

Historical Coins Through Time (TLCOIN)

This collection contains a variety of replica historical coins from various periods of history. We can learn how archaeologists and historians use coins to find out about the past. Through investigating the imagery on the coins, we can discover how coins can be a valuable source of evidence, giving us insights into historical figures and religious beliefs.



An Anglo-Saxon Coin

Questions you could ask children about the coins

Initial Discussion

- *How do archaeologists and historians use coins to learn about the past?*
- *What do we need to look for when studying coins to find out about the past?*

Collect any other questions the children might have about the artefacts and display them as you try to find the answers through your learning sessions.

Other questions to consider:

- *Are there any markings or symbols on the coins? What can they tell us?*
- *Is there a date on the coin? Does it show how much it was worth?*
- *Is there a picture of a monarch or historical figure on the coin?*
- *Are there any images on it such as gods, animals or weapons? See if there is an inscription, what does it say?*
- *What sort of condition is the coin in? Can you tell if it was handmade (hammered) or milled (machine minted), can you see any strike marks?*
- *What is the coin? What is it made of?*

- **What do the coins tell us about ...?** This last question can be returned to at the end of the investigation.

All About the Coins

1. Ancient Greek Coins

The standard silver coins were called **drachma**; one **drachm** was worth six **obols**. The larger silver coins were the **tetradrachm** which were worth more. The Greeks didn't write a value on the coin. The value was determined by the material the coins were made of and by the weight. A gold coin was worth more than a silver coin which was worth more than a bronze one. A heavy coin would buy more than a light one. The images on coins give us information about Greek life and culture.

2. Viking Coins

Coins were used for trade and bartering. They were valued by their weight and Viking traders would have carried a set of folding scales with them to weigh the coins and make sure they were getting a good deal. Sometimes the coins would be chopped into half to reduce their value. The most common was the silver **penny (penning)**.

3. Roman Coins

Made from different materials such as copper, bronze, silver or gold these coins featured images of emperors, gods and other symbols. Coins would have been used to exchange for goods and services. A **denarius** was a silver coin, a **sestertius** made from a yellow metal like a £1 coin, **as** copper like a 2p. 1 denarius was equal to 4 sestertii which was equal to 16 asses. There was also a gold coin called **aurei**. These were the same size as a denarius but much more valuable. It was worth 25 denarii, or 100 sestertii, or 400 asses.

A legionary soldier earned about 300 denarii a year. The army kept more than half of this for food, equipment and savings but still legionaries were richer than most ordinary people.

Design your own coins. Note that Roman coins weren't perfectly round like modern coins.

4. Anglo-Saxon Coins

Find out about Anglo-Saxon money and how rich and important people used coins as gifts, to buy land, pay taxes, fines and for trade. Every coin will be able to tell a story. Early Anglo-Saxons probably did not use coins and later when coins were made, they would have been very valuable. As there were few coins in Anglo-Saxon times coins would be cut in half to reduce the value when needed. Small gold coins **Thrymsas** were later replaced by small thick silver coins called **Sceattas** and then the silver **Penny**. There were regional variations of the coins including the Northumbrian silver **Stycas**.

5. Tudor coins

The coins represent those used during the reigns of Henry VII and Henry VIII. They consist of the **groat, half-groat, penny** and **halfpenny**. Gold coins (**Sovereign/Angel**) were used when large amounts of money were needed and the silver coins used to buy everyday items. The coins were often hammered by hand and featured the monarch's portrait on them.

6. Elizabethan Coins

These coins were made of silver and gold. This new money was to replace the poor-quality coins that were in use at the time and to show that England's currency was to be valued and trusted. Key coins included the gold pound and the silver shilling (12 pence).

7. British Wartime Coins

A collection of British coins used during the war time. Many children would have been given pocket money probably 1d (one penny). A loaf of bread would have cost around 3 and a half d and a Mars Bar 1d. Coins during this period featured the image of king George VI.

Research to find out what could be bought with the coins and compare the value of things today.

Ideas using the Coins

Alf Wilkinson, a history expert, shares ideas for using the coins.

1. Starter:

Put together a collection of British coins we use today - as many values as you can. Ask the enquiry question **'What can we tell about the present day from a coin?'**



Get them to look carefully at a coin - either as a class on a whiteboard or in small groups. The children could draw or rub their coin and label it to encourage them to look closely at the coin. You might, for example, use a range of 50p coins, all commemorating different events, or the 2012 Olympics coins.

Useful questions might include:

- When was this coin made?
- How old is it?
- Is it new and shiny, or old and worn?
- Who or what is commemorated on the coin?
- How much is it worth?
- What can I buy with this coin?

Finally, you might ask the children to place their coin on a timeline, from Stone Age to today. Where exactly should it go? Why is that?

You can also do some maths with the children at the same time. Finish up by asking two key questions:

- Why do we have coins of different values?
- How useful is a coin as evidence? Is it primary evidence, or secondary evidence?

2. For each individual set of coins:

The main thrust of the activity is to get the children to look carefully at the coins and use them as evidence for the period the coins come from. The questions will reflect those from the 'starter' activity:

- What are the coins made from?
- What images do they have on them? Are all the images the same?
- Are they all the same size/value/colour/from the same period?
- How well used are they?
- Can we date them from the coins themselves?
- How do you think they were made?
- Where do you think they were found?
- Do you think they would be valuable today?

Some of these questions and other questions the children might devise for themselves will not be able to be answered simply from investigating the coins. For example, 'how were they made?' Use these unanswered questions will need further research.

Ask the children what they think they could have bought, at the time, with each of the coins. Then carry out some research to find out what each of the coins would really have bought. Compare the results with the results for today, from the 'starter' activity.

Finally, don't forget to ask the children to place 'their' coins on the timeline they began earlier.



An Anglo-Saxon coin

3. Comparing two periods:

For example, you might compare the work in the 'starter' activity with the pre-decimal coins, or Anglo-Saxon coins with Viking coins, or perhaps the Roman coins with those from around the time of World War Two.

Encourage the children to come up with plenty of questions to ask about the coins.



You might choose to focus on two of the history 'concepts': How **similar** are the coins, and how **different**?

What has **changed**, and what has **stayed the same**?

Another area to explore might be the range of coins. Both Anglo-Saxons and Vikings only have silver pennies. Does that mean people didn't have much money at the time? What would be the difficulties in only having coins of one value? How might that make life easy? How might it make life more difficult?

Again, all these questions might lead to areas of further research.

5. Looking at the collection of coins as a whole:

Ask the children to identify their favourite coin from the whole collection. What is so special for them about that coin? Why is it their favourite? You could get each child to make a display about their favourite coin and share their ideas with the rest of the class.

A big question to ask is '**How have coins changed from Roman times to today?**' This gives the children the opportunity to pull together all that they have discovered during this topic but also bring in what they already know about history. Things like value - what could you buy with 6p, for example? Or design - are the things stamped onto coins still largely the same, or different? Or content - what are coins made of - copper, silver, gold?

Don't forget that there are some things you can't tell from coins - they might be reliable evidence in many ways, but they are only part of the evidence we have about the past.

Many thanks to Alf Wilkinson for sharing these ideas.

