Young Londoners spread the word

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The project, ‘What’s in a Word?' has been made possible by a £19,200 grant from the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF).

In the first of two phases twenty three young people have explored Georgian society and how the English language has changed over time. Managed by St Bride Foundation Youth Theatre, the young people have worked with staff at Dr Johnson’s House, just off Fleet Street. Attending workshops with the House’s Education Officer, Morwenna Rae they gathered information which was then turned into scenes for performance and a supporting documentary.

With the help of a playwright, along with theatre and music professionals they devised a performance, created costumes, learned the steps of period dances and played instruments. The resulting performance took place in front of an invited audience at Dr Johnson’s House.

In the second phase of the project, currently underway a further two dozen young people will build on the research carried out by the first group and will work closely with a playwright to create a new 45 minute piece of theatre. The final performances of ‘What’s in a Word?’ will take place at Dr Johnson’s House on 12th December.

Young participants from the first phase have spoken enthusiastically about the project. One said: “I learnt about the time period through researching the people. Also, I never knew about Dr Johnson, so it furthered my knowledge about him and all the other people who were important to him. Especially how women were beginning to be treated as equals.”

Another commented: “I feel that I gained confidence as I had to work with and perform in front of people who I had never met before - in contrast to at school. I have learnt a lot about Dr Johnson. I also gained a lot of new friends.”

For Dr Johnson’s House, Morwenna Rae, said: “It was inspiring for the staff and volunteers to see young people so enthused and absorbed in a character who is so often neglected. Working with St Bride Foundation was a great way for us to bring Johnson to life for a new audience.”

For the St Bride Foundation, Kristina Nilles, said: "We are thrilled to be working so closely with Dr Johnson’s House and can see the benefits this partnership has provided for our youth theatre participants. They are fully engaged in learning more about Dr Johnson, excited about exploring the English language and sharing their findings with others."

For HLF, Head of Heritage Lottery Fund London, Sue Bowers, said: “This project is bringing to life a fascinating period in London’s history enthusing a group of young people not only in our heritage but in language itself. It taps into their own creative talents and energy to the benefit of both younger and older generations.”

In the first phase of the project the participants came from Kingston-upon-Thames, Greenwich, Southwark, Enfield, Havering, Sutton, Merton and Lewisham. In the phase now underway there are also students from schools in Croydon and Ealing.

Notes to editors

The schools taking part in the project are as follows:

Old Palace of John Whitgift School, Croydon
Westwood Girls College, Croydon
Elthorne Park High School, Ealing
St Anne's Catholic High School for Girls, Enfield
Palmers Green High School, Enfield
Kingsmead School, Enfield
Southgate School, EnfieldPlumstead Manor School, Greenwich
The Coopers' Company and Coborn School, Havering
Bower Park School, Havering
Coombe Boys School, Kingston-Upon-Thames
Coombe Girls School, Kingston-Upon-Thames
The Tiffin's Girls School, Kingston-Upon-Thames
Tolworth Girl's School, Kingston-Upon Thames
Lewisham College, Lewisham
King's College School, Merton
St Thomas the Apostle School, Southwark
Harris Academy, Southwark
Sutton Grammar School for Boys, Sutton

Using money raised through the National Lottery, the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) sustains and transforms a wide range of heritage for present and future generations to take part in, learn from and enjoy. From museums, parks and historic places to archaeology, natural environment and cultural traditions, we invest in every part of our diverse heritage. HLF has supported 33,900 projects, allocating £4.4billion across the UK.

Further information

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