

Discussion 13

Why is writing important?

Objectives: To encourage pupils to think about why writing is important and how it is used. In addition, to introduce basic ideas about why the people of ancient India developed writing systems.

Materials: Photographs, books and/or illustrations of ancient Indian writing.

Class Set-up: Whole group discussion

Vocabulary: Script

Discussion: Discuss why writing is important, emphasizing that writing is a way to communicate information over distance and time, and that writing is a way to record information about business, beliefs and ideas. Why is writing important? How is writing used?

Ask pupils how they use writing in their daily lives, and to imagine what life would be like if they did not write things down. How could you communicate information if you did not have a writing system?

Discuss different types of information recording systems. Ask pupils to consider how information could be communicated if you did not use a writing system. Explain that one of the first systems used by the ancient Egyptians was a picture-based system. Discuss what the benefits and/or difficulties of a system like that might be. Compare and contrast a picture-based and a writing system. What kind of information could you convey using a picture-based system? What kind of information would it be difficult to convey using a

picture-based system?

Introduce and define the word script. Explain how a script is different from a language. Give an example of how the same script can be used to record different languages, such as how the Roman script is used to record English, French, Spanish, etc.. Ask pupils to think of other scripts used around the world. Discuss how scripts are different. What is a script? What is the difference between a script and a language? What other kinds of scripts can you think of that are used around the world today?

Ask pupils to consider other ways that information can be conveyed and 'recorded' such as through stories passed down through generations. How are the details of your own life preserved? How does writing something down change the accuracy and longevity of the information you want to preserve? What are the benefits and problems with communicating and keeping track of important information through an oral tradition?

Wrap up the discussion by showing photographs of writing

Background Information:

Writing

How to decipher an unknown script

Seals

Discovery

Language

Trade