

# Conducting the orchestra to allow our students to hear the symphony:

## getting richness of knowledge without resorting to fact overload

Alex Ford and Richard Kennett both welcome the renewed emphasis on knowledge within recent curriculum reforms in England, but are concerned about some of the ways in which the principle of a 'knowledge-rich' curriculum has been interpreted and transformed into particular pedagogical prescriptions. In this article they explain their reasons for endorsing a renewed emphasis on subject knowledge before setting out the implications that arise from such a commitment to the development of rich subject knowledge. Drawing on examples from their own (recent and current) practice as history teachers and on an extended metaphor of the history teacher as 'conductor', they explain how careful preparation – in terms of the teacher's subject knowledge – and attention to the way in which knowledge needs to be structured and brought to life for young people will enable a history teacher to orchestrate a rich symphony of historical learning that is both enjoyable and empowering.

### Alex Ford and Richard Kennett

Alex Ford is a Senior Lecturer and PGCE History Tutor at Leeds Trinity University. Richard Kennett is Curriculum Team Leader for Humanities at Redland Green School (11–18 comprehensive) in Bristol.

Since 2010, there has been a decided focus at the Department of Education on shifting secondary history away from the 'skills' agenda, prevalent under New Labour, and towards a focus on 'knowledge'.<sup>1</sup> This focus was led by the former Secretary of State for Education, Michael Gove (2010–14), and the Schools Minister, Nick Gibb. Both were heavily influenced by the works of E.D. Hirsch, who argues that schools have a moral duty to provide their students with a sound base of culturally powerful knowledge, and that such knowledge should be steadily built through repeated instruction and testing.<sup>2</sup> Hirsch's works influenced an attempt at building a 'core knowledge curriculum' in the 2013 revision of the National Curriculum, and had a significant impact on discourse about pedagogy.<sup>3</sup> This has led to heated debates at all levels, especially in relation to the redesign of the Key Stage 3 curriculum, and the equating of 'rigour' at GCSE with increased content demands.<sup>4</sup> The phrase which seems to have been used most frequently by proponents of the Gibb-Gove approach is that teachers need to make their lessons 'knowledge-rich'.<sup>5</sup>

Despite some of the outcry, we have cautiously welcomed the greater focus on 'knowledge' for a number of reasons:

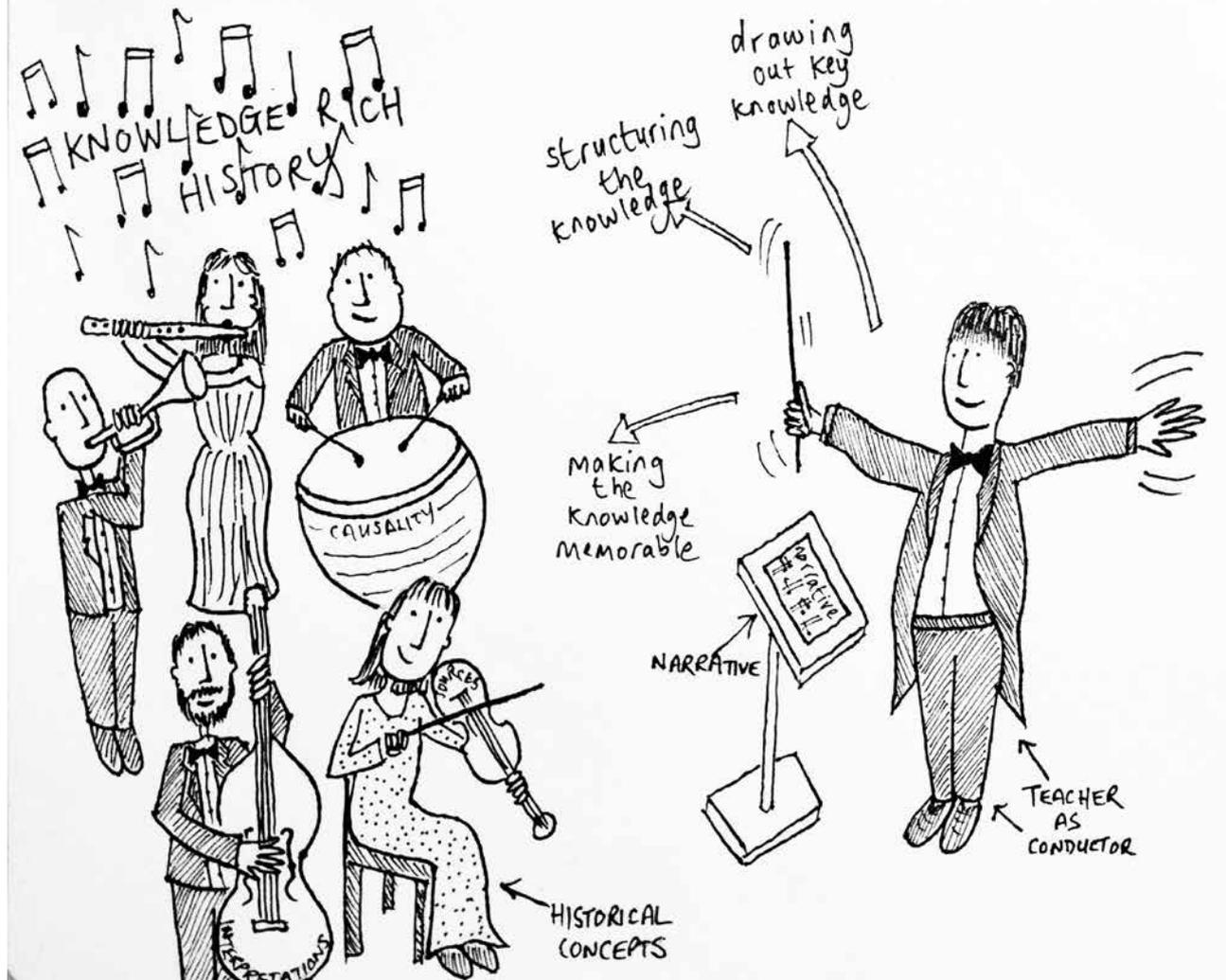
- The amount of time dedicated to history as part of the formal National Curriculum in Key Stage 3 (ages 11–14) appears to be shrinking.<sup>6</sup> We therefore have a duty to teach our students about the past and a decreasing number of hours to do so. In our experience, time spent teaching generic 'skills' is time that might be better spent helping students to understand the past. Teaching historical knowledge is more important than ever.
- We have both taught long enough to know that those students who know more history tend to do better in examinations. They are able, for example, to identify links between topics, to see common themes emerging over time and to grapple with the short and long-term causes of an event.
- And finally (and probably most importantly if we are honest) we are both self-confessed history nerds. We love our subject, read too much about it and drag our (at times) unwilling families to historical sites. We want our students to feel the same way about historical knowledge as we do.

However, claims about the use of a 'knowledge-rich' approach to teaching give rise to a number of concerns. First, definitions of what constitutes a 'knowledge-rich' curriculum, or even a 'knowledge-rich' lesson, are not clear. Second, there has been a good deal of conflation of the concept of a 'knowledge-rich' curriculum with a particular set of pedagogical approaches involving direct instruction, memorisation and frequent low-stakes testing, based loosely on popular studies in cognitive psychology.<sup>7</sup>

### What is 'knowledge-rich' learning? And what is not?

One of the major issues when planning for 'knowledge-rich' teaching is that the term itself is highly contested. Naturally all curricula contain knowledge of some sort or another,

Figure 1: The history teacher as conductor



so the term is arguably redundant. Indeed, Ofsted's subject review of history teaching between 2007 and 2010 found that:

*The subject knowledge of the specialist history teachers in the secondary schools visited was almost always good, often it was outstanding and, occasionally, it was encyclopaedic. Inspectors found so much good and outstanding teaching because the teachers knew their subject well.*<sup>8</sup>

Fordham makes some attempt to provide a working definition by suggesting that 'a knowledge-rich curriculum is one where we over-emphasise the importance of knowledge.'<sup>9</sup> But this, in some cases, has been taken to mean that 'knowledge-rich' involves cramming more factual information into lessons, and relying on a pedagogy of didactic content delivery and frequent testing.<sup>10</sup> To our minds, this does not meet the definition of a curriculum which is rich in knowledge. Simply remembering more factual detail does not necessarily equate to the deep understanding of the past which Fordham is presumably advocating. Indeed, even Willingham himself seems to be dubious about this approach, noting that the broad principles of effective teaching do not necessarily imply a single pedagogical approach:

*You can't teach kids to think critically about history or about science unless they are learning (or already know) facts about history and science. Oddly, some people take this principle as a derivative to sit kids down and*

*teach them lists of facts via teacher talk and textbooks. It's nothing of the kind. For one thing, any cognitive psychologist will tell you that a list is about the worst way to learn a bunch of facts... The principle – gotta learn facts – says nothing about how they ought to be learned... The principle sets a boundary: if you try to get kids to think critically about history without their knowing any historical facts, you'll fail.*<sup>11</sup>

How then should we be thinking about knowledge and its relation to a curriculum which inspires rich learning? One way of reflecting on the relationship is to imagine that historical learning is a great symphony: that facts are musical notes, instruments are historical concepts and the narrative movements are conveyed by the musical score. If we focus only on producing the individual notes of knowledge with little reference to anything else, then we are likely to get a discordant mess. If we prioritise a single conceptual instrument at a time, then we end up with something tuneful but weak. If we provide just the score and no direction, then we end up with clashing movements, different tempos, and yet more discord.

In order to create a beautiful symphony in history, we need knowledge, conceptual agility, and a sense of narrative, but we also need a conductor. In our experience we have found that the best teachers act like historical conductors, helping their students appreciate the beauty of a symphony of knowledge-rich learning (see Figure 1). Such teachers choose

their scores carefully, keep the flow, sustain the rhythm and, at the right times, emphasise particular instruments or passages that they think are powerful. Students are therefore able to listen to and appreciate the unfolding symphony of the past. Of course, we want to emphasise here that listening to a symphony is far from passive. Beethoven's Pastoral Symphony may be just a collection of notes, but it allows the listener to construct a vision of rural life: from the beauty of nature, to a flowing stream, country dance, or violent thunderstorm. All of these are images constructed by the active listener. Students are therefore engaged in a process of interpreting the historical symphony, building conceptual images in their minds from the complex flow and interplay of well-orchestrated facts. In the end, the best teachers enable their students to take up the baton themselves and conduct small movements, tentatively at first, but with growing confidence over time.

## The teacher as the conductor

If teachers are going to act as conductors then there are a number of key prerequisites. If one of us stood up in front of an orchestra, it seems unlikely that we would be able to produce the symphony. Why? Because we would not have the necessary knowledge. The first important point to realise is that 'knowledge-rich' learning can only be achieved if we are 'knowledge-rich' as teachers ourselves. We need to know our orchestra. We need to know the difference between a violin and a viola, what each adds to the symphony, and in what measure. We need to have the expertise to bring all of the instruments together at the right time, and in the right way. We need to know the score we are trying to play and how we want it to sound; how to interpret it for the orchestra, and how to shape it and control the tempo in full knowledge of what is coming next.

Our experience of working with teachers up and down the country is that subject knowledge should be a priority for professional development.<sup>12</sup> Teachers who update and deepen their knowledge regularly are able to choose the most appropriate scores in light of recent developments; can emphasise the particular facts which help to drive the narratives we want to tell; are able to structure the knowledge, break it down, introduce it at the right pace, and make it memorable. Without knowledge, teachers may as well wave their metaphorical baton at random.

Improving subject knowledge takes time and can seem onerous, but it is also enormously rewarding. There are many means of developing subject knowledge: visiting museums, and online exhibitions; watching documentaries; or even following historians on Twitter. Anything that stretches, improves, or develops our historical knowledge and connects us to current research should be seen, not only as valid continuing professional development (CPD), but as fundamental to promoting successful learning. We have found that reading history books is easily the best method, although this can be difficult in term time. When beginning to plan lessons on slavery in nineteenth-century America for the new OCR GCSE History B option, for example, Alex spent some time reading recent scholarship on the topic. The work of Edward Baptist in particular led to a realisation that the way he had been teaching the history of US slavery

was not only historically dubious, but also unhelpful for understanding the bigger story of slavery in the USA.<sup>13</sup> Baptist argues, for instance, that slavery, far from being an outdated and inefficient practice which was bound to be ended by capitalism, was in fact thriving and significantly more profitable than many capitalist enterprises. This line of reasoning is crucial to explaining why the practice was only actually brought to an end by war, when its demise had seemed inevitable in the discredited interpretation about the triumph of capitalism.<sup>14</sup>

Once teachers have developed their knowledge, three main jobs of the teacher-conductor remain:

- 1) Structuring the knowledge: both the big picture and the small details. This is akin to the way a conductor selects a score and interprets it.
- 2) Drawing out the key knowledge and making sure it is understood: much like the way a conductor might interpret the score, emphasising key elements and controlling others.
- 3) Making the knowledge memorable: those flourishes which allow the audience to better interpret the imagery of the music themselves.

## Structuring the knowledge

The primary role of a conductor is to know the score they are trying to interpret, and to unify the performers in bringing it to life. The role of the history teacher is to do the same but with knowledge of the past, be that just one movement, or the whole symphony. We would suggest that it is the history teacher's responsibility to select the most appropriate narrative, and to structure and shape it in such a way that the student can not merely appreciate it but see it, feel it, interpret it. It is not enough to simply know the notes to be played; the teacher-conductor also needs to be able to help their students understand how all the elements fit together.

Consideration of how knowledge is developed plays a crucial role in teachers' planning – within a single lesson, over the course of a term, a year and, indeed, across the key stages. Teachers are quite accustomed to considering how knowledge developed in one lesson might support students in their next. We are sure that most teachers would not, for example, attempt to teach the Reformation without having first having developed students' understanding of medieval Catholicism. If the aim is to deepen students' understanding, then the structure of that knowledge – a teacher's choice and interpretation of the score – is crucial. What knowledge do the students need? When is it the right moment to introduce one piece of knowledge so that another makes more sense? How can knowledge be revisited and reinforced? All of these questions are central.

But this principle also applies on a much larger scale. We believe that, as teachers, we need to consider the whole symphony of historical learning when we are teaching. In this sense we need to know how knowledge developed in one unit might underpin and support a later one. Or how the sense of period with which we seek to imbue students in Year 7 might support their work as sixth-formers. If our big curriculum

Figure 2: Examples of the distinction between residue and fingertip knowledge in a study of nineteenth-century Russia

### Examples of fingertip knowledge from Week 2 of the Russia 1855-1964 course

- the birth and early life of Alexander II up until his coronation
- the origins of the Crimean War and the events leading to defeat in 1856
- contemporary responses to the defeat in the Crimean War
- peasant uprisings in the late 1850s: numbers, locations, and responses by the state
- arguments over the need for social, economic and military reform in the Tsar's government

### One example of key residue knowledge from Week 2 of the course

#### Week 2

#### The nature of autocracy in Tsarist Russia

Including: the nature of autocratic rule, drawing on examples from Key Stages 3 and 4 (e.g. Hitler); the role played by the Tsar and the nature of autocracy in Russia – especially the pillars of autocratic rule: nobles, church and peasantry; the differences between Russian autocracy and the governments of other major European countries; the image of Russian autocrats in Europe; the expectations of different groups of the autocracy.

### How the residue knowledge from Week 2 was built upon later in the course

#### Week 3–4

The impact of civil unrest on the pillars of tsarist autocracy, including riots around Emancipation – links to why unrest failed to achieve radical change quickly.

#### Week 5

The assassination attempt on Alexander II and why reactionary policies were deemed necessary to stabilise the autocracy.

...

#### Week 45

The parallels between Lenin's dictatorship and tsarist autocracy; the pillars of Communist rule: army, party and people, and their comparison with the autocracy; the expectations people had of their new Communist leaders and how these were similar or different to those of the tsars.

plan is little more than stumbling through a series of events in loose chronological order, then the whole narrative loses coherence and the orchestra becomes a discordant mess. To give one example, we both taught our A-level groups the AQA unit on Russia 1855–1964. A core requirement in making sense of this unit is an understanding of the nature of Russia's serf-based society. We therefore both spent a suitable amount of time in Year 7 developing students' understanding of the concept of English manorialism. Although the two systems are distinct, one resonates with the other. By playing these 'knowledge notes' in Year 7, we felt that our students were able to more easily recognise the leitmotif when they were played again in Year 12.

We believe that it is equally important to provide structure at unit, or topic level; just as individual movements exhibit their own distinctive characteristics while fitting within the symphony as whole. There is a substantial body of evidence to suggest that one of the best ways to give shape to a unit is through a carefully guided historical enquiry.<sup>15</sup> As Riley and Byrom have suggested, a good enquiry has a clear focus on an historical topic, viewed through the lens of a second order concept.<sup>16</sup> For example, the question 'How should Churchill be remembered?' demands clear substantive

knowledge of Churchill, his actions, and his legacy; as well as encouragement for students to consider this historical content through the second-order concept of significance. In essence, the enquiry sets up a genuine historical puzzle to be solved; requires specific knowledge and disciplinary thinking; and demands that the two are brought together in a meaningful outcome. In this way students develop rich knowledge of a period, development, or issue, but do so through an historically grounded process.

### Drawing out the key knowledge

The role of the conductor is also to emphasise particular passages by bringing out some instruments and quietening others down, allowing certain sections of the orchestra to shine. For example, the conductor might soften the percussion to allow the strings to be emphasised. We suggest that history teachers might do something similar with disciplinary-focused historical enquiries, enabling students to focus on the particular knowledge notes being played by one section and to appreciate their contribution to the overall narrative. The history teacher might choose, for example, to focus mainly on the historical significance of the Black Death

Figure 3: Instructions and resources for a lesson on the Norman Church

# Task: What happened to the Church after the Norman Conquest?

**1** Read through the cards about what happened to the Church after 1066.

**2** Place each of them in an appropriate place on the graph, reflecting your judgement of whether the development was positive or negative in its effects and the extent of the change that they brought about.

**3** The historian Dr Helen Birkett argued that '*the overarching narrative is one of change*'.

How convincing do you find her interpretation? How could it be improved?



In 1070 William set out, with the papal legates, to reform the church. By 1087 only one of the sixteen English bishops remained in post. Norman abbots were put in charge of nearly all the monasteries.

In 1070 Lanfranc, a French abbot from Normandy replaced Stigand as Archbishop of Canterbury.

Lanfranc's reforms put in place regular church councils. He also launched reforms aimed at stopping simony (selling church privileges) and improving priest celibacy.

Lanfranc's reforms aimed to make priests more like monks. He created a new role – an archdeacon – who helped bishops run the church.

New monastic cathedrals were created across England, in particular at Wells and Gloucester

The Normans brought new architectural styles from France and set about rebuilding Saxon cathedrals, in particular at Ely, Canterbury, York, Winchester and Durham.

Ordinary English churchmen remained in post as it was impossible to replace everyone with Normans.

The Normans were very interested in monasteries. In 1066 there were only 60 monasteries in England. By 1135 there were approximately 250.

Monasteries in the North had been wiped out by the Vikings. The Normans set about rebuilding these famous monasteries at places like Jarrow and Whitby.

The new Norman clergymen and abbots were often much more intellectual. They brought new books and ideas.

Many of the Norman bishops that were brought to England following the conquest used the existing cults of Anglo-Saxon saints to promote their own monasteries and churches.

During the Norman period, various older Anglo-Saxon figures were canonized as saints. The authorities at Rochester in Kent declared Ithamar, a former Bishop of Rochester, to be a saint.

Figure 4: Samuel Colman's St James Fair, 1824



with Year 7 by asking 'Why does the Black Death matter?' Alternatively they might ask 'Why did the Black Death spread so rapidly?' to focus much more on the concept of causation.

There is an interesting paradox at the heart of knowledge learning. On the one hand, our long-term memories seem to have an almost infinite capacity to retain and link information; on the other Sweller *et al.* note that our working memory has a limited capacity, and that excessive new information can lead to overload, impaired processing, and reduced memorisation.<sup>17</sup> Sweller *et al.* show how, in order for our brains to process complex material, the mind develops schemata to connect information and make it more manageable. For example, when we remember phone numbers we tend to group digits together in threes. A similar effect can be demonstrated with historical knowledge. These cognitive schemata are what allow us to hear the word 'Renaissance' and bring to mind a range of different but connected information. For example, our Renaissance schema may enable us to recall the names of key artists, to articulate knowledge of important political and social ideas or to possess a sense of the broad zeitgeist of the period. The more knowledge we learn, the more complex these schemata can become. This is not too dissimilar to the kinds of imagery that hearing particular symphonic movements might generate in the listener. When students encounter new periods in history, they do not have these schemata to hand, much as the novice ear might not hear what the composer intended. As teachers we therefore need to help students by making the learning of new material manageable, while also allowing them to develop and evolve the intricacies of their schemata.

In terms of strategies for making knowledge more manageable for the working memory, knowledge organisers and low-stakes testing have become very popular. Core knowledge is presented as a series of simple key facts or definitions to memorise, thereby reducing cognitive load when they come to work with the material again. There is of course some good evidence that low-stakes testing, by prompting regular attempts at recall, can be an important tool in developing students' understanding, improving their memory, and preventing them from becoming 'chronologically lost'.<sup>18</sup> But, as Dennis and others have pointed out, this is only the beginning.<sup>19</sup> We would argue that such an approach misses two important points. First, by converting knowledge into a series of facts to be learned, those facts become divorced from their bigger schemata. It is also at odds with one of the central arguments from cognitive science that memory is actually the 'product of thought'. Willingham argues that just recalling information means that students will ultimately hit a wall, where they can access key facts but do not see the connections between them. He notes that 'the fact that the material you are dealing with has meaning does not guarantee that the meaning will be remembered. If you think about that meaning, the meaning will reside in memory. If you don't, it won't.'<sup>20</sup> If memory is the product of thought then, however we break it down, we need to encourage our students to think more deeply about the content they are attempting to commit to memory, not just regurgitate it for a test.

Second, not all knowledge is equally valuable in helping to build our bigger schemata. If we want students to build a sense of life in the Renaissance, it is far more important that they know that this was an attempt at a classical revival, and

on which ideas it was based, than that they know the names of the Doges of Venice between 1300 and 1500. Counsell wrote about this issue many years ago when she referred to the difference between fingertip and residue knowledge.<sup>21</sup> The former was relevant for the topic being studied, the latter had the power to transcend topic and build a broader sense of period and historic development. Knowledge organisers in particular tend to confuse this distinction, seeing all knowledge as equally important to memorise and failing to distinguish between fingertip and desirable residue knowledge. When we were teaching the AQA Russia 1855–1964 unit, we spent a good deal of time considering what knowledge might be considered fingertip, and what residue. Figure 2 shows some of the distinctions.

The question remains then: how can teachers make knowledge more accessible without atomising it and removing its transformative power? The key is to have clear and targeted tasks focused on developing the transferable knowledge we want, through the process of historically rigorous thought. If we want students to remember the causes of the French Revolution, it is far better for students to think about the nature and contribution of these causes than it is for them only to memorise them. In this way, students are being asked to listen actively to the historical score, to describe the bigger patterns and harmonies.

Figure 3 shows an example of a card sort that we use in lessons when teaching about the impact of the Norman Conquest on the Church. The cards are a way in which we have broken down the knowledge to allow our students to consider it piece by piece; but, importantly, we do not want them just to acquire this knowledge but also to use it. In this example the students have to place the cards on a graph on which the 'x' axis denotes the scale of change and the 'y' axis the impact of change. This active thinking element is crucial to the success of the sequence of tasks as it encourages deeper thinking about the process of historical change. Students first have to comprehend the cards, then apply their understanding by considering the level and nature of change that the cards record. They are, in effect, being forced to listen to the historical music to find the overarching themes and patterns. This second activity embeds the students' applied understanding of the facts in the bigger story of the conquest. The final activity then asks the students to evaluate Dr Helen Birkett's interpretation that 'the overarching narrative is one of change'.<sup>22</sup> Making this judgement encourages recall of basic factual knowledge and forces students to use these facts in addressing an historical issue, thereby developing their schema about the impact of the Normans on the Church. It also adds a new type of desirable difficulty by asking students to respond to a genuine historical question, developing their own interpretation of the narrative. In effect they are asked to pick up the baton for a short time and make their own attempt at conducting a small part of the symphony themselves. This handing over of control is incredibly powerful. Many teachers and educators have written at length on how teachers might pass the baton on to their students. Foster and Goudie, for example, designed a clever enquiry which allowed their students to write knowledgeably and historically in relation to the academic debate over the purpose of the Domesday Survey of 1086.<sup>23</sup>

## Making the knowledge memorable

The final job of the teacher-conductor is to ensure that the audience hears something memorable. That way they will pay attention to the core knowledge, find it salient and remember it in the long term.<sup>24</sup> This is crucial for students studying for GCSE and A-level courses, but should not be forgotten at Key Stage 3 either.

One way teachers can make knowledge memorable is by giving greater emphasis to narratives in our classrooms. Willingham claims that stories have a 'privileged position' in our brains, while Hawkey argues that narrative is the 'foundation' of history learning.<sup>25</sup> Stories are easier for our brains to process and to remember and they allow us to attach additional information to them. In short, the story can act as a skeleton schema to help with memorisation. We believe that it is vital for history teachers to use stories as much as possible to bring meaning and coherence to knowledge of the past. In history this is probably easier than in any other subject, as every historical period has its characters, who can illuminate the larger picture. Such stories are the flourishes a great conductor introduces to make a particular passage of music sparkle. But they are much more than this. A good story achieves three things: it strengthens memory of events, it allows exploration of wider domain knowledge and it allows students to appreciate the living, breathing elements of historical study.

One key aspect of a good story is intrigue. Despite some recent voices downplaying the idea of initial stimulus material, there is good evidence to show that images make a great way to get students asking crucial questions about a topic.<sup>26</sup> A few minutes spent puzzling over an intriguing image or source might do as much to trigger prior knowledge and develop a schema as fifteen minutes spent sitting and marking a test. Additionally, rich images (both paintings and photographs) can give us a greater sense of period than text can ever do alone. They transport us to the period and let us build a secure visual picture of the past. Take, for example, Samuel Colman's St James Fair (see Figure 4), which presents the full spectrum of society from rich merchants to agricultural labourers to nefarious prostitutes. Richard has used this for years as a starting point for the enquiry 'How great was Britain in the nineteenth century?' Students use it to develop a series of inferences about the key features of society, including social class and technology, that they can test and refine as they move on to detailed work on industrialisation and empire. If our aim is to help students to develop rich knowledge of a period, then we have a duty to introduce them to – and enable them to work with – powerful images of this kind.

Equally, much has been written about the notion that a teacher's starting point should not be to 'engage' students, but to deliver content.<sup>27</sup> It seems that, for some, fun is a term they would not want in their vocabulary about pedagogy.<sup>28</sup> But we would argue that 'engaging' and 'knowledge-rich' can be synonymous as long as the engaging activity is serving the history, making students think, and not being done for the sake of fun alone. With appropriate selection and design in

Figure 5: Practical strategies to orchestrate 'knowledge-rich' history

<p><b>Structuring the knowledge</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Use knowledge in earlier years that will resonate in later years.</li> <li>• Use enquiry questions to frame knowledge.</li> <li>• Use second-order concepts to lead learning. Think knowledge structuring not simple knowledge acquisition.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Drawing out key knowledge</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Design tasks to apply knowledge, don't teach isolated facts.</li> <li>• Spend time considering fingertip and residue knowledge.</li> <li>• Use tasks which get students to consider knowledge bit by bit, e.g. card sorts.</li> <li>• Consider when students might take up the baton themselves.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Making the knowledge memorable</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Remember that stories have a 'privileged position'. Use the narratives of individual people or places to provide a core.</li> <li>• Use rich visual images, particularly as an initial stimulus.</li> <li>• Don't be afraid of fun and engagement, e.g. role play.</li> <li>• Don't underestimate the power of debate.</li> </ul>

the service of both objectives, then engaging activities are a brilliant way of getting students to remember all the right history. Scripted drama is a good example of this – and its benefits have been widely reported.<sup>29</sup> Recently Richard tried out a drama based on the events of the autumn of 1066 which followed the narrative of Marc Morris' account of the Norman Conquest.<sup>30</sup> It was, in places, very silly but students loved it. As a result, weeks later, in their essays, they were using facts about housecarls, about papal support and about Norman consolidation on the south coast.

It is also worth considering how historical debate can be engaging in its own right. Carroll has written extensively about the power of discursive group work in helping students to develop their arguments about Nazi Germany.<sup>31</sup> The group work approach here was both engaging in the sense in which most teachers use the term, but it also engaged students with the very real processes of historical debate. This in turn led to 'knowledge-rich', historically grounded writing. It was the kind of flourish an expert teacher conductor could use, in full knowledge that it would enhance, rather than detract from the bigger symphony.

## Take up the baton!

Letting students listen to the rich symphony of the past should be the primary role of the history teacher. We hope that article has provided some examples of how to do this without falling into the trap of thinking that a knowledge-rich curriculum has to be mean drill and kill (see Figure 5). In short, pick up the baton, conduct the orchestra and allow the harmonies of rich historical knowledge to be heard.

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- <sup>3</sup> See Gibb (2015) *op. cit.*
- <sup>4</sup> For the original draft of the curriculum see [www.education.gov.uk/consultations/downloadableDocs/National%20Curriculum%20consultation%20-%20framework%20document%20.docx](http://www.education.gov.uk/consultations/downloadableDocs/National%20Curriculum%20consultation%20-%20framework%20document%20.docx). For more on how historians and educators responded to the draft, see Evans, R. (2013) 'Michael Gove's history curriculum is a pub quiz not an education' in *New Statesman*, 21 March, [www.newstatesman.com/culture/culture/2013/03/michael-gove%E2%80%99s-history-curriculum-pub-quiz-not-education](http://www.newstatesman.com/culture/culture/2013/03/michael-gove%E2%80%99s-history-curriculum-pub-quiz-not-education); and Counsell, C. and Hall, K. (2013) 'Silk purse from a sow's ear? Why knowledge matters and why the draft History NC will not improve it' in *Teaching History*, 151, *Continuity Edition*, pp. 21–26.
- <sup>5</sup> This phrase is used explicitly by Gibb for example in his Policy Exchange piece, Gibb, N. (2015) *op. cit.*; and (2017) 'The importance of a knowledge-based education', [www.gov.uk/government/speeches/nick-gibb-the-importance-of-knowledge-based-education](http://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/nick-gibb-the-importance-of-knowledge-based-education). However this notion also appears in the works of many others in this group, for example: Kirby, J. (2013) 'What we can learn from Core Knowledge and E.D. Hirsch?' <https://pragmaticreform.wordpress.com/2013/01/19/hirsch/>; Lehain, M. (2018) 'Ofsted is right about the knowledge-rich curriculum', <https://schoolsweek.co.uk/ofsted-is-right-about-the-knowledge-rich-curriculum/>
- <sup>6</sup> The 2017 Historical Association Annual Survey suggested that around 44% of England's schools now teach Key Stage 3 history in just two years rather than three. This change has been made to give more time to the formally examined years preparing for the GCSE examination at 16+. See [www.history.org.uk/files/download/19494/1512564539](http://www.history.org.uk/files/download/19494/1512564539) for details. The reduction of Key Stage 3 to two years was also commented upon by Amanda Spielman, the Chief Inspector within Ofsted, see [www.gov.uk/government/speeches/hmc-commentary-october-2017](http://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/hmc-commentary-october-2017).
- <sup>7</sup> Many of the proponents of the 'knowledge-rich' approach draw on the work of cognitive psychologists such as Willingham. Such proponents have suggested that rote learning and recall are the most valuable means of strengthening memory and, by implication, knowledge. For example, see: French, T. (2017) 'How to get through a lot of content', <https://mrhistoire.com/category/knowledge-2/>. In many cases, the use of Willingham is somewhat selective; a more detailed reading reveals much less attachment to this pedagogical approach. For more on why knowledge retention is more than simply drill and recall see Willingham, D. (2008) 'What will improve a student's memory?' in *The American Educator*, *Winter Edition*, pp. 17–25.
- <sup>8</sup> Ofsted (2010) 'History for all: history teaching in schools: strengths and weaknesses', [www.gov.uk/government/publications/history-for-all-strengths-and-weaknesses-of-school-history-teaching](http://www.gov.uk/government/publications/history-for-all-strengths-and-weaknesses-of-school-history-teaching)
- <sup>9</sup> Fordham, M. (2016) 'What makes a curriculum knowledge-rich?', <https://clioetcetera.com/2016/11/19/what-makes-a-curriculum-knowledge-rich/>.
- <sup>10</sup> For more on this approach at the West London Free School, see this series of blogs published by Robert Peal in 2017 on 'Planning a knowledge-based scheme of work': <https://robertpealhistory.wordpress.com/2017/02/14/planning-a-knowledge-based-scheme-of-work-part-1-reading/>; <https://robertpealhistory.wordpress.com/2017/03/04/planning-a-knowledge-based-scheme-of-work-part-2-writing/>; <https://robertpealhistory.wordpress.com/2017/07/01/planning-a-knowledge-based-scheme-of-work-part-3-summative-assessment/>. For another take on this see Newmark, B. (2018) 'Drill and thrill: on joyful low-stakes testing', <https://bennewmark.wordpress.com/2018/01/29/drill-and-thrill-on-joyful-low-stakes-testing/>; or Taylor, M. (2017) 'Year 7 history at Michaela', <https://thesitesofmemory.wordpress.com/2017/05/14/year-7-history-at-michaela/>.

- <sup>11</sup> Willingham, D. (2002) *When Can You Trust the Experts?*, San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, p. 221.
- <sup>12</sup> For further thoughts on this see Ford (2014) 'Knowledge based CPD: the key to effective and motivated teachers', [www.andallthat.co.uk/blog/knowledge-cpd-and-making-effective-teachers](http://www.andallthat.co.uk/blog/knowledge-cpd-and-making-effective-teachers)
- <sup>13</sup> Baptist, E. (2014) *The Half Has Never Been Told: slavery and the making of American capitalism*, Philadelphia: Basic Books.
- <sup>14</sup> For more on the impact of Edward Baptist's book see: [www.andallthat.co.uk/blog/busk-reading-the-expansion-of-us-slavery-baptist-2014](http://www.andallthat.co.uk/blog/busk-reading-the-expansion-of-us-slavery-baptist-2014).
- <sup>15</sup> For example: Byrom, J. (2013) 'Alive and... kicking? Some personal reflections on the revised National Curriculum (2014) and what we might do with it' in *Teaching History, Curriculum Evolution Supplement*, pp. 6–14.; Riley, M. (2000) 'Into the Key Stage 3 history garden: choosing and planting your history questions' in *Teaching History*, 99, *Curriculum Planning Edition*, pp. 8–13; and numerous applied examples, for instance Foster, R. and Goudie, K. (2015) "'Miss, did this really happen here?'" Exploring big overviews through local depth' in *Teaching History*, 160, *Evidential Rigour Edition*, pp. 16–25.
- <sup>16</sup> Riley (2000) *op. cit.*; Byrom (2014) *op. cit.*; Dawson (2018) *op. cit.*
- <sup>17</sup> Sweller, J., Ayres, P. and Kalyuga, S. (2011) *Cognitive Load Theory*, New York: Springer. Michael Fordham also deals with this well in his recent article: Fordham, M. (2017) 'Thinking makes it so: cognitive psychology and history teaching' in *Teaching History*, 166, *The Moral Maze Edition*, pp. 37–43.
- <sup>18</sup> See: Fordham, M. (2016) *op. cit.*; and Donaghy, L. (2014) 'Using regular, low-stakes tests to secure pupils' contextual knowledge in Year 10' in *Teaching History*, 157, *Assessment Edition*, pp. 44–53.
- <sup>19</sup> See Dennis, N. (2016) 'Cognitive psychology and low-stakes testing without guarantees' in *Teaching History*, 164, *Feedback Edition*, pp. 22–18 and Carroll, J. (2017) "'I feel if I say this in my essay it's not going to be as strong": multi-voicedness, "'oral rehearsal"' and Year 13 students' written arguments' in *Teaching History*, 167, *Complicating Narratives Edition*, pp. 8–17.
- <sup>20</sup> Willingham, D. (2006) 'How does learning occur?' in B. A. Marlowe and A. S. Canestari, *Educational Psychology in Context: Readings for Future Teachers*, London: Sage, p. 71.
- <sup>21</sup> Counsell, C. (2000) 'Historical knowledge and historical skills: the distracting dichotomy' in J. Arthur and R. Phillips (Eds.) *Issues in History Teaching*, London: Routledge.
- <sup>22</sup> Dr Helen Birkett lecture at the Historical Association Normans event at the Tower of London, June 2017
- <sup>23</sup> Foster, R. & Goudie, K. (2015) *op. cit.* For other good examples of allowing students to develop their own historically grounded interpretations see: Counsell, C. (2000) *op. cit.*; Foster, R. (2011) 'Passive receivers or constructive readers?' Pupils' experiences of an encounter with academic history' in *Teaching History*, 142, *Experiencing History Edition*, pp. 4–13.
- <sup>24</sup> Both 'attention' and 'saliency' have slightly different meanings in cognitive psychology. Attention is not defined by a person looking at the teacher, but by whether their brain is being actively engaged in constructing meaning about the desired content. It might therefore be possible for someone to be looking at their desk but paying close attention to what a teacher is saying. Equally, 'saliency' is not necessarily a measure of cultural relevance, but of resonance with the mind. This is a complex area, but many argue that both familiarity and novelty can inspire someone to find information relevant. For more on this it is worth reading Willingham, D. (2002) *op. cit.*; (2008) *op. cit.*
- <sup>25</sup> Willingham, D. (2004) [www.aft.org/periodical/american-educator/summer-2004/ask-cognitive-scientist](http://www.aft.org/periodical/american-educator/summer-2004/ask-cognitive-scientist); Hawkey, K. (2004) 'Narrative in classroom history', in *Curriculum Journal*, 15, no. 1, pp. 35–44; and Hawkey, K. (2007) "'Could you just tell us the story?'" Pedagogical approaches to introducing narrative in history classes' in *Curriculum Inquiry*, 37, no. 3, pp. 263–277.
- <sup>26</sup> The idea of initial stimulus material starters has been downplayed on Twitter recently, notably by Newmark, B. (2018) 'Nothing new, it's a review: on why I killed my starters', <https://bennewmark.wordpress.com/2017/11/13/nothing-new-its-a-review-on-why-i-killed-my-starters/>. However, many *Teaching History* articles show their value, for example: Phillips, R. (2001) 'Making history curious: using initial stimulus material (ISM) to promote enquiry, thinking and literacy' in *Teaching History*, 105, *Talking History Edition*, pp. 19–24; Card, J. (2015) 'The power of context: the portrait of Dido Elizabeth Belle Lindsay and Lady Elizabeth Murray' in *Teaching History*, 160, *Evidential Rigour Edition*, pp. 8–15; Harris, R. (2005) 'Does differentiation have to mean different?' in *Teaching History*, 118, *Re-thinking Differentiation Edition*, pp. 5–12.
- <sup>27</sup> See for example: Peal, R. (2017) *op. cit.*; Taylor, M. (2017) *op. cit.*
- <sup>28</sup> See for example, Gibb, N. (2010) *op. cit.*; Gove, M. (2013) 'What does it mean to be an educated person?', [www.gov.uk/government/speeches/what-does-it-mean-to-be-an-educated-person](http://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/what-does-it-mean-to-be-an-educated-person)
- <sup>29</sup> For example see: Dawson, I. (n.d.) 'Simulations', [www.thinkinghistory.co.uk/ActivityModel/ActModSimulation.html](http://www.thinkinghistory.co.uk/ActivityModel/ActModSimulation.html); and Snelson, H., Lingard, R. and Brennan, K. (2012), "'The best way for students to remember history is to experience it!'" Transforming historical understanding through scripted drama' in *Teaching History*, 148, *Chattering Classes Edition*, pp. 28–36.
- <sup>30</sup> For the scripted drama see Kennett, R. (2018) 'Battle of Hastings – a scripted drama for GCSE', <http://radicalhistory.co.uk/battle-hastings-scripted-drama-gcse/>. It was based on Morris, M. (2012) *The Norman Conquest*, London: Hutchinson.
- <sup>31</sup> Carroll, J. (2017) *op. cit.*; Hilliard, D. (2017) 'Helping A-level students make reasoned judgements in their argumentative writing work' workshop delivered at the Historical Association Annual Conference, Manchester, 12–13 May. [www.history.org.uk/events/resource/9133/helping-a-level-students-make-reasoned-judgements](http://www.history.org.uk/events/resource/9133/helping-a-level-students-make-reasoned-judgements)

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