

To 'WoLLoW' or not to 'WoLLoW', that is the question

'The World of Languages and Languages of the World'

Let's imagine you – or I – have got the chance to a language lesson to a Year 5 or Year 6 class. One alternative is to teach the boys and girls the days of the week in French, or Spanish, an obvious, simple and, perhaps, not naturally interesting task. The other is to teach them not the days of the week, but *about* the days of the week, in English, French or any language you like. If you were to do the latter, the following questions and answers and ideas and opportunities might emerge:

- i) Who on earth – or in heaven - are Tues and Wednes and Thurs and Fri named after?
- ii) And why?
- iii) Why in the English days of the week are there four names from the Northmen, two from the pagan world of Sun and Moon and one, lonely Roman god, Saturn?
- iv) Why is not even one day of the week which comes from Christianity: after all, it's been going here for 1.5 millennia?
- v) Why are French days of the week different?
- vi) Why are two, Samedi and Lundi, the same as in English?
- vii) What does Dimanche mean and what's it doing on a Sunday?
- viii) Is it coincidence that French days and the planets share names?
- ix) Is it a coincidence that Thursday (Thor) and Jeudi (Jove) are both thunderbolters and both on a Thursday (or a Jeudi)?
- x) Why are there seven days in a week, after all?
- xi) Did the Romans have days of the week? If not, why not?
- xii) Why are French and Italian and Spanish days of the week so similar and English so different?
- xiii) At this point, it may just be that a pupil from Russia, or Pakistan or Afghanistan or Germany volunteers his days of the week, and off we jolly well go.

That will do, I think. Of course, we rarely do find the time to wonder why Tuesday is Tuesday, but such a lesson encourages thought and curiosity, encompasses history and geography, empire and religion and, perhaps best of all, allows the pupils to use their knowledge, their family and language history, to fill the gaps in our ignorance. 'What larks', as someone once said. And that's a 'WoLLoW' lesson.

In recent times, a number of us from Birmingham, Norwich School, Cheadle Hulme School have been constructing a programme which is designed to encourage curiosity, understanding and enjoyment of languages in KS2 and KS3. We think that this is particularly valuable when the pupils in front of us are increasingly bilingual, if not multilingual, a reality which seems to have had little or no impact on what we teach. And another reality is that the teaching of languages in the early years is, too often, fragmented, undervalued and has no coherent link to what is taught in secondary school. As Steffan Griffiths, the Head of Norwich School, said at our first 'WoLLoW' conference: 'We teach Italian in our junior

schools so that, when those pupils move into the senior school, they don't have too much of an advantage over the pupils coming from elsewhere. That must be a nonsense.'

Anyway, it's not hard to get down to the hollow and there be a WoLLoWeR'. The resources are accessible – for free – on the 'WoLLoW' website and those resources can provide a full-year curriculum or individual lessons or topics to be cherry-picked according to your whims – or schemes of work. All you have to do is jump in, or whatever hippotamoi do.