

**Looking Up – Guidance Notes for Teachers**

This document should be read in conjunction with the Competition Brief and accompanying checklists.

**Introduction**

As the name suggests the aim of the competition is encourage competition participants to ‘look up’ and see what is above them in the street and better understand their home city and its history.

The streets in the Dundee City Centre are lined with many old and interesting buildings. They vary in style and have their own stories to tell. They were built by their owners with an enormous sense of pride which is illustrated in the frontage details of their buildings. These embellishments could be representations of a perceived status, importance, wealth, a success or possibly even intimidation. Sometimes such décor provides clues to the history of the building, what or who it housed, or the activity it was built for. Sometimes the décor simply reflected the fashions of the day. Built for long past ambitions they still celebrate their own existence with storytelling details that are unseen and ignored today. Most people who pass by take little to no notice of the facades above the ground floor. They are seldom aware of the decorative wrought iron and stonework that form the skyline of our surroundings. But there is much to be seen, from weathervanes, to the many mysterious faces that watch us pass by, and mythical beasts that connect us to forgotten legends.

Much of the décor disguises ordinary functions such as a grotesque gargoyles in the shape of an angry beast to act as a waterspout to shed rainwater away from the walls to stop staining and seepage through the walls to the inside.

A few of the more elaborate buildings have pediments that contain dioramas referencing stories of the past or the aspirational activities of the building. You can also sometimes see purely functional items that are not part of the original décor, but might represent some change that a building has been through, i.e. items that have lost their functional role due to the development of technology or change in the building’s usage or business practice.

The aim of this competition is to encourage participants to observe, record, question, and research their observations. It may not be easy to find into definite answers for some of items they will see and therefore some detective work and imagination is encouraged to help develop an understanding of these forgotten ciphers that our ancestors have left all around us.

**The Competition**

The competition is restricted to schools in Dundee. The pupils who wish to take part can do as individuals or work as teams. The subject matter is sited in the city centre of Dundee and therefore requires a teacher to escort pupils to the town centre and walk around the prescribed area.

The role of this competition is to encourage observation, recording, research, interpretation, and presentation and therefore gain some understanding of our city centre heritage. The organisers selected an area confined to a few streets, offering many choices from which the participants could choose. Some of the buildings may be obvious choices, others not so. The amount of information available through research will also be variable, which means in some cases, the participants should analyse what they see using their detective skills and imagination by combining what they know about the building, its usage, and its commissioners.

The submission should cover five buildings and all their embellishments or particular items of interest; it may be an item that is repeated elsewhere on the building or on other buildings.

The submission should show the results from any research and display some understanding or interpretation as to what the item might have represented to the owners.

**The Route**

The selected route contains a variety of buildings to look at and find items of interest. The participants must choose only items of interest that can be viewed from the pavement on either side of the road and that the items are on the exterior of the selected building.

It is suggested that the participants walk the route on more than one occasion.

**Recording**

A camera with a good zoom lens will be useful to record them, though if not available, then a photograph of the whole building noting where the item is located, and a sketch of the item should be made. It should be remembered the item should be seen and recorded in context with the building.

**Research**

The participants should research the building, e.g. who built it, the function of the building, and if possible, find out what the item represented, what was its function if any, what was it made from and who designed and/or made it.

**Interpretation**

It maybe there is little information on the selected item then the student should interpret the work, can they guess what it might have represented, and why would the architect/designer/owner want to have the item on their building.

**Presentation**

The presentation should clear in writing, and visuals. Judges will mark mainly on observation, research, understanding and interpretation. However, the results will be exhibited in public so the visual presentation should be taken seriously.

**What are you likely to find?**

The Victorian era was a time of "free expression" in architecture, and many buildings were built in the city centre during this period. Expressive architecture often showcases newfound wealth and the connection to new and powerful industries and businesses. Architectural styles based on the Italian Renaissance were usually highly detailed, and others have references to Greek mythology. One building is embellished with motifs from India, so the question to the participants might be, why is this?

On the route, participants will be able to see many different types of details about old buildings. Most of these features are carved in stone. Some buildings have a great deal more decorative sculpture than others, but by far, the majority of these are carved in stone. Sadly, some that were carved in softer stone, usually a local stone, have been worn away by weather and pollution, but many carvings have survived well and are worth examining for the details they hold.

Corbels, often seen as stone supports for windowsills or pediments above windows, are a typical ornate detail usually decorated with leaf forms and scrollwork. Many of the designs take their references from nature in various ways. Such details give a facade a sense of importance and value, which would reflect on the owner or business. Why would a proprietor of a building invest so much value into stonework?

Other details to look out for are date stones and lettering. Some buildings have the initials of their business name or that of a particular person. These designs of two or three letters are usually quite intricate, with the letters intertwined and set within a shield form and accompanying flourishes of leaves and scrolls. Other lettering and signs could provide a business name or information regarding the building's original usage. This simple visual information could lead to more information about the building.

Some buildings have more human or animal-based sculptural forms. Participants will see human heads carved as corbels or keystones in the arches of entranceways. Such statements will have a reason for being included in the construction, and sometimes, this may relate directly to those who commissioned the building. Many of these figurative works have other artefacts that offer clues as to whom the figure might represent. These stone carvings act as metaphors and symbols that once represented the values of those responsible for the building. Can the participants interpret these values, or what legends and stories they might be referring to?

This competition is about encouraging everyone to look up, engage with what they see, and imagine the grand past of Dundee. Participants will be judged and marked on their observations and their ability to record, research, and interpret the visual stories found in our fine historic architecture with some understanding and even some imagination.

**Judging Presentations**

The organisers understand that information on the reasons why owners and architects included such artworks may be lost or not easily found with time that school students will have to spend. Therefore, this competition encourages the participants to use their observation skills and, using their detective skills and research where possible, to interpret any meaningful references found in the building façade, the sculptures and the accompanying decorative works. Where actual facts cannot be obtained, the use of imagination to develop interesting theories is fully encouraged.

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**Useful Online Sources**

Historic Environment Scotland, A site with information of listed buildings in Scotland *https://portal.historicenvironment.scot/*

Canmore contains more than 320,000 records and 1.3 million catalogue entries for archaeological sites, buildings, industry and maritime heritage across *Scotland.https://canmore.org.uk/*

A dictionary of architectural parts, with some illustrations -[*https://columnsdirect.com/pages/glossary*](https://protect.checkpoint.com/v2/r02/___https://columnsdirect.com/pages/glossary___.YzJlOmR1bmRlZWNjOmM6bzpkOGQxZWYxMWM0YTc2OThlMDUwM2Q2ZDEyZDFkNTEwNjo3OjQxYzA6MDI5YzdkNTUyZmM2ODJjN2JjMjY3MDE4Y2NiOWE4YjI5MmUwMWUxOGZmOWFlYjY3ODI2MzI0NzE1YzZlOTNiNjpwOlQ6Rg)

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