

IVCA Clarion Awards 2008

Performing Arts category

The Town of Total Darkness

Communication objectives of the project

E.ON is committed to promoting responsible energy usage and climate change awareness. The Energy Experience has the ambition of helping to create an energy-literate generation by presenting in an engaging manner the information that young people need to become informed, responsible consumers of energy.

The Town of Total Darkness theatre tour aims to further these objectives. The tour encourages pupils aged 7–11 to think actively about how energy reaches them and how they use it and in doing so, asks them to question whether it is used appropriately or not.

A strong interactive emphasis is carried through the performance as pupils are asked to inform two Victorian detectives, newly arrived in 2008 through time travel, on what is going on around them. The detectives ask thought-provoking and comic questions about the many electronic devices that the pupils see around them in the home and at school. The performance aims to draw out the pupils' existing knowledge of energy, eventually translating this onto a large 'energy jigsaw' mapping the energy journey from the power station to the home.

As the use of energy becomes more crucial in the way that we manage our lives in the future, it is essential that there are enough energy-conscious minds to maintain and progress changes being made today. The tour introduces messages that are reinforced in E.ON's classroom resources for schools, The Energy Experience.

Ultimately the play seeks to promote the message that electrical appliances should be turned off when not in use, and to effect behaviour change. Kettles can be filled carefully and lights can be switched off in empty rooms. Pupils are also encouraged to think about the wider implications when energy is used and to take these messages away with them.

The play also aims to raise the profile of E.ON, which is a relatively new brand in the UK.



Description of the project

Launched in June 2007, the Town of Total Darkness theatre tour runs for a five week stretch during the summer term. Performances take place in primary schools and are aimed at pupils across the 7–11 age group. The tour is part of the E.ON Energy Experience programme.

The play's energy-saving messages are communicated in an interactive mystery narrative. Two famous detectives are brought to the present day by a Time Lord and are asked to employ their techniques of deduction to find the energy villain who is responsible for creating the Town of Total Darkness in the year 2030. They are asked to enlist the help of the Promising Young Detectives – the pupils themselves.

The purpose of the performance becomes deducing what energy is, how it gets to us and how it can be wasted, as this will lead to the energy villain. In beginning to understand how the energy chain works, the detectives realise that the energy villain can be traced back to today and that the real crimes are perhaps our every day misuses of energy. This notion has been well appreciated by teachers, as it helps to reinforce the idea of personal responsibility and encourages pupils to think consciously about their energy behaviour. These ideas aim to feed into E.ON's objectives for the tour, and also help pupils to identify issues more critically as they progress through curriculum areas such as Citizenship, Science and Geography.

Throughout the performance, pupils are invited to assist the detectives with their enquiry. The detectives teach the pupils skills in how to enquire and they are then encouraged to identify household appliances that waste energy. Getting the children actively involved with this process makes the performance lively, but also assists the pupils in identifying types of energy use they may or may not have previously been familiar with.

The detectives investigate the processes of producing and distributing energy through a live demonstration of the energy journey. They enlist the help of volunteers to create an active chain carrying energy to the home by performing actions and making noises to build a simulation. This simulation helps pupils to understand that the smallest energy requirements come as the end result of an immense process.

Following the performance, Watson and Holmes invite both pupils and teachers to engage in a question and answer session. They are able to question what has happened and offer their thoughts and opinions on the subject. These discussions pave the way towards thinking about renewable methods of energy use and creation. Pupils are able to go away with their newly discovered skills of deduction, they are now equipped to 'Look, Listen, Think and Solve' when it comes to matters of effective energy use.



Outcomes / effectiveness of the project

The Town of Total Darkness tour ran for the first time in 2007 and will run for a second year in 2008. It has enjoyed great success and has been very well received by both pupils and teachers. Many teachers have reported how enthusiastically some of their pupils have carried the messages forwards into their homes.

Our evaluation of the 2007 tour revealed that pupils reacted positively towards the visual language of the play: the actors, costumes, narrative and props. They strongly expressed that this interactive performance was their preferred method of learning about this subject, both in comparison to lessons, but also other performances they'd seen.

"It's much better than a science lesson, that's boring."

Year 4 pupil

The performances provided some teachers with an introduction to the wider Energy Experience programme, and offered reinforcement of the topics covered in class for those using the programme already:

"You could tell by their faces, some of them were standing up wanting to see what was happening. They loved it."

"Listening to some Years 5 and 6 as we were going into the hall, I could hear a lot of them saying that it was really good, I really enjoyed it, that was fantastic."

"My boys gave me a hug on the way back, talking about it, they thought it was brilliant."

Teachers

Most teachers had little awareness of E.ON before the performance. They reported that they were more aware of the brand after the tour's visit, and that they were more likely to use the Energy Experience classroom resources.

"It's fantastic that they want to put some money into it and go around schools and educate"

Teacher

Both teachers and pupils liked the interactive elements in which the children could get involved in the performance. In particular, the search for the jigsaw pieces was seen as a good way to keep the children engaged for the whole performance. The performance was also said to have a good balance between humour and entertainment, and information and learning.

"I liked how they made it fun and facts at the same time"

Year 4 pupil

Children reported that having seen the performance would encourage them to change their energy behaviour:

"It gave me more encouragement to turn things off when I have used it in the house"

Year 3 pupil