Hidden Presence – a ffotogallery project

Learning resource – Caldicott School

The Participants
Eight Key Stage 4/5 students for two days.

The Project
Theme: Behind the face of Piercefield.

This project worked across the History and Art department. A visit took place to Piercefield House, the countryseat of Nathaniel Wells, which gave the young people an understanding of life as a country gentleman in the 19th century, and provided them with the background knowledge to create an animated short film juxtaposing life in the UK and in the colonies during the days of the British Empire. They also created still and moving digital images, Picturesque Photography and Photographic Walks with Photosynth.

Aims
- By visiting and photographing Piercefield House the young people learn historical background on aristocratic life in the 18th & 19th centuries
- Through exploration of Nathaniel Wells story young people learn about identity, opposing sides of self and empathy
- Learn new practical creative skills and visual literacy
- To explore past and present personal accounts and examples of slavery and look at what slavery means, its origins and legacy

Planning
Most of the liaison in advance was done with the History department. This project was different to the others as the work took place during Activity Week at the end of the Summer term, where the students had the opportunity to choose an activity. This had the advantage of working with a small group who had all put themselves forward for the activity and were highly motivated. It was useful to have the History Department on board to expand on the historical detail of slavery whilst the support of the Art Deptartment gave us an opportunity to share creative knowledge and skills, as well as resources.

Outcomes

- **Picturesque Photography**

On the site visit young people learn about leisure in the 18th century, the birth of tourism in the Wye Valley and the picturesque movement. By taking their own picturesque photographs they learn about the constructed landscape, history of art and the contrast between the life of a country gentleman in the UK and an enslaved person in the Caribbean. See How to: Picturesque Photography

- **Piercefield Walks**

Site visit to Piercefield House and photograph their journey to the house using digital photography. Photos are then edited with online software Microsoft Photosynth to create otherworldly animated walks through the woods.

The length of the walk was divided into the number of young people (and staff) present. Each young person is designated a stretch of the Piercefield Walk which they then photograph using the Walk technique. See How to: Photographic Walk with Photosynth

- **Animation '*Behind The Face of Piercefield House'*.**

Merging vintage footage of the work and life in the colonial estates in the Caribbean with visuals of life in the UK, young people create an animation to tell the story of Piercefield, the origin of capital behind it, the link between the two places. In this roles of different people and spaces are explored. See How to: Stop Frame Animation

  o In advance, a source film was prepared into individual frames and printed off several on sheets of A4 paper
  o Young people are given sheets and materials to animate/draw on/ collage into/ cut out
  o Emphasis is given to juxtaposing conflicting elements of the story – scenes from the UK intercut with scenes from life in the UK
  o Set up a camera on a tripod over a table with consistent light to replicate a rostrum camera. Photograph each manipulated frame of the film, this works well in pairs with one young person operating the camera and one moving the paper
  o Alternatively, the paper can be scanned and the frames cropped individually

Discussion
Here are some sample questions as a starting points:

Slavery
What does slavery mean? When did it start? Has it ended? What is the legacy of historical slavery? What do we mean by the 'slave trade'? What is modern day slavery?

Empathy
How would you feel if you were exploited and/or enslaved? How does language affect how we think about a person's experience (ie. the use of 'slave' vs 'enslaved person')?

Legacy
What were the difference between life in Britain and the colonies? What is the legacy of the exploits by the slave traders? How has it affected our rural and urban areas? How can people's history be altered over the years (ie. Nathaniel's becoming 'white' over time)

Impact on Learning

"Overall the project was thoroughly enjoyable and students benefited both artistically and historically. They practiced skills that would have otherwise been outside of the scope of normal lessons which enriched the learning process." Matthew Handford, History Dept.

This cross-curricular activity boosted the participants historical knowledge and skills development, and was an opportunity for them to use ICT in new ways. It gave them more interest and confidence in using cameras, tablets and software.

Because it was an activity that had to be chosen, the group was highly motivated and meeting arts professionals broadened their horizons in terms of the arts in society and future careers.

The final piece, the animation, was a group work and built on their teamwork and collaborative skills.