

The Project 'Window on the Past'

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• The article describes an educational programme aimed at introducing medieval life at pupils of 10 to 15 years age.

In 1999, the non-profit organisation Villa Nova Uhřínov began the project 'Window on the past'. It is an educational programme aimed at ten to fifteen year old pupils. It is carried out in the form of one-day school trips. The project is based on co-operation with museums, namely the Regional Museum of Orlické Hory in Rychnov nad Kněžnou and the Museum of Winter Sports, Tourism and Crafts in Deštná v Orlických Horách. It combines a visit to a traditional museum exhibition with 'project teaching' at the grounds of the open-air museum and the exhibition of experimental archaeology at the Villa Nova base in Uhřínov pod Deštnou. The programme complements school history lessons with visual experience. The pupils are acquainted with experimental archaeology, which helps to popularise archaeology.

The trips usually start with a visit to the exhibition at the Villa Nova base that is placed on the ground floor in a space of 120 m². It presents reconstructed artefacts, iconographic material, photographs of features and single activities. The pupils are introduced to the term 'experimental archaeology' and they are given a lecture on the life of people in Middle Ages – the stratification of medieval society, way of clothing, gaining and working textile fibres, weaving, dyeing cloth, colonisation of foothills and mountains, building houses, use of wood, farming, making pottery and its

use for dating in archaeology, starting fire and so on. The part on clothing is accompanied by examples of male and female clothing which are tried on by two volunteers from the pupils. During the talk on dyeing, we organise a competition. The children divide into groups; each group receives crayons and a page with the outlines of three medieval persons from various classes. They draw four cards, on each of them is a picture of a dyers plant with its name and the part of the plant used for dyeing. The children then guess what colour of dye is gained from each plant. With the chosen colours they then colour in the pictures and add the names of the plants. Originally, we created this game for small children but it is surprisingly popular also with thirteen and fourteen year old.

After the lecture, the children themselves try some of the production processes under our supervision. They can try weaving on both horizontal and vertical looms, belt weaving, spinning wool, twining strings, making pots on two types of potter's wheel, grinding corn on a quern stone, polishing bones with fine sandstone, and striking fire from quartz and catching sparks with tree fungus.

The whole programme in Uhřínov pod Deštnou takes about three hours. The lecture including the dyeing competition takes about an hour. For another

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hour or longer, depending on interest, the children try the processes at the exhibition and than we all move to the open-air museum. Here the pupils visit single structures: two types of grubenhäus, outbuilding, bread oven, three types of fences and fields where we carry out experiments in medieval agriculture. They learn more about medieval homes, building houses, growing crops, breeding animals, bee keeping and fish farming. In one of the grubenhäus, children can experience the medieval way of dealing with smoke and they can try to loosen soil with period spades. The greatest attraction is without any doubt baking bread in the bread oven. From the flour, they ground themselves earlier at the base, we prepare simple dough and divide it between them so that each of them can make their own cake and bake it in the hot oven. At the end, each pupil receives a brochure with a summary of what they have heard.

Apart from the programme at Villa Nova, the schools can choose from the museums and which exhibition they want to visit with their children (the entrance fee is part of the overall price). In Rychnov nad Kněžnou they can visit the Regional Museum of Orlické Hory, situated in Kolowratský Palace, with a changeable exhibition on the history of the region with a focus on folklore, Orlická Gallery (landscapes of Orlické Hory) and the Synagogue with a permanent exhibition of history of Jews in the region and the work of the writer Karel Poláček. In Vamberk, they can visit the Museum of Lace; it is a unique museum in Europe with an exhibition of lace development from the 18th century to present. In Deštné v Orlických Horách the Museum of Winter Sports, Tourism, and Craft, is an exhibition focusing on

the development of tourism, sports and crafts in mountains (weaving, woodcutting, glass making).

In the museum exhibitions, the children can see artefacts, development of which started centuries ago. Some of the artefacts can also be seen in more primitive form in the open-air museum. This helps them to realise the centuries long development of tools and human culture (for example a loom from the 19th century and a medieval loom in Villa Nova, textile products in the Museum in Rychnov and the Museum of Lace in Vamberk).

Although the programme is aimed at ten to fifteen year olds, some schools taking part bring younger pupils (eight to nine). We have had very good experiences even with such young children. It is necessary to adjust the explanations but on the other hand, they are interested in all the activities and they approach everything enthusiastically. On the contrary, there are sometimes problems with fourteen and especially fifteen year old pupils who are shy trying things in front of each other. We have to persuade them. It is also more difficult to keep their attention during the lectures. For this reason, it is not ideal if we get a visit of children of a wide age range as then the older pupils are often disruptive and because of this, it is necessary to shorten the programme, although the younger children are often interested. The fifteen year old pupils visit only occasionally, with the fourteen year old it depends very much on their school and teachers' approach. Generally, we have better experience with visits from the smaller schools from small towns and villages. However, with few exceptions there are generally few problems with the children. On the contrary, the

programme usually captivates them (especially baking bread in the open-air museum, sitting in a smoke filled grubenhause and stroking goats) so we believe that they do carry off something. Some of what they learn at school they

can see with their own eyes. Together with the possibility to try single production processes, it is of great importance to gain a better understanding of the life of medieval people.

Summary

Projet «Fenêtre sur le passé»

En 1999 Villa Nova Uhřínov, en collaboration avec les musées régionaux, a introduit le programme éducatif «Fenêtre sur le passé» envisagé pour les élèves de 10 à 15 ans. Ce programme marie la visite d'une exposition classique au musée avec un cours pratique au parc archéologique. Les enfants s'y trouvent vis-à-vis du moyen âge. Au moyen de l'expérience personnelle, ils découvrent le mode de vie médiévale et les technologies de ce temps-là. En fait, le programme complète les cours d'histoire d'une façon illustrative.

Das Projekt "Fenster in die Vergangenheit"

Im Jahre 1999 initiierte das archäologische Freilichtmuseum Villa Nova Uhřínov in Kooperation mit mehreren Museen der Region das pädagogische Programm "Fenster in die Vergangenheit", das zehn bis fünfzehn Jahre alte Schülerinnen und Schüler zur Zielgruppe hat. Das Programm verbindet den Besuch in einer traditionellen Museumsausstellung mit projektbezogenem Unterricht im Gelände des Freilichtmuseums. Die Schülerinnen und Schüler werden hier mit mittelalterlicher Lebensweise vertraut gemacht; sie können dabei diverse handwerkliche Tätigkeiten praktisch ausprobieren und allgemein die rekonstruierte Lebens- und Umwelt des Freilichtmuseums kennen lernen. Das Programm ergänzt den Geschichtsunterricht an der Schule mit visuellen und praktischen Erfahrungen.