

Visit the 100 year old Paragon Café in Katoomba 1916-2016

Meet the outcomes, cover the skills and content of the NSW K-6 History syllabus for students in Stage 1 through a site visit to this famous historic café. Established in 1916, by the Greek Simos family the café will celebrate its centenary in 2016.

Read Professor Ian Jack's remarkable story about the café, beginning with 19 year old Zacharias Simos from the island of Kythera in Greece to the current owner, Robyn Parker, who has loved the café since her childhood.

Visit Ian's story at:

<http://www.bluemountainsheritage.com.au/imagesDB/wysiwyg/BMHJournal5Jan2015.pdf>

The following web sites add further information, interesting details, events, photographs and insights into the story of the intrepid, adventurous and entrepreneurial young man, Zac Simos.

<http://theparagonhistory.com.au/>

<http://www.kythera-family.net/index.php?nav=117-119&cid=225-221&did=2886>

<http://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/simos-zacharias-theodore-jack-13195>

<http://www.pittwateronlinenews.com/the-paragon-at-katoomba-by-george-repin.php>

<http://www.smh.com.au/national/the-great-grecian-earn-how-immigrants-made-a-cafe-society-20091208-khqp.html>

<http://www.environment.nsw.gov.au/heritageapp/ViewHeritageItemDetails.aspx?ID=5051727>

<http://www.bluemountaingazette.com.au/story/3024974/heritage-recognition-for-paragon-cafe/>

<http://www.bluemountaingazette.com.au/story/1438202/chocolate-secrets-uncovered-at-paragon-cafe/>

http://www.bluemountainsheritage.com.au/imagesDB/wysiwyg/Heritagenletter25Jan-Feb2013_2.pdf

Location and contact details

65 Katoomba Street, Katoomba, New South Wales 2780, Australia
61 2 4782 2928

<https://www.facebook.com/TheParagonCafe/>

View Google images of the Paragon Café Katoomba to set the scene!

Stage 1

The Past in the Present

This topic provides a study of local history. Students explore, recognise and appreciate the history of their local area by examining the remains of the past and considering why they should be preserved.

Outcomes

- Identifies and describes significant people, events, places and sites in the local community over time HT1-2
- Describes the effects of changing technology on people's lives over time HT1-3
- Demonstrates skills of historical inquiry and communication HT1-4

Key Inquiry Questions

- What aspects of the past can you see today?
- What do they tell us?
- What remains of the past are important to the local community? Why?
- How have changes in technology shaped our daily life?

Content

The history of a significant person, building, site or part of the natural environment in the local community and what it reveals about the past (ACHHK044)
The impact of changing technology on people's lives (ACHHK046)

Students

- Identify a significant person, building, site or part of the natural environment in the local community and discuss what they reveal about the past and why they are considered important
- Investigate an aspect of local history
- Develop a narrative on their chosen aspect of local history which focuses on the remains of the past
- Discuss the similarities and differences of technology from the past through a range of sources and sequence them over time
- Use a range of communication forms to explain how one example of changing technology affected people's lives

Reference: pages 39, 40 and 41 History K-6 NSW BOS

At the Paragon Café students will

- View and explore the main rooms of the Paragon Café including the Blue Room, the Banquet Hall, the dining area, the old bakery and the chocolate making room
- Discover and describe features of both the exterior and interior of the building indicating it is an old building
- Sight examples of technology being used in the café and compare old (past) and new (present) equipment e.g. cash registers. Talk about how the technology helped people in the café
- Observe and name features of the cafe and objects that show the past
- Undertake an object study e.g. original chairs, chocolate moulds, chocolate boxes, drink containers and menus, complete a matrix and share understandings of what the objects reveal about the past in the café
- Talk about the people who visited the café in the past and compare with those who visit today. Consider reasons for going to the café, clothing worn, food eaten etc. View photographs of famous people from the past
- Think about why the Paragon Café has been in the same building that it started in one hundred years ago and still keeps going!
- Examine the cafe that has been operating for one hundred years in a building that is one hundred and seventeen years old
- Record their observations and impressions through a variety of ways including photographs, drawings and key words

An Object Study

Objects are **primary sources** and provide a window into the past having been produced by people who lived during that period.

Providing opportunities for students to have contact with a variety of objects can develop a sense of what it was like to be alive during a past era.

An object study engages students in a personal way to events of the past and helps make them more real.

When studying an object, students need to be both critical and analytical as they examine the object.

Through discussion, questioning and drawing on prior knowledge student's piece together clues and patterns and form conclusions based on evidence gleaned from the object.

A suggested approach to undertaking an Object Study with Stage 1 students includes the following four focus areas:

- The main things to think about when viewing an object
- Some more questions to ask
- Things found out from viewing an object
- Things I have to find out about through research

The main things to think about when viewing an object

- **Physical features**- what does it look and feel like?
- **Construction**-how was it made?
- **Function**- what was it made for? How was it used?
- **Design**-does it do the job it was made for?
- **Value**- what is it worth?

Some more questions to ask (examples only)

Physical features

- What shape and size is it?
- What colour is it? How is it decorated?
- Is it made of something natural or produced in a factory?
- Is it a complete object?
- Has it been changed or mended?
- Is it old or new?
- Is it in good condition? Is it worn, chipped or broken?

Construction (examples only)

- Is it handmade or made by a machine?
- Has it been stuck together?
- Was it made in pieces or in one piece in a mould?

Function (examples only)

- How has the object been used?
- Has the use changed?
- Has a new use for the object been invented?

Design (examples only)

- Is it an easy object to pick up and hold?
- Is it heavy or light? Is it a tall or short object?
- Is it easy to work?
- Is it decorated? If it is decorated how does that help the design?
- What could be changed or improved?

Value (examples only)

- Who would have made this object and what would it mean to them?
- Who would have purchased this object? Why would they have chosen this object? Do you think it has meant a lot to the owner? How do you know if the owner has cared for the object?
- What do you think this object means to the owner of the Paragon Café?
- Is it easy to get another one of the objects and replace it? Why is it hard to buy more of this object?

Things found out from viewing an object

Students record their observations and knowledge

Things I have to find out about to research

Students will determine what they would like to know more about after completing their object study

Object Study in the Paragon Café

Students will have the opportunity for a 'hands on study' of a variety of objects during their excursion time in the café. Up to ten objects will be set out on tables in the Blue Room; students will work either individually or in pairs to study up to three objects in the allocated time.

Taking photographs of the objects and working together using the Jigsaw strategy back at school, the students can share their observations and conclusions about all of the objects on display.

A recording sheet set out as a grid will be provided for the students for this activity at the café.

It would be beneficial if students are familiar with how to study an object prior to the excursion, maximising this learning opportunity in the café. Students may wish to develop their own set of investigative questions to guide their study of an object or may use the example questions listed.

Some questions to help students understand what makes a building historically significant

History

Who were the original occupants and what did they do at the building?

The building, consisting of four shops, was built in 1909 by William Niland as a commercial investment on the vacant block of land that is now the site of the current café. Three of the shops were purchased as an investment by John Russell, the Anglican rector of St Hilda's Church just across the road. He retained ownership of the shops after he retired from St Hilda's in 1913. Various shopkeepers occupied No. 65 Katoomba Street prior to Zac Simos.

Who were later occupants?

Zac Simos occupied the building in 1916 and set it up as a café. The building has been a café since 1916 and still operates as a café today in 2016, one hundred years later. Zac Simos leased the building until 1924 then purchased the freehold of the property, No 65 along with the adjacent shop, No 67 Katoomba Street. He and his wife Mary and brother George managed the café for many decades. The café was in the Simos family until 2000 when it was sold.

Did an event of historical importance occur in the building?

The establishment of the Greek café culture in Katoomba through the Paragon Cafe broadened the experiences of both community members and tourists of the café experience in the 1920s, 30s and beyond. The contribution of Greek migrants to Australian culture and society can be seen through the role of the cafes in towns and cities throughout Australia over time. The reputation of the Paragon Café has reached iconic status both in the mountains, NSW and Art Deco Societies around Australia. Updating the interior several times to include outstanding examples of art deco architecture, executed by significant theatre people of the time and the friezes of the famous Danish artist Otto Steen now allow us to appreciate the efforts the Simos family undertook to keep the café appealing, vibrant and a "must visit" destination. The creation of the state of the art ice cream room, bake house and chocolatier upstairs introduced café clients to the ground breaking technology, imported from America and Europe, used by the cafe in the production process of making chocolates, candy and cakes. The local Katoomba Rotary group was established in 1937 and met weekly in the Paragon Café for 50 years. Zac Simos was a founding member of Katoomba Rotary.

Can the building be said to illustrate an historical issue?

Because the building is 117 years old and the interior of the café is relatively unchanged since the Simos family outfitted the café during the 1920s-1940s the building is in need of structural attention both inside and outside. Some parts of the inside of the café need restoration e.g. panelling in the Blue Room.

Overall, the Paragon café is an outstanding example of art deco architecture and one of a kind among the remaining Greek cafes across Australia. Therefore the building raises the issue of preservation and conservation and the imperative for looking after a site that is such an important part of Australia's heritage.

Architecture

When was the building constructed?

The building was constructed in 1909.

Who designed the building?

Unknown

Did the designer use a style or tradition to create the design?

Unknown- possibly based on the common style of shop buildings at the time; the same awning extends across the four shops.

Who constructed the building?

Information unknown about the original builders; it is known that an extensive refurbishment was undertaken by Harry and Ernest Sidgreaves from Redfern in 1926.

What materials were used in the construction of the building?

The following document lists many of the architectural features of the building and some materials used particularly between World War 1 and World War 2

<http://www.environment.nsw.gov.au/heritageapp/ViewHeritageItemDetails.aspx?ID=1170394>

Integrity

Have there been changes made to the building?

In 1926 a major make-over of the café was undertaken at a cost of 5000 pounds. The shop fitters were Harry and Ernest Sidgreaves from Redfern. The main front room of the café, now the main dining room was doubled in length, a new soda fountain was constructed in Australian marble, wall panels in white or cream, framed in gold were installed as well as glass shelving with adjustable brackets in the front windows. An elegant private supper room was created, and a new change room for the girls who worked in the café was built behind the supper room. The kitchen was added behind the change room. The upstairs of the building was transformed. The front section was converted into Zac Simos' private accommodation and three industrial sections were added to the rear. One was for refrigeration and was where the ice cream was made and stored. The second

section was a new bakehouse with tiled walls and floors. A new dumb waiter was installed to bring the cakes and bread downstairs. The Paragon chocolate factory was relocated to the upstairs area. In 1934 the function room known as the Banquet Hall was created. This room features walls of stunning art deco style mirrors. In 1936 the function room known as the Blue Room was created based on the sleek designs of the fabulous ocean liners of the time. In 1947 Otto Steen the Danish sculptor and artist created the dozen one off alabaster reliefs based on classical Greek mythology; these replaced the cream and white panels installed in 1926. Most of the changes completed by 1947 are still evident and retained in the café today.

Has the building always fulfilled its present function?

The building has been a café since 1916.

Environment

Does the building look like any others in the community?

As the café is in a group of four shops joined together there are similarities between the four shop fronts such as the awnings. However, there is a distinctive Paragon café sign above the front awning in Art Deco style that makes it stand out from the others.

Is the building a local landmark?

The Paragon Café is a well-known landmark throughout Katoomba, the Blue Mountains, NSW and other parts of Australia. It is visited by international tourists and is on the list of recommended sites to visit during a trip to the Blue Mountains. It is still recognised today by the distinctive chocolate box design developed a century ago, the stunning art deco interior and beautiful features of the front of the building, particularly the glass windows, the brass trim, the adjustable shelving, the curtains and the renowned symbol, the capital P and the fancy sign writing of the name of the café.

Getting ready for the excursion to the Paragon Café

A suggested Teaching and Learning sequence

Teachers' note

1. Prepare students for the excursion by providing opportunities for them to learn how to discuss and describe an object of significance chosen by the teacher using the suggested areas- Physical appearance, Construction, Function, Design and Value.
2. Tell students they will be visiting the Blue Mountains town of Katoomba and the Paragon Café to have a look at the outside and inside of the building and work out why and how it's important to Katoomba, the Blue Mountains and other places. They will also be thinking about why buildings like this café should be preserved and conserved for the people in the future to visit and enjoy.
3. Establish student knowledge and experience of cafes in general, then specifically the Paragon Café. Ask students if anyone in their family has ever been to the Paragon Café, including grandparents and great grandparents. Students describe their experience or knowledge, if applicable and bring in supporting information including photographs, any souvenirs etc. for sharing.
4. Google images of the streetscape of Katoomba Street, Katoomba and discuss, observing the age of the buildings, what the buildings are used for and determining an approximate chronology of them based on evidence in the images. Terminology to be used includes the past, the present, future, recent, long time ago
5. Google images of the Paragon Café and briefly discuss student observations
6. Google maps of the Katoomba area including the location of the Paragon Café. Discuss with students the route to be taken, either by bus, train, or walking to get to the café.
7. Keep the interior of the café as a surprise for the students until they arrive!

At the Paragon Café

On arrival in Katoomba Street, Katoomba, take time to have a look at the outside of the café. The best vantage spot is on the footpath opposite the café, outside Macarthur's Antique centre.

Students describe what they see in terms of age, style, colours and anything else that stands out for them.

Cross the road at the nearby pedestrian crossing to the front of the café, pointing out features about the nearby buildings as you make your way safely to the café.

Volunteer members of the Friends of the Paragon will be waiting to greet you at the front door and will escort you through the main dining area of the café to the Blue Room.

Robyn Parker, the owner of the café will welcome you to the café and then students will be set to work investigating this wonderful site.

Prior to arrival please organise students into two groups:

Group A will be taken on a tour of the café (depending on student numbers and numbers of volunteers, this group may be made into smaller groups for easier exploration of the café)

Group B will work on the Object Study set up in the Blue Room. Friends of the Paragon volunteers will be able to assist students with their object study if necessary. Students will be encouraged to photograph the object they are studying to assist with either an oral or written description back at school.

After a nominated time, the tour group will come back to the Blue Room and swap over with the Object study group.

The tour of the Paragon café will include close viewing of the

- **Front of the building, including the awning** over the footpath. Students will be encouraged to identify features that give clues to the café being an old building e.g. brass window frames, the door, shop front windows, writing, curtains, overall style of the building and materials used to construct the building
- **Main dining room**- features that stand out; students will be directed to observe the display cabinets, carpets, light fittings, photograph of Mrs Simos, the booths, glass mirrors, Greek classical friezes, signage, packaging
- **Upstairs area** including the chocolate room, the bake house and viewing some of the industrial kitchen equipment used
- **Banquet Hall**- stunning art deco mirror work and fancy designs and patterns, the furniture
- **Blue Room**-light fittings and areas that need restoration

Throughout the tour, students will be encouraged to describe what they see, feel, hear, smell, are liking, finding interesting and identify what they think is old, new, what the rooms have been used for, what things were made from, how it has changed or stayed the same, what needs fixing, etc., ask questions and take photos. Short film clips could be made if students bring and use iPads.

Once all students have completed the tour and the object study assemble in the Banquet Hall for a brief discussion and sharing of observations including

- What they have been impressed by and interested in
- What they have never seen before and learnt about today
- What's the most important thing about the café they will share with their family that evening?
- Why do you think, Robyn the owner, loves the café so much?

At this point students may like some time to draw, or write to record their observations of their time in the café.

Winding up the visit

- A light luncheon option will be available and will be served in the Blue Room for those schools who have booked in for this; this will be set up during the discussion session in the Banquet Hall
- Purchasing gelato or drinks can be organised
- Opportunities for some shopping for a treat or to take something special home for the family can be organised if students are allowed to bring along a set amount of spending money. Students may wish to purchase a small box of chocolates, a Waratah Bar or one of the many tempting reproduction vintage toys that were popular with children in the 1920s and 1930s
- Bringing own lunches and eating them in the Blue Room can be arranged

Home from the Paragon Café and back at school!

Some suggestions:

- Complete the object study matrix and any further investigation needed; share
- Discuss and record in an appropriate way responses to the following:
 - *How does everything we have seen inside and outside of the Paragon Café let us know it is an old building?
 - *What was it about the building and the café that made it special?
 - *Special buildings need to be cared for and looked after for the future. How can the Paragon Café be looked after?
 - *How can we tell others that it's important to look after and preserve the Paragon Café?
 - *The Paragon Café is an old building. The old things about the building tell us a lot about what people did and liked in the past. What do you think the building and the café tell us about the people in Katoomba in the past and the history of Katoomba?

*What things do you think people in the past who visited the café liked compared with people who visit the café now? What are some similar things and what are some different things?

- Concluding activity-digital presentation

Draw together the knowledge and understandings demonstrated by the students from their experience at the Paragon Café to develop a digital presentation which answers the following questions:

What aspects of the past can you see today at the Paragon Café?

What is it about the Paragon Café that makes it important for the local community and why?

Why should the Paragon Café be preserved for people to visit and enjoy in the future?

- Send some feedback to the Paragon Café! We would love to display and share your time at the café!