

1. PYTH YW PLEN AN GWARI?

WHAT IS A PLEN-AN-GWARI?

Primary Sources:

Share the images 1.1 – 1.7

Discuss in pairs or small groups; what ideas can you come up with to explain these pieces of primary evidence?

Secondary Sources:

Share the texts 1.8 -1.11

These are original historical texts and difficult to decipher.

Again discuss in pairs or small groups; what ideas can you now come up with to link these pieces of secondary evidence with the pieces of primary evidence?

Share each image and piece of text via the Powerpoint presentation and help unpick each one, allowing students to lead the observations.

Through discussion establish the following conclusions:

1. A *Plen an Gwari* is a medieval Cornish amphitheatre.
2. Two well-known examples of *Plen an Gwari* survive at St Just and Perran Round
3. Huge, spectacular plays lasting several days were once put on (in the Cornish language).
4. Medieval texts in Cornish include some of the earliest known stage diagrams in the world

Plen an Gwari

The Playing Places of Cornwall

2. PLE'MONS I?

WHERE ARE THEY?

Look at the images 2.1 – 2.2; these are images of the two existing sites taken from an internet mapping site.

Now look at 2.3 - 2.12 Each one shows the traces of what is believed to be a *Plen an Gwari* .

2.14 is a map of *Probable* Plen an Gwari sites across Mid- and West Cornwall

2.13 is a photograph of people in St Just Plain an Gwarry holding up place-names of probable sites across Cornwall

2.15 lists both *Probable* and *Possible* sites together with grid-references and the evidence

Is there a Plen an Gwari site near you?

With 31 *probable* sites, some experts claim that the medieval Cornish theatre tradition was as rich and as dense as anywhere in Europe

3. DYSKI TAMM KERNEWEK

LEARN A BIT OF CORNISH

i) KEWSEL

SPEAK

Have a go at reading some lines in Cornish from the original medieval scripts. Use the recordings to follow the scripts and join in.

3.1 The first one involves you playing God. These are the opening lines of the 'Ordinalia' - some experts believe it is the oldest play script in Britain.

3.2 is the speech of a demon (Lucifer) looking forward to torturing someone's soul.

3.3 has the Duke of Cornwall staking his claim to the land of Kernow.

ii) KANA

SING

3.4 Here's a great Pilchard Fishing song in Cornish from around 1700.

(ok it's a hundred years too late to be actually part of a Plen an Gwari play, but its one of the earliest songs in Cornish that we have)

The slightly unusual spelling here is the way John Boson of Newlyn wrote it down in 1710 (he'd never seen written Cornish and so he spelt it as he heard it!)

3.5 first have a go at the repeated 'chant'

3.6 then sing the verse of the song

3.7 if you are really keen, here are the words for all of the verses!

iii) DONSYA

DANCE

We know that most Plen an Gwari plays ended with a call to join-in the dancing. We don't know exactly what the dances were but we guess that for these occasions fairly simple chain dances would do the trick. Have a go at the dance instructions in 3.8 Now if you are *really* clever you can try singing and dancing at the same time!

3.9 'Descent' is a great dancing track from Cornish band, Dalla. Join in the words from 'Creacion of the World' as God sends Lucifer for ever-lasting torment 3.10

4. GWREWGH GWARY-MEUR AGAS HONAN.

STAGE YOUR OWN MIRACLE PLAY

Here are some bigger chunks of medieval Cornish playscripts. (4.1 – 4.5)

There are a few pretty big problems to overcome if we want to put on our own version of a Cornish miracle play

- i) Written Cornish; you probably can't read it!
- ii) Spoken Cornish; your audience probably doesn't understand it!
- iii) Plen an Gwari; no-one really knows exactly how it was used!

Aaargh!

i) **Written Cornish:**

The answer to reading Cornish is to be loud and proud; strong but wrong. Trying learning a single line of by heart. If you sound confident and belt out the line, very few people will know whether you have got it right or not.

ii) **Spoken Cornish:**

In small groups, play with ways of delivering chunks of text and translations. You might take it in turns to say the Cornish and English lines. You might have one person moving their mouth whilst another reads the words ('lip-synch'). You might have someone doing a 'voice over' or narration in English across the Cornish lines. Are there other ways of helping an audience understand what is happening without having to translate? (eg tell the story through action)

iii) **Plen an Gwari:**

Here's the best bit of all – we believe that the staging in a Plen an Gwari was unlike any 21st Century theatre you have ever been to!

Look back at the ancient stage diagrams 1.2 and 1.4 (4.6 gives a translation of 1.2); what do they suggest about where the staging was built?

Look at 4.7 – this is one person's suggestion of how the stages were arranged; each main character had their own stage around the outside bank of the Plen an Gwari.

But, if the stages were around the outside, where was the audience?

Perhaps richer and more important people got to sit around the banks but we believe that most of the audience was standing up, thronging through the whole space.

Plen an Gwari

The Playing Places of Cornwall

4.8 is a sketch that gives you an idea of what that might have been like.

So, now re-invent your pieces of action to include an audience in the middle and the main performance positions around the outside

You might argue across the audience's heads. You might take the action travelling around the audience. You might weave your way through the audience. Suddenly, allsorts of possibilities open up for including the audience in the action – how might they join in?

Plen an Gwari

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PYTH YW NESSA?

WHAT'S NEXT?