighting the lived experiences of women, the working classes, and BAME and LGBTQ+ communities in particular, *40 Ways to Diversify the History Curriculum* draws upon a carefully curated selection of forty case studies to exemplify significant historical moments and shed new light on topics that have traditionally been taught through narrower lenses.

## AN IDEAL RESOURCE BANK FOR TEACHERS WISHING TO ENLIVEN HISTORY LESSONS AT KEY STAGES 2– 3, GCSE, A LEVEL AND BEYOND.

Not only does Elena Stevens provide a clear rationale as to why we should diversify many different areas of the 'traditional curriculum' but, crucially, she also offers many practical ideas, strategies and even enquiries to inspire teachers to help create a curriculum fit for the twenty-first century. *40 Ways to Diversify the History Curriculum* is a real, practical guidebook that should be a core text in all history departments.

**Richard McFahn, Lecturer in History Education, University of Sussex, consultant and founder of [www.historyresourcecupboard.com](http://www.historyresourcecupboard.com) and [www.practicalhistories.com](http://www.practicalhistories.com)**

Elena Stevens doesn't simply introduce us to people and situations we may have been ignorant of, but she offers a way of making us all better historians along the way. And, it would not be too much to claim, better human beings too.

**Dr Debra Kidd, author and teacher**

If you are looking to move your curriculum beyond 'our island story', then *40 Ways to Diversify the History Curriculum* offers you a treasure trove of starting points: historical nuggets that have been looked over by a practised teacher's eye and are accompanied by suggestions for enabling the stories to capture students' learning and to swiftly develop their historical skills of enquiry and reflection.

**James Handscombe, Executive Principal, Harris Westminster Sixth Form and Harris Clapham Sixth Form**



**Elena Stevens** is a secondary school teacher and the history lead in her department. She completed her PhD in the same year that she qualified as a teacher, and loves drawing upon her doctoral research and continued love for the subject to shape new schemes of work and inspire students' own passions for the past.

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