Squirrel Class Visit to the River & Rowing Museum

In June 2024, Squirrel Class (Year 1/2) enjoyed a wonderfully rich and engaging trip to the River & Rowing Museum in Henley-on-Thames, where they spent the day exploring *The River of Life*. The trip supported key areas of our Science and Geography curriculum, while also reflecting our commitment as an Eco School to developing children's understanding of local habitats, environmental responsibility, and the importance of conserving natural spaces.

The museum provided an exceptional real-world context for learning, enabling our young pupils to build their knowledge through hands-on investigation, storytelling, and first-hand observation.

Curriculum Intent in Action

The day was designed to help children:

- observe and name a variety of plants and animals in their local habitat
- use simple scientific language to describe, compare and classify living things
- understand adaptation, predator/prey relationships, and simple food chains
- explore the geographical features of a river environment
- understand how humans interact with and depend upon rivers
- develop curiosity, awe and appreciation for the River Thames

This combination of indoor and outdoor learning offered excellent evidence of children applying scientific enquiry skills in a meaningful, age-appropriate context.

Exploring "The River of Life" – Natural History of the Thames

The day began with an interactive session exploring the natural history and human story of the River Thames, from prehistoric times right up to the present. Using models, artefacts, and storytelling, children learned how the river has shaped life, wildlife and communities for thousands of years.

The workshop supported learning by:

- introducing new vocabulary such as *habitat*, *current*, *bank*, *floodplain*, and *ecosystem*
- helping children understand how rivers are formed and how they change over time
- exploring how animals and humans have relied on the Thames for food, water, travel and shelter
- strengthening chronology through exploring the river "then and now"

Children were captivated by the idea that the river has been home to everything from prehistoric creatures to Victorian boatmen to the wildlife they see today.

Scientific Investigations Using Real Thames Samples

One of the highlights of the day was a practical science workshop where pupils examined real samples taken from the River Thames, using magnifiers, sorting trays and classification charts.

They developed key scientific enquiry skills by:

- closely observing different forms of river life
- identifying and grouping living things based on appearance and behaviour
- discussing how each creature is suited to its habitat (adaptation)
- comparing similarities and differences between organisms

Children were thrilled to spot tiny freshwater shrimps, insect larvae, water snails and other minibeasts. Through discussion with museum educators, they began to understand how each organism relies on the river environment for survival.

Predator/Prey Relationships & Simple Food Chains

The next workshop explored food chains in a clear and engaging way, perfectly pitched for this age group.

Pupils investigated:

- who eats what in a freshwater habitat
- the role of predators and prey
- how energy moves through a simple food chain
- what might happen if one part of the chain is removed

Children built food chain models using Thames river species and gained a deeper understanding of how living things depend on one another.

This linked strongly to our Eco-School message: when we care for habitats, we protect every part of the food chain.

Riverside Walk – Geography and Eco Awareness in the Real World

After the workshop, the children enjoyed a wonderful walk along the River Thames, where they were able to put classroom knowledge into practice by observing the *real* river habitat.

During the walk, pupils:

- examined river features such as banks, flow, vegetation and wildlife
- spotted ducks, swans, reeds, water plants, and riverside trees
- discussed how animals use the riverbank for food and shelter
- explored how humans use the river for leisure, travel and sport
- identified signs of seasonal change and human impact

This outdoor learning beautifully reinforced both Science and Geography objectives, encouraging children to think critically about their local environment and how to look after it.

Exploring the Boat Museum – History, Transport & River Life

Inside the museum's fascinating boat galleries, pupils enjoyed exploring a wide range of vessels, from traditional wooden rowing boats to sleek racing shells.

This experience allowed children to:

- understand how boats have changed over time
- learn about different materials and designs used for water travel
- discuss how rivers support human activity and community life
- connect past and present through examining historic and modern boating equipment

The boat museum sparked wonderful conversations about floating, sinking, forces and human ingenuity — all valuable early scientific concepts.

Wind in the Willows Exhibition – Storytelling Meets Geography

To end the day, Squirrel Class visited the magical Wind in the Willows exhibition - a charming walkthrough experience that brought Kenneth Grahame's classic riverbank story to life.

The children loved walking through immersive scenes featuring Mole, Ratty, Badger and Toad, and this linked beautifully to:

- storytelling and narrative understanding
- building cultural capital through classic literature
- reinforcing riverbank habitats through fiction
- exploring themes of friendship, nature and adventure

The exhibition helped pupils blend imagination with real-world learning about rivers and their wildlife.

Impact of the Visit

By the end of the visit, children had:

- strengthened scientific enquiry skills through hands-on investigation
- deepened their understanding of habitats, adaptation and food chain
- broadened geographical knowledge of rivers and local environments
- built confidence in using scientific vocabulary
- experienced high levels of engagement and curiosity
- demonstrated excellent behaviour, teamwork and questioning skills
- developed a stronger sense of environmental responsibility
- connected literature, science and geography in a meaningful way

The trip provided a powerful example of how well-planned educational visits can enrich learning, build cultural capital and support the holistic development of young children.






Plants








WIND IN THE WILLOWS

WIND IN THE WILLOWS