



WSRHT Education Service: Teachers' Information Pack

General Information

Planned by Isambard Kingdom Brunel as a branch line of the Bristol and Exeter Railway and opened in 1862, the West Somerset Railway is the longest standard gauge independent heritage railway in the UK.

Beginning at Bishop's Lydeard, the line stretches across the Somerset countryside for 22 miles and passes through 8 other stations before terminating at the seaside town of Minehead.

The line covers a 100 year period of railway history from the 1860s to 1960s, giving a unique insight into the important role that the railways played during a time of massive industrial and social change for Great Britain.

The Gauge Museum at Bishop's Lydeard offers educational sessions and loans boxes to suit a range of topics and Key Stages as well as museum trails to support teacher-led visits.

Based on the 2014 National Curriculum, our learning sessions offer an opportunity not only to explore our local and national history, but also provide links to the STEM subjects if desired.

Museum- Based Learning Sessions:

Learning sessions cost £45 for a class of up to 32 children and last approximately one hour. STEM extension activities are charged at an additional £30 per class when taken with another learning session or £45 as a stand-alone. Sessions are led by our Learning Officer, a qualified teacher, and take place in our learning space in the lower section of the museum. Because of the size of the space, it may be necessary to divide large groups into two for the session.

In School Learning Sessions:

Learning Sessions can now come to you! For the same price, we will bring our learning sessions, complete with costumes and resources, into your classrooms. These can be used as a basis for a themed experience day, or simply as a topic focus. All of our current sessions, including the STEM investigations are available in this format.

Current Learning Sessions Available:

EYFS/KS1: 'A trip to the Seaside'

Focus: Exploring and comparing how seaside holidays have changed over time with optional links to local history through the development of Minehead from small town to big attraction (KS1).

Overview: The session takes the form of an imaginary seaside holiday; with opportunities for dressing up and role play. It explores how the railways made seaside holidays possible and invites children to compare the differences between past and present holidays using local photographs and handling objects.

- Topic links to Seaside, Holidays and Transport

Curriculum Links 2014:

- Identify similarities and differences between ways of life in different periods.
- Understand some of the ways in which we find out about the past and identify different ways in which it is represented.
- Events beyond living memory that are significant nationally

KS1: 'Who was Isambard Kingdom Brunel?'

Focus: Exploring the life and achievements of Isambard Kingdom Brunel and the changes that his GWR and branch lines brought to our local area.

Overview: The session explores Brunel's life and achievements within the context of the Industrial Revolution; with opportunities for dressing up and role play. It uses object sorting and handling to investigate the impact that Brunel's railways had both nationally and locally on the everyday lives of people and encourages children to consider why we remember people like Brunel.

Curriculum Links 2014:

- Identify similarities and differences between ways of life in different periods.
- Events beyond living memory that are significant nationally
- The lives of significant individuals in the past who have contributed to national and international achievements
- Significant historical events, people and places in their own locality

EYFS/KS1: Living at Three Chimneys – ‘What might life have been like for the Railway Children?’

Based on E Nesbitt’s classic novel, our *Railway Children* inspired learning sessions invite children to find out more about early rail travel and life in Edwardian England.

Focus: Exploring aspects of everyday life in Edwardian England and making comparisons with modern equivalents.

Overview: Using extracts from the book, along with costume and guided role play, the session encourages children to discover what life was like more than 100 years ago. Exploring aspects such as clothing and everyday activities, children are invited to compare the lives of Bobby, Peter and Phyllis with their own. Inspired by events from the story, they will find out how to save a railway using their underwear and how to prepare their best clothes for an award ceremony.

Curriculum Links 2014

English:

- Develop pleasure in reading, motivation to read, vocabulary and understanding by:
 - Listening to and discussing a wide range of poems, stories and non-fiction at a level beyond that at which they can read independently.
 - Being encouraged to link what they read or hear read to their own experiences.
- Understand both the books they can already read accurately and fluently and those they listen to.

History

- Identify similarities and differences between ways of life in different periods.
- Understand some of the ways in which we find out about the past and identify different ways in which it is represented.
- Ask and answer questions, choosing and using parts of stories and other sources to show that they know and understand key features of events.

KS2: Deadly Forces: Exploring safety on the railway – ‘Why did the Railway Children become heroes?’

Focus: Exploring some of the forces involved on a railway and understanding why safety is so important and what measures are taken to prevent accidents.

Overview: Using extracts from the book, along with contemporary newspaper articles on rail accidents, children are invited to consider what might have happened if the Railway Children

had not been on hand to prevent the train from hitting the landslide. The session includes a series of STEM investigations designed to demonstrate what happens when a moving object impacts upon a stationary one. It concludes by introducing some of the systems put in place by the railway to ensure safety.

Curriculum Links 2014

Science:

- **Working Scientifically**
 - setting up simple practical enquiries, comparative and fair tests
 - making systematic and careful observations and, where appropriate, taking accurate measurements using standard units
- **Forces**
 - Explore falling/moving objects and raise questions about the effects of resistance.
 - Recognise that some mechanisms, including levers, pulleys and gears, allow a smaller force to have a greater effect.

KS2: Victorian Britain: ‘How did the railways change people’s lives in our locality?’

Focus: Setting the scene by exploring aspects of pre-railway life such as transport, communication, diet and politics, the session explores how the railways became a defining part of Britain’s Industrial Revolution, changing people’s lives throughout the Victorian period and establishing the framework of the modern world.

Overview: Using object handling, picture analysis, discussion and role play, children will be encouraged to explore how the GWR and its branchlines changed the life of ordinary people in the South West. Investigating the views of different groups of people in character, children are invited to consider whether they would be ‘for’ or ‘against’ the building of the railway.

Curriculum Links 2014:

- A study of an aspect of British History beyond 1066: A significant turning point in British History: The First Railways
- Address and devise historically valid questions about change, cause, similarity and difference, and significance.
- A local history study

KS2: Operation Pied Piper: ‘What was it like to be an Evacuee during the Second World War?’

Note: for this session, we encourage children to come to us dressed as evacuees.

Focus: Beginning by exploring the context behind ‘Operation Pied Piper’ the session investigates what life might have been like for a child during the Second World War, encouraging children to make comparisons with their own lives.

Overview: Using object handling, document analysis, discussion and role play, children will explore the important role played by the railways in the evacuation process. They will find out more about rationing, investigate the contents of an evacuee’s suitcase before finally facing the ultimate ordeal: being chosen by a new family. Some will be lucky – others not so much...

Curriculum Links 2014:

- A study of an aspect of British History beyond 1066: A significant turning point in British History: The Second World War
- Address and devise historically valid questions about change, cause, similarity and difference, and significance.
- Understand how our knowledge of the past is constructed from a range of sources

Railway themed STEM Investigation Sessions

Learning sessions can be extended with the addition of a STEM-related investigation- allow at least an additional hour in your visit for these. Many of these can be adapted to suit either a KS1 or KS2 class – let us know what you require when you book. Current sessions include:

The Gauge investigation – exploring the differences between Brunel’s broad gauge and the standard gauge railway lines.

Beginning with a maths problem solving activity using standard or non-standard measures, children investigate the difference in width between a broad gauge and a standard gauge line. They then explore the science behind Brunel’s design comparing the stability of a broad based structure over a narrow one.

Brunel’s Great Bridge Challenge – Based around Science and Engineering/DT, children are invited to explore some of the different types of bridge design before exploring, selecting

and shaping different materials in order to design and build a bridge sturdy enough to hold a variety of different weights.

Stevenson's Rocket Challenge – based around science and engineering, the session explores how steam is used to power a locomotive, with children constructing their own compressed-air powered locomotive.

Further details on request.

Digital Resource Packs

Need some inspiration to help you kick start a topic? Containing background information to get you started, a large selection of photos which can be either printed for displays or incorporated into your whiteboard presentations and a collection of worksheets, challenge cards and printable replicas our digital resource packs allow us to send some of the magic of the railway – and the museum to you. Current Resource packs include:

- The Seaside (EYFS/KS1)
- The Railway Children: Edwardian Life (EYFS/KS1)
- Isambard Kingdom Brunel (KS1)
- Victorian Britain: The Industrial Revolution (KS2)
- WW2 and Evacuation (KS2)

For more information on these, click on the [Resource Packs](#) link on our website.

Loans Boxes

Designed to give children a more genuine insight into a topic, by offering the opportunity to gain tactile experience of handling objects and replicas, our loans boxes cover a variety of Primary History Topics. Each box contains a collection of objects, photos and costumes from the museum's handling collection, which can be used to support your class by forming the basis of discussions, drama activities, comparative activities or mystery object games.

Current Loans Boxes include:

- The Seaside (EYFS/KS1)
- The Railway Children: Edwardian Life (EYFS/KS1)
- Isambard Kingdom Brunel (KS1)

- Victorian Britain: The Industrial Revolution (KS2)
- WW2 and Evacuation (KS2)

For more information on these, click on the [Loans Boxes](#) link on our website

Visiting the West Somerset Railway

The Railway and its museums are operational between March-October (please see individual timetables for specific dates and times of trains) and we welcome school groups throughout this period. In-school sessions, loans boxes and digital packs are available throughout the whole year.

The Gauge Museum is based at Bishops Lydeard station on Platform One. Following an extensive re-fit during 2020, the museum tells the story of the West Somerset Railway; from its beginnings, at the hands of Brunel, to its decline and subsequent recovery, also covering themes such as the Industrial Revolution, the growth of holiday towns such as Minehead and the impact of railways on the local economy. There are also opportunities to actively engage with our collections by investigating our interactive exhibits including a working signal box and of course our lovingly restored Victorian first class sleeping carriage.

In addition to our learning sessions, we also offer the opportunity for a 'self-guided' or 'teacher led' visit with full access to the museum space. We have a variety of museum trails which allow children to interact more fully with the museum and its collection. We also have costumed volunteer guides on hand on certain days who offer additional information and insights into life on the WSR – please contact us for more information about this.

Train Travel

Your visit to the Gauge Museum can of course be combined with the experience of travelling through the Somerset countryside behind a restored steam locomotive.

The WSR offers a range of possible routes on our line, allowing you to tailor your visit in terms of time and expense.

For more information and a list of potential options and prices, please go to the [Planning your Educational Visit](#) section of our website.

Facilities for School visits

The Gauge museum is happy to host school visits and has a small learning space where children can store their belongings for the duration of their visit and take part in Learning

Sessions. Due to size restrictions in the museum, it may be necessary to divide classes into smaller groups for each activity.

Accessibility

The Gauge Museum is housed in a grade II listed building and as such has some access limitations. The ground floor exhibition space is fully accessible to wheelchair users and the lower floor education space can be reached via a rear entrance. Unfortunately, there is currently no access to the model railway exhibition on the mezzanine floor.

Our Victorian sleeping carriage has extremely narrow corridors and unfortunately does not offer a wide enough turning circle for wheelchairs.

Please always make us aware of any wheelchair users at the time of booking or before the day of your visit.

Parking

Parking facilities for the museum are at the far end of the industrial estate, next to the picnic area and adventure playground. There is a short walk from the car park to the station platform past the engine sheds, though if preferred, there is a drop off point for coaches outside the station entrance (missing out the engine sheds).

Toilet Facilities

Teachers should please note that unfortunately the Gauge Museum does not have toilet facilities on site, but that toilets are available on the other side of the platform with disabled access. Additionally, there are toilet facilities on board all of our trains and at the following stations:

- Crowcombe Heathfield *
- Stogumber*
- Williton
- Watchet*
- Blue Anchor
- Dunster
- Minehead*

* Toilets with disabled access

Lunchtime Arrangements

The picnic area is a short walk from the station next to the main car park. It is equipped with picnic benches and play equipment. If the weather is poor, children may eat their lunches in the learning space in the museum or in the station waiting room. Lunches may also be consumed on the trains. There is a café on the station opposite the museum that serves drinks and light bites.

Please Note: The behaviour of pupils during lunchtime is the responsibility of the teacher. Please clear up any litter before leaving the area. If any cleaning materials or extra bin bags are needed, please ask.

Shop

Children are welcome to visit the Bishops Lydeard Station shop which sells a selection of railway related souvenirs. Please be aware that standard conditions still apply during a shop visit i.e. minimum supervision ratios need to be adhered to and behaviour of pupils closely monitored.

Safeguarding

The West Somerset Railway is strongly committed to protecting and promoting the welfare of children and young people and expects all staff, volunteers and visitors to embrace this commitment.

Please contact us if you would like a copy of our Safeguarding Policy and Procedure.

Photography and Filming

The WSSRT follows a policy whereby the photography and filming of school children on organised school visits by general visitors are not permitted in the Museum. Visitors and other members of the public who appear to be taking photographs in inappropriate circumstances should be challenged.

Teachers are otherwise welcome to take photographs of the children while in the museum or on the platform.

Risk Assessments

We can provide Risk Assessments for all educational activities within the Gauge Museum. Please note that these are written from the Museum's perspective and we recommend that

all potential Group Leaders also conduct their own risk assessments during your familiarisation visit.

Please ensure you read our Risk Assessments for school visitors before your visit and brief all accompanying adults and, where appropriate, the children.

Supervision of Groups

We require that schools observe a minimum supervision ratio of 1 to 6 at KS1, 1 to 8 at KS2 and 1 to 12 at KS3 and above. This is also the maximum group walkabout number. Classes are to be divided into small groups (as above) with a competent/trained/qualified adult responsible for the supervision and behavior of each group at all times. The behaviour and supervision of the pupils on the West Somerset Railway is the responsibility of the teacher.

Adults are to remain with their designated group at ALL times.

Familiarisation Visits

We encourage all teachers who are planning a visit to the WSR to attend a familiarisation visit. Entry to the museum is free, but please check the opening times on our website to avoid disappointment. If you wish to speak with our Learning Officer regarding your visit, please let us know in advance.

We are happy for any school staff that will be accompanying the children on the day of the actual visit to attend the familiarisation visit, so that everyone feels fully confident on the day.

Though Risk Assessments are provided, we strongly recommend that you conduct your own assessment to complement ours. Museum Trails are available, but you may also wish to develop your own learning resources to enhance the visit.