

Gypsy, Roma, Traveller History Month

What is Gypsy, Roma and Traveller History Month?

Gypsy, Roma, Traveller History Month, or GRTHM, celebrates the richness that Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities bring to the UK, through a variety of academic and artistic skills and achievements.

GRTHM has been celebrated in some schools since 2001 but was recognised by the Department for Education in 2007, and is now celebrated throughout the UK during June.

History of Gypsies, Roma and Travellers

Gypsies, Roma and Travellers have been part of British society for over 500 years. The first mention of a Gypsy in England was in 1514. In 1530, King Henry VIII banned Gypsies in England and Wales, and they were transported out of the country or killed.

Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities have had centuries of being persecuted and mistreated through ignorance and prejudice. Therefore, one of the aims of GRTHM is to improve to awareness of Travelling communities, develop respect and understanding about the traditional Gypsy, Roma and Traveller ways of life, and encourage positive links between all communities.



Many years ago, Gypsies, Roma and Travellers were groups of people who might have moved from place to place, however, now that is not the case. Most Gypsies, Roma and Travellers live in houses or permanent sites, but some choose to live in caravans and travel around. They have their own beliefs, histories, cultures and languages.

Interesting Information

Traditionally, many Gypsies and Travellers worked seasonally on farms. Different jobs would be done at different times of the year, for example, fruit picking, harvesting and planting. After the mechanisation of farming, Gypsies moved from the rural areas to cities and towns, to find work.

Many Gypsies and Travellers have adapted their skills to work in landscaping, gardening and motor trading. Gypsies and Travellers work in a variety of professions and careers, including the police force, as politicians, and as teachers.

Gypsies, Roma and Travellers are three separate ethnic groups with different histories, cultures and languages. All three groups traditionally lived nomadic lives, moving to different places. Now most Gypsies, Roma and Travellers live in houses. Some people choose to travel around and live in caravans and some people live in caravans that stay in one place for most of the year. It is estimated that around 70% of Gypsies and Travellers in the UK live in houses, with 20% living on sites and only 10% choosing to live a nomadic lifestyle.

Fascinating Fact

- Gypsy culture is built upon strict codes of cleanliness learnt over centuries of life on the road. There are strict guidelines, for example, on what objects can be washed in what bowls.
- Most Gypsies and Travellers refer to caravans as 'trailers' and mobile homes on sites are known as 'chalets'.

Problems Faced by Gypsies and Travellers

Gypsies and Travellers have been subjected to hundreds of years of prejudice and persecution. This is largely due to a lack of understanding about the traditional ways of life. There are many misconceptions about Gypsies, Roma and Travellers. GRTHM aims to change these misconceptions, and educate people about the traditions and histories of Gypsy and Traveller cultures.

- Many old campsites have been shut off so it is hard for anyone to camp there.
- Gypsies and Travellers face regular racism and prejudice. During the Holocaust in the Second World War, Gypsies and Travellers were killed in the mass genocide carried out by the Nazis.
- An unusually high mortality rate means the life expectancy of Traveller men is ten years less than the national average.

Contributions of Gypsies, Roma and Travellers

There are many examples of the huge contributions Gypsies, Roma and Travellers have made to the world. Django Reinhardt was born in 1910 and brought up in the Belgium Sinti Gypsy community and became the first and most significant European jazz musician of all time, playing the guitar, banjo and violin.

Flamenco dancing in Spain is of Gypsy origin, and the Romany Diamonds are a popular Polish music group. There have been numerous writers, artists and musicians who grew up in a variety of Gypsy and Traveller communities.



Questions

1. What is GRTHM a celebration of?
2. Summarise the main points in the paragraphs written in the yellow box.
3. Use a dictionary to match up these meanings and words.

a. persecuted:	having a preconceived idea of someone which is not necessarily based on fact
b. ignorance:	being ill-treated because of race or religion
c. prejudice:	having a lack of knowledge or information
4. What does it mean when it says that Gypsies and Travellers used to work “seasonally” on farms? Give an example.
5. Look at the sentence beginning “Gypsies and Travellers have adapted their skills...” What does the word ‘adapted’ suggest about the nature of Gypsies and Travellers when machines were used on farms?

6. *There are many misconceptions about Gypsies and Travellers. Give the meaning of the word 'misconceptions' in this sentence.*

7. One problem that Gypsies and Travellers have is that there are not enough authorised sites. Why is this a problem and what could be done about this?

8. Tick the correct facts about Django Reinhardt.

he was a banjo player

he was Belgian

he was a rumba musician

he played the guitar

9. The following sentences summarise the paragraphs in the text. Number them 1 to 5 in order.

Gypsies and Travellers changed how they worked.

A number of talented Gypsies and Travellers are famous.

GRTHM recognises the different contributions Gypsies and Travellers make.

Different factors make life difficult.

GRTHM wants to change the way people think about Gypsies and Travellers.

10. Identify the three main points that you think are most important from this text.