



Learning about electricity

Power in the Past

Learning objectives:

**FS: Know some similarities and differences between things in the past and now:
Understand that electricity powers some of the appliances in our homes**

Start learners off

Go on an 'electricity hunt' to find the appliances and toys in the classroom that need electricity to power them. You can discuss the difference between mains electricity and battery powered toys (batteries are able to store electricity for a while so the toys can use it.)

Make a list of the activities carried out in our homes that require electrical appliances (cooking, lighting, housework and any games involving powered toys, or computers!)

Move learners on

Introduce the idea that people didn't have electricity in the past. Look at a timeline to work out when electricity became common in homes.

Electric light was available in the late 1800s, but it was rare. In 1919 only 6% of homes were wired up to the 'National Grid' of power. By the end of the 1930s, two-thirds of houses were connected, but by no means all!

Before electricity, light came from candles, and later from gas-powered lamps. The rich might have had beeswax candles, but poorer people used smelly tallow candles and the least well off used rushes dipped in animal fat. These gave out very little light.

Discuss the ways people carried out every day tasks in this country before they had electricity. If possible, bring in candles and a gas lamp to show the children. You might also look at a bucket and scrubbing board or a mangle. Children might enjoy beating a carpet outside using a carpet beater or a stick to get the dust off. Notice how long some of these tasks take! Which appliances do the children have at home to carry out cleaning tasks?



Which toys did children used to play with in the past? Ask the class to think of the toys and games they enjoy that don't need any power to make them work. Adults might bring in some favourite toys from the past that didn't need batteries or to be plugged in.

Challenge learners further

Set up the home area with household appliances from before the days of electricity and ask children questions about how they are feeling as they go about their tasks.

Ask children if there are any toys from the past that they still enjoy now (dolls and balls were popular long before electricity!)

Encourage children to draw and write about the ways that electricity has changed our lives. Have there been any problems caused by the use of electricity, or is it only a good thing? We often talk about 'saving electricity' or 'not wasting' electricity. Why do learners think this might be?

At the end of this activity:

All children will be able to give examples of toys and appliances that run on electricity.

Most children will be able to talk about the ways that people played or carried out household tasks before there was electricity.

Some children will be able to talk about the ways that people from the past might have felt as they carried out their tasks without electrical power. They might talk about some of the pros and cons of using electricity.