



Activities:
Mr Brown
and his
capabilities

Capability Brown –
Visionary or
Vandal?



What
you
need

Information cards (p22-25 of
worksheet pack)
Paper
Pencils
Clipboard

Time

30 minutes

The question

Did Capability Brown do more good or harm with the works he did?

The activity

This is an activity which could also be lead in school by a teacher.

It is better suited to older children (Year 5 and 6).

Take the class to a spot in the landscape which has a good overview of the landscape, or a spot where you know a lot of work was done.

Tell the class that, although this landscape was made to look as 'natural' and 'English' as possible, it took a lot of work to make it look like this. Brown was a genius at solving problems. He planned how lakes or rivers would be built. He also moved trees so that at different spots you could see individual trees or groups of trees. He also arranged how the trees were planted to produce 'views' at different places. He sometimes had to be quite destructive (vary this according to your site), knocking down churches, buildings or whole villages and moving roads.

Split the class into groups of 3 or 4 and give each group one of the four sets of information cards (they are biased towards the 'visionary' or 'vandal' positions). Ask them to read through the statements, decide which are the most important and what they could add to these arguments. How can they persuade people who disagree with this point of view? Ask the children to make notes on their ideas and what they've read, as you will be taking in the information cards before the next step.

When they have had time to prepare, introduce them to a 'polarisation game'. All the children supporting Brown as visionary line up on one side of the space and those supporting the view of him as a vandal line up opposite them. One child at a time from each side takes it in turns to attempt to persuade children from the other side that their point of view is better. If anyone is persuaded, they can change sides. Continue until both sides have aired a good range of opinions and worked hard to persuade the other side to join them.

Curriculum links

English – persuasive and balanced argument writing, presenting a point of view





Information cards for the Visionary or Vandal debate

Set 1: Visionary

Lancelot Brown could imagine what a site would look like in a hundred years time.



Mr Brown made wet land useable by draining it into lakes. He also made sure land was useable by sheep and cattle to help the landowner have an income.



Lancelot Brown was very good at making friends with landowners and persuading them to let him change their land.



Mr Brown was able to draw maps and plans of what large areas of land would look like, before the days of aeroplanes, helicopters or drones for aerial photography.



Capability Brown wanted visitors to the gardens to be delighted and surprised by sudden views they came across.





Information cards for the Visionary or Vandal debate

Set 2: Visionary

Mr Brown was a genius at solving problems – he even invented a device to move large trees.



Lancelot Brown wanted to stop gardens looking formal and instead make them look like natural English countryside.



Mr Brown was a clever showman. He would turn up, look around and gather ideas but often made landowners wait to see what he would come up with.



Lancelot Brown was such a great landscape architect that he became the King's Royal Gardener.



Mr Brown provided a lot of work for manual labourers, including navvies who had created many canals across the country.





Information cards for the Visionary or Vandal debate

Set 3: Vandal

Lancelot Brown destroyed churches and buildings to give the landowners the 'right' view from their house.



Mr Brown got rid of beautiful gardens that had been carefully designed and looked after by experienced gardeners for years.



Lancelot Brown couldn't meet often with landowners because he was ill or travelling in another part of the country.



Mr Brown didn't spend much time with his family because he was always travelling around the country (travel was much slower in those days).



Lancelot Brown's landscapes took a very long time to build, so there was lots of mud and construction activity in beautiful rural places.





Information cards for the Visionary or Vandal debate

Set 4: Vandal

Mr Brown might have come up with the grand designs, but he rarely did any of the hard, physical work.



Lancelot Brown travelled a lot around the country to work with different landowners, but didn't have much time to check how well the work was done.



Mr Brown created new landscapes for landowners who had made money from the slave trade.



Lancelot Brown sometimes knocked down whole villages if they got in the way of the views he wanted to produce.



Mr Brown put up walls and ha-has around the estate, which stopped people from following their usual footpaths.



This resource refers to 'Mr Brown', who was 18th century landscape designer Capability Brown. It can just as appropriately apply to other designers, such as Richard Woods or Humphry Repton, so don't worry if the landscape you are looking at was not designed by Brown.