

STANLEY ROBERTSON:
EDUCATION
FROM THE HEART OF
SCOTTISH TRAVELLER
CULTURE
FIRST LEVEL

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studying culture in context

FOREWORD



I am honoured to write a short forward to the Stanley Robertson school resource. My father Stanley could never have imagined, as a young boy being chased home from school by the scaldie bairns that one day his name would find fame in academic circles throughout the world.

Traveller children were ignored by the school system and because they were different to other children they were bullied and persecuted daily. However, my father was a very clever boy with a great imagination and this mind was fired up by reading books of far off places and peoples.

The world was much bigger than the cold dark tenement flat where he lived - ironically within a stone's throw of the University of Aberdeen - a place which some 50 years later would recognise his genius.

As children we never realised how lucky we were to have a father who was a storyteller, balladeer, and a keeper of his people's proud history. We learned through the stories the importance of honesty, kindness, and integrity. The Jack tales set our minds alight with stories of monsters, dragons and castles. As well as challenges and difficult tasks to overcome. My father had travelled the world, sharing his love and knowledge of those songs and stories; but he was most proud when chosen to work at Aberdeen University on a project documenting all he knew of his own history, while collecting songs, stories and memories from other Travellers their songs, stories and memories. Towards the end of the three-year project he was nominated to receive an honorary degree from the university. He was delighted, he was honoured; he was receiving this in some ways on behalf of the many Travellers who had gone before him with no recognition.

We as a family were immensely proud of our father and this resource will help keep his memory alive. My life has been enriched by the songs, stories and memories of my Traveller ancestors and I hope you will find joy and excitement in using this resource.

**Tony Robertson,
Stanley Robertson's Son**

ABOUT THIS RESOURCE

This resource has been made with teaching professionals and educators in mind. Each activity plan has been carefully selected and designed to sit neatly within the curriculum, providing an inclusive approach to subject choice.

The design of the pack allows for flexibility and ease of use, spanning Early, First and Second Level CfE education – each section colour co-ordinated. This resource is a celebration of Stanley Robertson, Aberdeen loon and master storyteller. It has been compiled and designed by those who were influenced by Stanley and knew him best.

It is also a window into the centuries-old culture and lore of Scottish Travellers – the lore Stanley spent his life protecting. It is our hope that this resource will empower young people to learn about their local heritage, the diversity of Scotland and their role in preserving tradition.

In a way this resource is an act of preservation, passing the glowing torch of tradition from Stanley, to the next generation - so that they can become the Tradition Bearers of our future.

TERMINOLOGY

This resource has utilised the term 'Scottish Traveller' throughout, which differs slightly from the Scottish Government's official term 'Scottish Gypsy/Traveller'. This is in line with how Stanley Robertson defined himself, but it is important to note that not all families accept this terminology with some preferring to be defined as 'Scottish Gypsy/Travellers' (McLennan et al, 2017), 'Nawken' (Donaldson, 2020) and 'Torikker' (MacDonald, 2009).

McLennan, K., McPhee, R., McPhee, S., Turbett, C. (2017) *Gypsy Travellers: Human Rights and Social Work's Role*. IRIS Insights.

Donaldson, D. (2020) *Why I think self defining as Nawken will help reduce depression rates*. Available from: <https://conyach.scot/why-i-self-define-as-nawken/>

MacDonald, J. (2009) *Learn Beurla Reagaird [Words & phrases] 1*. Youtube. Available from: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=il_kDvPCmwk&t=159s

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WHO ARE THE SCOTTISH TRAVELLERS?

Nobody can be certain on the origins of Scottish Travellers. Some have claimed that the community's roots lie in a pre-celtic nomadic people (Whyte, 2001); whilst others claim that the contemporary Scottish Traveller community is more closely linked with the Roma diaspora from Northern India (McPhee, 2017). However, what can be said is that they are one of Scotland's oldest nomadic cultures, having been travelling Scotland's highways and by-ways for nearly one thousand years.

Scottish Travellers continue to retain their unique culture through distinct cultural codes, languages and beliefs. Indeed, language and orality is a pillar of Scottish Traveller identity, with at least two spoken languages present in the community – *Beurla Raigaird* and *The Cant*. *Beurla Raigaird* is mainly spoken by the Highland Travellers, with *The Cant* being spoken throughout the Lowlands, Perthshire and North-East of Scotland.

Scottish Travellers have played an array of roles in Scotland over time, lending their specialised skills and talents to the development of the land. From skilled tin-smithing and basket-making, to seasonal harvest work; from remarkable ballads and songs to wonderful story traditions with local and international connections. Scottish Travellers have contributed to and have been an integral part of Scotland's culture for centuries.

As a people, Scottish Travellers' history is littered with persecution and oppression; they have experienced marginalisation of their nomadic culture, been forced into reservations and have had their children forcibly sent abroad. Despite it all, they are a proud people, rich in heritage and culture – who continue to hold on to ancient traditions, customs and ways of life.

The lived identity of today's Scottish Travellers can take many forms, some families are permanently settled, others travel for part of the year and others live on the road permanently. This said, for much of the community, the ability to travel or telling stories of life on the road are still an integral part of the way they experience their identity.

Many Scottish Travellers interact with the environment in a much more extensive and intimate way than settled people; they inhabit it as the 'world's room'. Thus, the roads and campsites of Scotland are as much home as a flat or a house might be to those from the settled community. So, where you see a set of caravans pitched up where none were before, it's families at home, expressing belonging and culture, living a different world view.

As a community, oral tradition is greatly important; songs, folktales, rhymes and legends – orality is at the core of Scottish Traveller culture. The community uses this tradition to educate their children, passing on knowledge of genealogy, history and geography.

There is no comprehensive history book on Scottish Travellers, but despite this, many Scottish Traveller families can trace their ancestors back generations. Impressively, through their stories and songs, some are able to pinpoint family members at the Battle of Culloden, the Glencoe Massacre and the Highland Clearances! As a result Scottish Travellers have become renowned in the Story and Ballad traditions, notably families such as the 'Stewarts of Blair' and the Robertsons of Aberdeen played a crucial part in the Folk Revival of the 1960s and 70s.

Despite an ancient history in Scotland, attitudes towards Scotland's Travellers have been described as the 'last acceptable form of racism' by campaigners, with the Scottish Government admitting that much still needs to be done to tackle the socio-economic inequalities faced by the community (Scottish Government, 2019).

This resource is a celebration of one of Scotland's most renowned Travellers – Stanley Robertson. Through exploring his life and the important role he played in Scotland's story, we will empower a new generation of tradition-bearers in his memory!

Davie Donaldson,
Scottish Traveller and Activist





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FIRST LEVEL

At First level the focus will be Social Subjects outcomes related to a 'famous Scot'. We will explore Stanley's life and his contribution to Scottish culture.



Activity One: History Detectives on the Loose!

AIM:

To explore and use historical evidence related to Stanley Robertson and think about how trustworthy it might be.

RESOURCES:

- [Sway Document](#)
- The History Detective Worksheet can be downloaded by clicking here: [History Detective Worksheet](#)
- The Evidence Sheet can be downloaded here: [Evidence Sheet](#). It includes copies of an email from Tony Robertson; an email from Donald Smith; photos of Stanley; a photo of TMSA storytelling trophy; a photo of a Newspaper article; a photo of some of Stanley's books; a photo of some of Stanley's CDs.

LEARNING POINTS:

- I can use information learned from sources to relate the story of a local individual of historic interest.
- I can draw a short timeline and locate two or more events on the line in the correct order.
- I can identify the difference between a more and less trustworthy source.

OUTCOMES

Social Subjects
Experiences and
Outcomes

ACTIVITY:

The following activities are presented in [this Sway Document](#).

1) **Set the scene:** Tell learners they are going to be detectives, and use clues to find out as much as they can about the man in the photo – show image of Stanley. Ask pupils what things they might try to find out? Make a list on the board, (e.g. his name, where he was born, what he did, etc.)



Activity One: History Detectives on the Loose!

2) **History Detectives Carousel:** Hand out History Detectives worksheet and explain task.

- write names of group members in first box
- number the pieces of evidence looked at; a list of things they learned from each piece of evidence;
- put a cross on the continuum line to show how trustworthy they think the evidence is and give their reasons.

Encourage learners to explore as many pieces of evidence relating to Stanley as they can in the given time.

3) **Findings:** Ask learners to share what they have found out. Did they manage to 'detect' the answers to all their questions?

4) **Timeline:** Place information learners found on a Timeline of Stanley's life. Use the Worksheet provided or make your own version.

5) **Class Reflection:** Reflect on the exercise by asking learners:

- What pieces of evidence could detectives use to find out about you?
- What have you learned today that you didn't know before?

Activity Two: Stanley Robertson - A famous Scot?

AIM:

To find out about Stanley Robertson and express my opinion about his importance as a Tradition Bearer

RESOURCES:

- Sway Document
- Stanley Robertson Biography (the film is embedded in Sway Document or can be accessed [here](#))
- Gypsy Traveller History in Scotland Timeline (IRISS)
- 'A Road Less Travelled' (Article 12, 2017)

LEARNING POINTS:

- I can use information learned from sources to relate the story of a local individual of historic interest.
- I can name a figure from the past and comment on their role in events.

OUTCOMES

Social Subjects
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ACTIVITY:

The following activities are presented in [this Sway Document](#).

1) **Introduce Scottish Travellers:** Begin by showing images of Scottish Travellers to class (Sway Document).

- Ask learners to put on their detective hats and look for clues in the pictures to see if they can work out what the people have in common.
- Respond to thoughts/comments.
- Give brief outline of who Scottish Travellers are (Refer to 'A Road less Travelled' and 'Gypsy Traveller History in Scotland')



Activity Two: Stanley Robertson - A Famous Scot?

2) **Stanley Robertson Biography:** Explain that learners are going to find out more about Stanley (refer to what they found out in their previous lesson) (e.g. he was a famous Scottish Traveller tradition bearer, he came from Aberdeen). Show Film (it is embedded in the Sway Document).

3) **Timeline:** Place information learners have found out on the Timeline of Stanley's life.

4) **Discussion:**

- What did Stanley mean when he talked about 'the chalice' that needs to be polished and kept in the best of condition and never allowed to tarnish?
- What is meant by 'keeper of the lore' / 'tradition bearer'?
- Do you think it is important to keep these stories and songs alive? How did Stanley help to keep them alive?

5) **Class Reflection:** Reflect on the activity by asking learners:

- Do you think Stanley Robertson should be considered famous?
- Does your family pass on any traditions?

Activity Three:

Stories & Songs as Historic Sources

AIM:

To recognise the role of story and song as a means of passing on Scotland's history and traditions.

RESOURCES:

- [Sway Document](#)
- The audio clip of Stanley telling a Burker story can be accessed through the Sway document or can be accessed [here](#)
- The worksheets can be downloaded by clicking here: [Burker Tale Worksheet + Burker Tale Glossary](#)

LEARNING POINTS:

- I can comment on the role played by Scottish Travellers (with reference to Stanley Robertson) in passing on songs and stories which tell us about the past
- I can comment on the trustworthiness of songs and stories as sources of evidence.

OUTCOMES

Social Subjects
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ACTIVITY:

The following activities are presented in [this Sway Document](#).

- 1) **Recap:** Remind learners about some of the sources of evidence they looked at for clues about Stanley (e.g. emails, photos, newspaper, book, CD)
 - Show the (photo of) book/CD – what did we learn about Stanley from these pieces of evidence? (e.g. he was an author, a singer and a storyteller)
 - Ask learners if we can learn anything from the songs or stories themselves?

Activity Three:

Stories & Songs as Historic Sources

2) **Burker Story:** Listen to clip of Stanley telling a Burker story.

3) **Research Task:**

- Complete tasks 1-4 on the Burker Tale Worksheet.
- This will require learners to carry out some research into who the Burkers were.
- Once complete, ask learners to share their answers to the questions with the class.

4) **Importance of stories:** Listen to the story again and complete tasks 6 + 7.

- Explore why Travellers told these tales. (Due to their lifestyle Travellers were more at risk of being captured by Burkers. Later the stories became general warning stories.)
- Can learners think of any stories they have been told which have a warning in them?

5) **The Cant Language:** Splitting the class into groups, encourage learners to complete tasks 8-10 on worksheet. They shouldn't look at the Glossary until they have had a chance to try the translation for themselves.

6) **Class Reflection:** Reflect on the activity by asking learners:

- Do you think stories and songs are a good way to pass on history?
- What have you learned today that you didn't know before?

Activity Four:

Stanley & the Three 'I's! – Importance, Impact, Icon?

AIM:

To consider Stanley's role in preserving and passing on history and traditions.

RESOURCES:

- [Sway Document](#)
- The Stanley and the Three 'I's worksheet can be downloaded here: [Stanley and the Three 'I's Worksheet](#)
- The Evidence Sheets 1,2, and 3 can be downloaded here: [Evidence Sheets](#). It includes an obituary (Exhibit 1); research papers (Exhibit 2); listings in archives (Exhibit 3); a song (Exhibit 4); an article about Stanley receiving the Masters Degree (Exhibit 5); photo of Stanley's books/CD (Exhibit 6); photo of TMSA trophy (Exhibit 7); adverts for commemorative event (Exhibit 8); dedications from storytellers (Exhibit 9)
- The Face Cut Out Poster Film is embedded by can also be viewed [here](#)

LEARNING POINTS:

- I can use information learned from sources to relate the story of a local individual of historic interest.
- I can name a figure from the past and comment on their role in events.

OUTCOMES

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ACTIVITY:

The following activities are presented in [this Sway Document](#).

1) **Do you think Stanley's work as a 'keeper of the lore' was important?:**

- Split class into groups of three learners to explore Exhibits 1, 2 & 3 (one item each)
- Then share what they discovered with the rest of their group and complete first section of Handout, 'Stanley and the Three 'I's'



Activity Four: Stanley & the Three 'I's! – Importance, Impact, Idol?

2) **What evidence is there that Stanley had a big impact on other people?:**

- Encourage learners in their groups of three to explore Exhibits 4, 5 & 6 – one item each.
- Then ask them to share what they discovered with the rest of their group and complete second section of Handout, 'Stanley and the Three 'I's'

3) **Would you call Stanley an icon?:**

- Encourage learners in their groups to explore Exhibits 7, 8 & 9 – one item each.
- Then ask learners to share what they discovered with the rest of their group and complete the third section of Handout, 'Stanley and the Three 'I's'

4) **Cut Out Face Poster:**

- Listen to the video which includes instructions on how to create a cut-out face poster.
- Ask learners to create a 'face cut out' poster about Stanley. Try to add features that show it is Stanley, (e.g. bonnet, tie, glasses)
- Ask learners to add some facts about his life, as well as opinions about his importance as a keeper of the lore.
- Encourage learners to share their posters – learners should place their face in the cut-out and 'pass on the lore'!
- Ask for a volunteer to tell some facts about Stanley, tell a story or sing a song.

5) **Class Reflection:** Reflect on the exercise by asking learners:

- Who are your icons?
- What impact do they have on you or on others?

Acknowledgements

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Booklet Photographs and Images: With thanks to Grace Banks (private collection) for the cover image. Other credits/sources appear with each entry. All Sway images have creative commons attribution or come from the collections held by the Elphinstone Institute or Grace Banks.

Advisory Group Members:



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Funders and Supporters:



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"WITH THE ORAL
TRADITION YOU'VE GOT
EVERYTHING - YOU'VE
GOT A WHOLE
ANCESTRY THAT COMES
THROUGH YE"

STANLEY ROBERTSON