



'Hymns to Hers': Democracy Project

Malton School Year 7 class learn about suffragette campaign of 100 years ago

On Friday 16th March a Malton School Year 7 class visited the Drama Studio to learn about women's struggle for the right to vote in the early part of the twentieth century.

The session started with a discussion about what democracy and voting were all about and why they are important.

Following this there was a vote, using an original 1920's ballot box, in which only the boys could participate. The question on the ballot was — should the vote be for 16, 18, or 21 year olds!



Unsurprisingly the girls were put out by the idea that boys alone should have the right to decide.

The whole class considered some of the arguments for and against women's suffrage from back in the day and then chose a drama prop before going on to argue and persuade one another of the rightness of their point of view—just as would have happened back then. Those arguing against women voting donned a flat cap, those in favour of women having the vote wore rosettes or sashes.

A Year 7 student acting as Mrs. Emmeline Pankhurst gave out her instructions for gaining support and air-time for the campaign—'making more noise than anyone else'.

The whole class sang the suffragette's version of John Brown's Body with words changed to convey the struggle for votes at a time when corrupting popular songs to the cause was the equivalent of today's social media in terms of spreading the message virally.

A student acting as Emily Davison described her part in the general disobedience and her own personal sacrifices for the cause



and students watched news footage of the stunning moments when Emily stepped out on to the racetrack during the Epsom Derby of 1913.

At the end of the session ALL students voted on the same issue as before. The addition of the girls' votes made no difference to the outcome - a majority in favour of retaining the voting age at 18 - however, all agreed that this was a much fairer ballot than before.

Students studied photographs taken in 1918 and discussed what they could see in these images and what they thought might have happened next.

Students create their own 'freeze-frames' based on original photographs



Suffragettes under arrest



Force-feeding a suffragette in prison



Mrs Pankhurst detained again...

At the end of the session students were given a mock-up of a newspaper depicting the Derby Day drama and a suffragette word-search to take away and complete at home. Students were heard to say later that day that they found the session 'stimulating and enjoyable' and 'it was 'fun to act out the women's struggle'.