

School Resource

Stories from Mint Street

This activity supports:
KS2 English and Literacy

Learning objectives:

- Use the historical setting of the Mint and Tower of London to inspire creative writing.
- Practice creative writing tasks that may include planning and structuring a story, developing description and character studies.

You will need:

- PowerPoint projector or interactive whiteboard.
- Printing pupil worksheets and relevant slides, ideally in colour.

Suggestions for use

Use this selection of short creative writing tasks and stimulus to encourage pupils to take the people, settings and stories from the history of the Mint at the Tower as inspiration for story planning, writing and revising.

A number of tools and possibilities are included for stimulating creative writing at each of the planning, writing and revising stages of story writing. We hope you will tailor them to suit your purposes.

Use this activity to:

- Introduce the essentials in good story writing including the need for character, setting, time and action – and the need for strong description.
- Show how people, settings and tales from the history of the Mint can be used as stimulus for modelling and practicing describing writing or familiarising children with Mint stories. Pupils can write their descriptions or record useful vocabulary on the framework provided.
- Introduce the importance of planning a story before writing. Introduce story structure – beginning, middle and end – and what normally happens at each stage.
- Organise pupils into groups and, using visual stimulus from the resources, generate style lists of powerful words to include in their stories.
- Ask children research and plan stories on the framework provided. Stories can be written, drawn or practiced orally.
- Choose a historical period and carry out research. Ask pupils to set their Mint story in medieval times, or under the Stuarts during a time of plague.
- Use the story revising engine resource to practice various writing techniques and inspire improvements and new ideas.



Background and notes

Teacher resources (included)

- Three stories from Mint Street
- How coins were made at the Tower of London
- **Pupil worksheet:** story planning framework

Three stories from Mint Street

William Foxley's fortnight nap

William Foxley was a potter at the Mint in the 1540s. He earned £10 a year, about the same as the general labourers, clerks and the junior under-engraver who he worked alongside. (Top officials earned a lot more: 200 marks per year, which was the equivalent of about £133.) One day, in April 1547, Foxley inexplicably fell asleep while working at the Mint, and it is said he remained so for 14 days and 15 nights.

The King's doctors could neither diagnose nor rouse him. King Henry VIII even had a look at the Mint's curious sleeping beauty. Apparently the episode had no lasting effects as Foxley continued to live and work happily for another 40 years in the Tower until 1587.

No one is certain what happened to Foxley. However, Tudor pottery excavated at the Tower was found to contain high levels of lead along with other heavy metals such as arsenic. Perhaps Foxley suffered from heavy metal poisoning?

Elizabeth I's visit to the Mint

On 10 July 1561, Elizabeth I visited the Mint at the Tower to check the progress of her new coins.

Years earlier, her father – King Henry VIII – had reduced the purity of English silver and gold coins to fund foreign wars and his extravagant lifestyle. The devaluation of the coinage led to huge price rises and public unrest as people lost faith in England's coins.

In preparation for the Queen's visit, the Mint brought in bags of gravel to cover the muddy street so she did not get her dress and shoes dirty. Rumour was that she even struck some gold coins herself.

Elizabeth's recoinage successfully restored people's faith in England's currency and she was widely applauded for her efforts.

Isaac Newton vs William Chaloner

The Mint's most famous Warden (who later became Master) was the mathematician and scientist Isaac Newton. He was appointed Warden of the Mint in 1696 at a time when counterfeiting was a huge problem – nearly ten per cent of coins were fake.

Newton took his job seriously and led the charge against the counterfeiters, including the notorious coin forger William Chaloner.

Chaloner was a resourceful criminal and confidence trickster. His skill at engraving counterfeits and his reckless money-making scams made him a rich man, although he was imprisoned in Newgate several times. When Chaloner accused Mint employees of selling dies to counterfeiters, Newton was enraged.

Newton used a web of spies and informants to gather evidence against Chaloner and had him sent to Newgate prison for High Treason. Despite naming his accomplices and pretending to be made in an attempt to escape his conviction, Chaloner was hanged in 1699.

Stories from Mint Street

How coins were made at the Tower of London

For centuries, coins were made by manually hammering a coin blank between two dies.

Producing coins in bulk made it possible for the Mint to generate a profit (which went to the monarch). The difference between the face value of a coin and its production cost was called 'seigniorage'.

In the 1660s, under Charles II, the Mint adopted new methods already in use on the Continent. Hand-operated screw presses could make beautiful coins very quickly.

The machine-struck coins were thicker and more regular than the old hammered ones, which helped combat counterfeiters and clippers, alongside other innovations such as specialist edge marking.

Hammering



Edward I groat, 1279

- Bullion arrives at the Mint
- Metal is melted down
- An assay sample is taken
- Ingots are cast in sand moulds
- Metal is rolled flat using horse power
- Blanks are cut
- Edges of coin are decorated using new technology intended to foil counterfeiters. Mint employees swear an oath of secrecy not to reveal details of the invention
- Blanks are weighed and tested
- Coins are struck with screw press
- Blanks are blanched, cleaned and dried with sawdust
- Coins are counted, scrutinised and weighed

Milling

- Bullion (in precious metal or coins) arrives at the Mint
- An assay sample of metal is taken to test purity of the bullion
- Metal is melted, alloyed and cast into ingots
- Ingots are rolled or flattened into sheets
- Blanks are cut
- Edges of the blanks are smoothed
- Coins are struck with a hammer
- Coins are blanched (cleaned using a mild acid wash)
- Coins are checked for fineness, size, striking quality
- Coins are tallied and given to client or buyer

Charles II
Petition Crown,
1663





Title _____

Author _____

Setting

Where and when?

Character

Who's involved?

- appearance?
- likes/dislikes?
- job?
- personality?
- something no one else knows?

Middle

End

