

Diversity & Inclusion *in History*

Case Study

2020

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1066

1215

History teacher and subject advisor, Jane Wicks, shares her views on diversity and inclusion in history and gives an insight into how her school is championing women through the ages.



Jane Wicks,
History teacher
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Jane Wicks: Championing the role of women

What does a diverse and inclusive history curriculum look like? That seems like such a simple question, but actually there is so much to it.

History is the study of the past, of people and their impact. People are diverse and complex, and the history we teach should take that into account and be the same.

Today, we live in a diverse world and a diverse country. But diversity isn't something that is new. We have always been diverse and students need to understand that. Just because we may be putting more emphasis on diversity in history now, this does not mean that we are changing the past.

Don't get me wrong, history should absolutely not be a citizenship lesson, but we have a duty to help students move away from any preconceived judgements and prejudice. As a history teacher, I want all students to feel included and to understand that we are all different, but equally important.

In my opinion, there are a lot of groups who could be more included in what we teach in history, from the BAME community to working classes, women, the LGBT+ community and people with disabilities.

At my school and across Ormiston Academy Trust we are doing a lot of work to champion these groups in our history teaching. I'm not saying that we've got everything right so far, it's a work in progress, but we are taking steps to try and make a real difference.

Championing the role of women in history

The world is made up of 50% women and yet women do not appear in half of what we teach in history. So, in our school we have really tried to champion the role of women in history throughout our curriculum.

While we are quite confined at GCSE when it comes to what we teach in history, we have much more freedom at KS3. So, we kick-off our Year 9 students' history learning by exploring women getting the right to vote, The Suffragettes and Suffragists, but we don't end there.

We then explore women in the Medieval period, the Renaissance and the Industrial periods and aspire to break down the idea that women have always been the oppressed or the voiceless. Rather than this being a bolt-on topic, women kick start our year 9 student's history learning and form a key feature of the other topics we later explore too. For instance, we look at women's roles in WWII, their contributions and their importance.

I get my students to learn about individual women, based on real life people and the parts they played on the Home Front. One of the individuals is my grandma, who was in the land army. I share her medal with the class and tell them that she only received this medal and had her contribution officially recognised in 2014 - despite her and other women's important roles keeping the country going.

It's amazing to see the impact that teaching about some of these groups and topics can have. While teaching about the Suffragettes and exploring gender equality issues, we watched the trailer to the film Suffragette in class and one of our students was in tears and requested to watch the rest of the film for her homework!

It's incredible to see students really connect with something and feel so strongly about it. I've also been amazed by how the boys have responded to this topic too. 10 years ago they would most likely have been saying "Ah, this is nothing to do with us", but today that has completely changed. They're hugely engaged with the subject and this shows how much society has moved forward in that time too.

Moving forwards with society

The biggest, most impactful changes happen when society is moving along at the same pace. If you look at the news and the current climate, society wants greater diversity and inclusion, it wants this to happen and is ready for it to happen.

That said, we have learnt that some topics and themes really just don't resonate with students. So while diversity is hugely important, the content also has to meet the needs of the class in front of you and be evolving.

For example, while we are proud of our work to champion women and the BAME community in our history teaching, we are also thinking about how we could embed more Romanian history to reflect our students whose families come from there. Some of my colleagues across our trust, also put an emphasis on exploring local history with their students, which is also hugely important.

It's an exciting time for history teaching and learning, but we do need more resources, textbooks and qualifications that champion more diverse topics to support us too. It's great to see that Pearson is releasing its new GCSE Migration topic - it sounds amazing and I think our students will really be able to see part of their own world in this.

My overall advice for teachers would be, yes it's tricky, yes, we are busy, but it's important to find the time to do this as the impact on pupils and society will be worth it.

Jane Wicks is a history teacher and subject advisor for Ormiston Academies Trust.

Take a look at [Pearson's Diversity and Inclusion in History webpages](#) for more great content.