

Kapitein Klip's Amazing Stories

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In the summer of 2000, Rotterdam Zoo opened its Oceanium, 'a journey through the seas of the world, under water and above, along the coasts of continents and to oceanic islands'. The zoo's Education Department having long had the desire to create something special for the early years of Primary, now seemed the right time to do it. So, the team sat down together and began throwing ideas around...

The lesson had to be in the new Klipklas, the custom-built classroom in the Oceanium. 'Klip' means 'cliff' and 'klas' means what you think it means. Since children from four to seven years of age freely mix 'reality' and imagination, it was agreed the lesson should take the form of a journey – Kapitein Klip's Fantastic Voyage.



"Pieces of eight!....pieces of eight!"

With this model, there is the opportunity to fill each voyage, or lesson, with different adventures. With several teachers delivering the stories, and responding to different pupils each time, no two voyages are going to be the same.

Our next wish was to 'activate' the children's perceptions and respond to their natural curiosity, so we built a stimulating environment – the inside of an old sailing ship. Many mementos and keepsakes from Kapitein Klip's voyages on distant oceans are stored in the hold of his ship. Every object has its own story, and if a pupil asks what this or that thing is, the teacher recounts the thrilling tale of how it came to be in the hold of Kapitein Klip's ship.

Here are a few of the items: the jaws of a shark, a bottle with an octopus inside, a stuffed puffin, the eggs of a

razorbill, the log (journal) of a voyage, a captured treasure map, several turtle carapaces (shells), various stuffed fish, pieces of coral, a 'rain stick' made from a cactus plant, a diving helmet, a ship's horn; there are many more.



The Kapitein's memorabilia

The teachers are just as flexible as these objects. Some are male, appearing dressed as a ship's captain. While some play the part of Kapitein Klip himself, others choose to take on the role of his grandson. One teacher is female. Wearing rubber trousers, she dresses as one of the Oceanium's animal keepers. 'Secretly' smuggling the children into the hold of the ship via a side door, she has her own take on Kapitein Klip and his travels.

What happens in practice with a class is that, on arrival, the class teacher is given a key to the side entrance to the Oceanium. Teacher and class make their own way up to the Klipklas, where an old ship's bell hangs next to the door. One of the children is allowed to ring this bell, summoning Kapitein Klip, his grandson or whichever character is 'on stage'.

Many weave their tales around the first voyage of our hero, in the time when he was still a cabin boy... 'about the age you are now...'. The young Klip brought many strange and amazing souvenirs back from his early years at sea... 'which you can see here today, in this very ship's hold...'. When the lesson time is up, the teacher is given a 'treasure map' of the Oceanium, while each pupil gets a set of pictures of all the animals that have featured in the day's stories. These can be ticked off as each species is visited on a walk through the Oceanium itself.



More reminders of distant shores

'Kapitein Klip' has proven an unusually popular lesson, with the pupils learning much *and* having a wonderful time. Sometimes, months later, children coming back for a different lesson are very surprised to discover 'their' Kapitein Klip is just an ordinary zoo teacher. 'Don't be confused,' they are told, 'you must have met my brother, the good kapitein...'