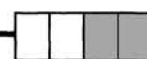


Making a start

The kind of activities a school may hold on Commonwealth Day will depend on the extent to which learning about the Commonwealth forms an integrated part of the curriculum. In some schools the Commonwealth is taught as a unit model within a particular subject, such as history or social studies. In some schools, topic work is used as a way of introducing information about different Commonwealth countries, although this approach rarely deals with the way the Commonwealth operates as an international association.

If a class teacher is starting from scratch, it is a good idea to find out how much students already know about the Commonwealth. The following activity gives students an opportunity to identify and share existing knowledge. It gives everyone a chance to contribute and helps create an atmosphere of co-operation and confidence. It also gives students an overview of the theme to be studied.

ACTIVITY 1



Level: Secondary

Brainstorming

Ask the students to come up with as many ideas as possible, in the space of five to ten minutes, on the subject of the Commonwealth. This can be done by students working in small groups and reporting back to the class, or by the class as a whole, with the teacher or a student recording the ideas on a poster or blackboard. It is important for every idea to be accepted without discussion at this stage, no matter how far fetched it might appear.

Questions that could provide useful starting points are:

- What comes to mind when you think of the Commonwealth?
- What does the Commonwealth do?
- What links Commonwealth countries together?

When as many ideas as possible have been collected, students could be asked to try grouping or linking them in the form of a web (see page 3). The teacher will need to go through the main implications of the points and ideas 'collected' to show that:

- The Commonwealth has a history;
- The Commonwealth links together people from all over the world;
- It is concerned with co-operation (consultation/training/development).

After the discussion the teacher can show the class a large poster of a 'Commonwealth web' which has been prepared in advance (see page 3). It is important to emphasise that the teacher's chart does not represent the only 'right' response to the brainstorming exercise. The students will have thought of valid ideas that do not appear on the poster. The web which the teacher may have adapted from the one shown here,



ACTIVITY 1: CONTINUED

depending on the age and circumstances of the students, simply serves to take the students' ideas a stage further, to reinforce their existing knowledge and to open up new aspects of the subject which they did not previously know about.

Students can then be invited to ask questions about the 'Commonwealth web'. The answers need not be very extended but can give a taste of further areas of study that may be explored in the coming weeks.

ACTIVITY 2



Brainstorming

For younger children it may be too difficult to look at the Commonwealth as an entity and as an association that works in particular ways. A more appropriate subject for the brainstorming exercise may therefore be an individual Commonwealth country rather than the Commonwealth as a whole.

Alternatively, students can be asked to write down as many Commonwealth countries as they can think of and anything else they know about the Commonwealth. This can be followed by a discussion in which pupils share their ideas and knowledge and the teacher can begin to introduce topics for further study and project work.

ACTIVITY 3



Detective work

Either as a follow-up to the 'brainstorming' activity or as an alternative activity, ask the students to find out as much as they can about the Commonwealth before the next lesson. Ask them to see what they can find out from their parents, relations or other members of the community, from the school library, and from local churches, post offices or other institutions. Can they bring any 'evidence' of what they have found out?

When the students have put their pieces of information and evidence together, what conclusions can they draw and what further things do they as 'detectives' need to find out before they can understand what the Commonwealth is about?

A Commonwealth web

