



Abbey Highlights trail – teachers’ notes

Thank you for downloading this resource. We hope that it will be a useful teaching tool during your visit to Westminster Abbey.

As we continue to grow our free catalogue of teaching resources, we’d really appreciate a few minutes of your time to let us know what you liked and what could be improved. Please complete this [five-question survey](#).

All Bible references are taken from the New Revised Standard Version.

1) The cloisters

The first monks arrived at Westminster in about 960AD, over 1,000 years ago. Westminster Abbey was a working monastery for over 500 years. This stopped during the reign of King Henry VIII, in 1540. All monasteries in England were closed at this time as part of the Reformation.

Enter the Abbey.

2) Candles

Pupils are welcome to light a candle with adult supervision (please remind them to be careful of sleeves and long hair) or you could light one candle as a group.

A quiet moment by the candles can be a really good way to start your visit. Westminster Abbey is a Christian place of worship, but all are welcome to light a candle regardless of personal belief. You might wish to ask pupils if light is important in their own belief or other religions they might know about.

Christians believe that Jesus is the light of the world; that he came to light up a dark world with his promise of love and peace (John 8:12). Candles can also be symbol of prayer. The flame going upwards reminds Christians of their prayers being lifted up to God.

3) The Coronation Chair

Look closely at the chair. How would you describe it? **Pupils might notice:**

- **It’s made from wood.**
- **It’s damaged.** There is graffiti on the back of the chair from Westminster schoolboys and visitors who carved their initials into it, over 200 years ago.
- **It looks plain.** Originally it was painted with patterns of birds and animals on a gold background and decorated with coloured glass.
- **It looks uncomfortable.** Do you think the monarch uses a cushion?
- **It looks heavy.**

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What do you think it is used for? **The Coronation Chair is used in coronations, a special service where the king or queen is recognised and crowned as the new monarch.**

The last person crowned on the Coronation Chair was HM King Charles III on 6th May 2023. You might wish to talk to pupils about the coronation and their recollections of it.

Look at the large painting hanging to the left.

King Richard II was only ten years old when he was crowned. Depending on the age of your pupils, this can be a nice link to make. Richard's coronation service lasted five hours – and he fell asleep during it! He holds the orb (to the left) and sceptre (right). The orb symbolises God's power over the world. The sceptre symbolises the monarch's authority or power.

Ask to be let through the barrier by one of the Abbey Marshals.

4) Unknown Warrior

Do you recognise the red flowers that surround this grave? **They are poppies.**
What clues tell you that this person is a soldier?

- **The poppies around the grave and their association with remembrance.**
- **He is described as a 'British warrior, unknown by name or rank.'**
- **He was buried on 11th November (now known as Remembrance Day).**
- **The gravestone mentions the 'Great War of 1914-1918.'**

You could ask pupils what poppies remind them of. They might have seen people wearing poppies or have worn them themselves. They may have learnt about Remembrance Day or attended a service. They might particularly associate red poppies with the Second World War. They may also be familiar with other colours of poppies – for example, white, purple or black.

This soldier represents all those who died fighting for Britain and have no known grave. No one walks on this grave, out of respect. Even the king walks around the grave when he visits.

Make your way towards the gold screen.

5) Scientists' Corner

Use these pictures as clues to talk about what he (Isaac Newton) discovered.

- **Telescope – he invented a new, more accurate reflecting telescope to look into space.**
- **Apple – he discovered the laws of gravity (after seeing an apple fall from a tree).**
- **Prism – by using a prism he observed that clear white light is made up of seven visible colours (the colours of a rainbow).**

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Look around you. Can you spot any other famous scientists nearby? **Pupils might recognise:**

- **Stephen Hawking** (his ashes are buried here). He was an expert in space and cosmology - the science of the universe.
- **Charles Darwin** (buried under a large white gravestone, outside of the rope towards the wall). He was a naturalist known for his theory of evolution.
- **Michael Faraday** (memorial). He is known for his work on electrical energy.

Discuss as a group: Which female scientists should be remembered here? **Pupils might be aware of scientists such as Mary Anning, Ada Lovelace and Marie Curie, or people from their own lives.**

Pupils often want to know who decides who is buried and remembered at the Abbey. The final decision is made by the Dean of Westminster Abbey, the most senior priest who is in charge. He will talk to lots of different people to help him make a decision. Often, people write to the Dean suggesting someone who could be buried or memorialised.

When back at school, you could use this as inspiration for pupils to practice their persuasive writing.

As you walk through the golden quire screen, look up. In the past, all of Westminster Abbey would have been covered in bright colours like this.

6) The quire

Can you spot the large organ that sometimes accompanies them? (Clue: look up for the grey pipes). **The organ can be found above the gold screen you just walked through.**

An organ is the musical instrument used to accompany the choir. It is made up of hundreds of buttons, pedals, keys and pipes – the whole instrument is powered by wind.

Name the four countries you can see on the backs of the seats in the quire.

1. New Zealand
2. South Africa
3. Canada
4. Australia

These seats are the Commonwealth seats, reserved for representatives of the Commonwealth countries. The Commonwealth is an international organisation of 56 countries who work towards making the world a better place. The monarch's role as Head of Commonwealth is to respect and recognise these various faiths, and to promote tolerance and understanding.

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7) The High Altar

Can you find the...



Encourage pupils to look up to understand that they are standing in the centre of a cross-shaped church. The cross is the key symbol of Christianity.

Coronations take place in front of the High Altar. The Coronation Chair is placed on this beautiful mosaic floor, called the Cosmati Pavement, which is over 700 years old. The area you're standing in, between the High Altar and the quire, was built as a Coronation Theatre.

8) The Queen's Window

Discuss: Do you like the design? **Pupils could vote by giving a thumbs up or down.**

What images would you choose for your own special window? Draw them here.

You could ask pupils to think about some of their favourite things, shapes or patterns.

The artist David Hockney designed this stained-glass window for Westminster Abbey on his iPad. He chose to use vibrant colours and described the window as "a celebration" of the reign of Queen Elizabeth II. This activity could lead into a bigger piece of work back at school where pupils design their own window for Westminster Abbey.

9) St Edward's Shrine

Many kings and queens are buried around the shrine. Why could this be? **Because of the medieval belief that the closer you were to a saint, the closer you would be to God.**

Discuss: Have you ever been on a pilgrimage or made a special journey to somewhere important to you? **Pupils might have been to a holy place such as Canterbury, Iona, Lourdes, Jerusalem, Mecca**

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or Varanasi. Lots of faiths take part in pilgrimages and have different pilgrimage sites. Or pupils may have been on a special journey to places that are important to them. For example, a football stadium, Disneyland or a place with links to their family.

Please note that the shrine is not open to the general public as it is very old and fragile. However, prayers are offered here several times a day.

King Edward the Confessor built the first stone Westminster Abbey. It was finished in December 1065, just a few days before he died. He was buried inside the newly completed Abbey. In 1161 King Edward the Confessor was made a saint. A saint is a person thought to be especially close to God. Pilgrims have been visiting his shrine to pray ever since it was completed.

10) The Lady Chapel

What musical instrument did he (John Blanke) play? **A trumpet.**

Draw or write the things you would have on a flag representing you. Pupils could think about their favourite activities, friends and family, where they live and their personalities and characteristics.

Started by King Henry VII in 1503, the chapel was completed by his son, King Henry VIII. King Henry VIII chose to be buried at St George's Chapel, Windsor alongside his third wife, Jane Seymour, who gave birth to his only son.

11) Poet's Corner

Do you have a favourite author or book? You could ask pupils what they are reading or share your own favourite author or book.

Can you find her (Mary Ann Evans) memorial stone on the floor?



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Discuss as a group: Why do you think Mary Anne Evans wrote books under a 'pen name'? In the 19th century women were being published under their own names. However, Mary Ann Evans did not feel that women writers was taken as seriously as men, so chose the pen name of a man (George Eliot) to be taken seriously. She also wanted to keep her private life private.

There is no faith test at Westminster Abbey. People don't have to be Christian or of any faith to have a memorial here. This part of the Abbey commemorates people who have used their creative talents in all sorts of ways. Each one of us has those creative talents. Pupils could reflect on where their own talents lie.

12) The cloisters

Return to the cloisters.

If you have time at the end of your visit, you could sit in the cloisters sketching and reflecting. Encourage pupils to look for interesting shapes. They can also write down their favourite thing about their visit, something that surprised them or that they want to find out more about.