Lesson 1: What are my views on investigating my own family history?

Lesson 2: Who was Walter Tull?

Lesson 3: What interview questions could I ask Rita about her family stories?

Lesson 4: What objects are useful in giving us clues about Walter Tull and his family story?

Lesson 5: How can I organise the information I have uncovered?

Lesson 6: What does being ‘British’ mean to you?

Lesson 7: Why did Walter Tull’s father leave Barbados in 1876?

Lesson 8: What experiences did Walter Tull and his family have in Britain?

Lesson 9: How are our family stories connected to migration?

This nine-lesson historical enquiry uses the family story of Walter Tull and his connection to migration as a lens through which to enthuse, engage and equip students with historically rigorous skills to conduct their own independent research. This involves EITHER investigating their own family history and its potential connection to migration OR to complete further in-depth research into Walter Tull’s family story. An alternative independent study investigation is provided as my preliminary review of the literature and students’ initial perspectives from Lesson 1 demonstrate that not all students wish to research their family stories. Some of the reasons are outlined below including family sensitivities and indifference.

Focus
This small-scale study aims to explore the ways in which students can benefit (if at all) from one historical enquiry that encourages them to investigate their own family stories.

Cunning Plan
Below is a sample of the written questionnaire responses as a result of Lesson 1 which reveal students’ initial preconceptions about investigating their own family history. I selected quotations from eleven students (coded A-K) across a sample of three Year 8 groups containing higher and lower attainers.

Benefits
‘Because one day I would tell my children about them, and how life used to be in the 1900s. I would see how my family has changed, because some of my family is Christian.’ D

‘You need to know who your ancestors were and how they have shaped you and influenced you into becoming the person you are today.’ A

‘Because it would be more interesting to find out about events that happened in your family’s history rather than other people’s history. However, I think that the choice is up to the person and that you shouldn’t get forced into it.’ F

‘Because it is worth a shot. And you might not want to miss out on an opportunity about your family history and many people might want to get away from family history whereas many want to get close.’ [sic] E

‘Many of the pupil’s backgrounds are from abroad making it extremely problematic to find the right sources and the amount that is enough.’ [sic] K

‘It might be challenging if I have to learn a language to speak to them.’ C

‘It would enlighten me and change my way of thinking, it may even give me more appreciation and respect towards people around me.’ [sic] B

‘People may find it a sensitive subject and might not want to talk about it.’ J

‘My family history is personal and I would not like to discuss it in a history lesson but with my parents.’ [sic] G

‘There are always secrets in families. Secrets are meant to be secrets. Misunderstandings could arise, as well as conflicts.’ H

‘It might be challenging if I have to learn a language to speak to them.’ C

‘Many of the pupil’s backgrounds are from abroad making it extremely problematic to find the right sources and the amount that is enough.’ [sic] K

‘...my family does not seem to have much history where they have done something significant.’ I

Challenges

Students’ initial preconceptions on investigating their own family history

‘Because it would be more interesting to find out about events that happened in your family’s history rather than other people’s history. However, I think that the choice is up to the person and that you shouldn’t get forced into it.’ F