

Friends, Families and Travellers **EDUCATION GUIDE**

FAMOUS GYPSY, ROMA AND TRAVELLER PEOPLE Introduction for teachers





Eminent Gypsy, Roma and Traveller people from around the world

We are excited to introduce you to some eminent Gypsy, Roma, Traveller and Showmen people from across the world, which gives a snapshot of the diverse range of talents and expertise across these communities. There are countless other examples, but these stories are particularly inspiring.

From artists to entertainers and sports-people, people from Gypsy, Roma, Traveller and Showmen communities have made wonderful and important contributions to society over the centuries, and many have legacies which are still influential today. Despite a tide of prejudice and difficult circumstances that often weigh against Gypsy, Roma, Traveller, Showmen, and nomadic communities, many of the people below achieved great things in the face of adversity.

Terminolgy

Gypsy, Roma and Traveller

'Gypsy, Roma and Traveller' is often used to describe a diverse range of communities. While this has been helpful in gaining recognition for the issues facing nomadic communities, the groups that fall under this category are separate ethnicities and communities, with different histories and cultures. The acronym 'GRT' should be avoided. Below is a description of the varying groups:

Gypsy

'Gypsy' is often used in place of 'Romany Gypsy' and primarily refers to the ethnicity of Romani, often spelt Romany in the United Kingdom. Romani people left India around 1500 years ago. Fleeing persecution, Romani people settled in various countries before reaching the United Kingdom around 500 years ago. In the United Kingdom, Romany people often refer to themselves as Gypsies or Romany Gypsies. The word 'Gypsy' has been largely reclaimed by Romany people in the United Kingdom as a point of pride, but 'Gypsy' can be considered a racial slur and so it's best to refer to 'Romany Gypsy'.

Traveller

'Traveller' refers to a range of diverse groups, such as Irish Travellers, New Travellers, Showmen and sometimes Boaters. Irish Travellers are considered Ireland's indigenous people and form a distinct ethnic group. Irish Travellers have their own culture, language and dialects. 'New Traveller' is a community of nomadic people in the United Kingdom, born out of the free festival and peace convoy movement of the 1960s and continuing into present day. Many are now in third-generation New Traveller families.

Roma

'Roma' mainly refers to the overarching description of all sub-groups of Roma communities across the world. Whilst some Romani people continued onto the United Kingdom and formed present-day Romany Gypsy communities, many Romani who stayed in mainland Europe are considered 'European Roma' and form part of local communities across the continent. Roma people often have shared forms of culture, language and heritage, but many European Roma have also adopted cultural elements from the places they have lived and continue to live.

Sinti

'Sinti' people form a sub-group of Romani ethnicity, with their own traditions and customs. Sinti communities experienced extreme marginalisation in pre-WW2 Europe, and this was further ramped up during the Nazi Regime. Sinti people suffered alongside Roma and Jewish people, and entire Sinti communities were wiped out during WW2.





Musicians/ actors/ entertainers

Panna Czinka, Hungarian Roma 1711-1772



Panna Czinka was a famous Hungarian Roma violinist, composer, and folk artist. She was born around 1711, and her father was also an eminent musician who played at the court of Francis II. Legend claims she began playing violin as early as 9, and amazed both family and neighbours with her talent. Panna married a Roma blacksmith-musician, and together they had five children.

Panna founded her own Gypsy musical group with her husband and brothers-in-law who played a variety of instruments. She also designed a special military-style costume for the group to wear, which is often depicted in paintings of her. She became very sought after and played in a number of noble houses including the Court of Empress Mara Teresa shortly before her death in 1772.

http://rombase.uni-graz.at/cgi-bin/art.cgi?src=data/pers/cinka.en.xml

Django Reinhardt, Belgian Roma 1910-1953



Django Reinhardt is often described as one of the greatest jazz guitarists of all time. He was born in 1910 in Belgium and grew up as part of a family of Romani Gypsies. When he was a boy of 12, he received a banjo-guitar as a gift, and by the age of 15 he was making a living from busking in cafes. At the young age of 18 he nearly died when he knocked over a candle in his caravan, which ignited flammable material his wife used to make artificial flowers with.

He was badly burned and nearly lost a leg, but two of his fingers were so damaged that doctors believed he would never play guitar again. Django altered his craft and taught himself to play using only his fore and middle fingers. After this, he went on to become the most accomplished jazz guitarist to come out of Europe.

During the Second World War, Django was to face further difficulties, as the Nazis wanted to eliminate the Roma and Sinti population. Living in Paris at the time, Django narrowly escaped persecution. Django's influence can be heard throughout music to this day; a pastiche of Django Rein-hardt's music sound-tracked the 2011 Woody Allen film 'Midnight in Paris'.





John Roberts, Welsh Gypsy 1816-1894



John Roberts was a Romani Gypsy and harpist born in 1816. As a boy, he travelled around Wales with his family sleeping in barns or tents and carrying their possessions on horses and donkeys. They would often play for the local countryside residents who would join in with singing and dancing.

John grew to become famed as the country's leading performer on the Welsh triple harp, an instrument popular with Welsh musicians in the 17th and 18th centuries. He fathered 9 children, which included two sets of twins, who nearly all grew up to be musicians who performed with their father. The high point of John Roberts' career came when he and his sons were invited to play for Queen Victoria during her visit to Palé Hall near Llandderfel, Merioneth.

http://www.valleystream.co.uk/romany-roberts.htm

Felix and Johnny Doran, *Irish Travellers* 1928-1972 and 1907-1950



Felix and Johnny Doran were Irish Traveller brothers known for their traditional music from the early 1920s through to the 1970s. They were both uilleann pipe players and great-grandsons of the great 19th Century Wexford piper John Cash. Both brothers were also horse dealers and played all over Ireland for many years. Johnny died tragically in an accident at the age of 42. Felix went on to record the album 'The Last of the Travelling Pipers' which was released in 1976 - four years after his death.

http://www.bbc.co.uk/leicester/entertainment/music/world_on_your_street/launch_artists/mikey_doran_ullian_pipe.shtml

https://projects.handsupfortrad.scot/hall-of-fame/jeannie-robertson-mbe/





Jeanie Robertson, Scottish Gypsy-Traveller 1908-1975



Jeannie Robertson was a folk singer born into a Scottish Gypsy Traveller family with a long musical tradition. Her father was a piper, and her mother was a singer with a great repertoire of songs and stories. She belonged to an oral tradition. As with so many Gypsies, Roma and Travellers, music was a way of retelling Traveller histories and important life lessons. In 1968, Jeannie was appointed as a Member of the British Empire (MBE) for her contribution to folk music, an event made all the more significant since she was the first folksinger and the first Traveller to receive this honour. Her most celebrated song is "I'm a Man You Don't Meet Every Day" which has been recorded by many well-known artists including The Pogues and The Dubliners.

Margaret Barry, Irish Traveller 1917-1989



Margaret Barry, known as 'Queen of the Gypsies or Tinkers', was an Irish Traveller and folk singer born in Cork in 1917, and was the granddaughter of one of Ireland's most celebrated uillean pipers, Robert Thomson. She left home at 16 with nothing but a bicycle and a banjo on her back, making a living from busking. It was during this time, busking on a street corner, that she was discovered. She soon rose to fame by producing several albums such as 'Songs of an Irish Tinker' and headlining at both the Royal Albert Hall and the Carnegie Hall in New York. Bob Dylan said she was his favourite singer, and thanks to the young David Attenborough, she had her TV debut. She was known for being outspoken and had a saying about herself: 'a mouth full of a million words.'

https://www.kingsplace.co.uk/whats-on/folk/she-moved-through-the-fair-legend-of-margaret-barry/





Charlie Chaplin, English Gypsy 1889 –1977



Sir Charles Spencer Chaplin KBE was an English comic actor, filmmaker, and composer who rose to fame in the era of silent films. He became a worldwide icon through his screen persona 'The Tramp', and is considered one of the most important figures in the history of film. Chaplin's Romani ancestry only came to light after his death, when his daughter found a letter that had been locked away in her father's bedside cabinet.

The letter was addressed to her father from an elderly gentleman by the name of Jack Hill who claimed that Charlie Chaplin had been born in a Gypsy caravan on The Black Patch in Smethwick, near Birmingham. It also went on to explain how Chaplin's grandfather belonged to a circus which moved around, with Chaplin's mother eventually settling in London, which is where Chaplin grew up. In 2015, Chaplin's son unveiled a memorial to the Gypsy community of Smethwick in honour of his father's Romany roots.

https://www.gnews.com/archive/business-news/celebrity/was-charlie-chaplin-a-romany-gypsy/

Ellen Chapman, Romani and Showman 1831-1899



Also known as Madam de Vere (Lady of the Lions), Ellen Chapman was the eldest daughter of Harry Chapman, an English Romani man and peepshow owner. She was brought up by the Manders family, who worked with George Wombwell who ran a travelling circus. She was said to be the first woman to put her head in a lion's mouth.

When she was interviewed about her bravery, she said that it was simply routine, and she performed each show with no thought for any danger. She had no education and was illiterate. In 1847, Queen Victoria commended the bravery of the 'British Lion Queen' who appeared with lions, leopards and tigers. A personal audience was arranged with the Queen, where Ellen was given a gold watch and chain. In 1850, she married George Sanger, a Showman and circus proprietor who founded the Showmen's Guild. Her daughter, Laurina, performed on horseback in the circus. She went on to marry Alexander Coleman who was said to be Queen Victoria's favourite clown.





Artists

Anthonio Solario, Italian Roma 1382-1455



Anthonio Solario was a Romani Renaissance painter, likely born in Venice in 1502, who was sometimes known by the nickname Lo Zingaro ("The Gypsy"). In Naples, he was famous for his 20 large frescoes illustrating the Life of St. Benedict. It was also believed he worked in England for a time, with three of his paintings held at the National Gallery and one of which on display, The Virgin and the child with Saint John.

Michaela Flores Amaya, Spanish Roma 1938-Unknown



Michaela Flores Amaya was a Spanish Flamenco dancer and painter of what is often described as naif art ('naïve' art made by artists with no formal training). Her parents were Andalusian Romani who immigrated to France during the Spanish Civil War. She was born in Marseille in 1938, but the exact date of her birth remains unknown. She started dancing at six years old and became known as 'The Barefoot Dancer' as a result of her style of Flamenco. Salvidor Dali even asked her to make art by dancing on a blank canvas. She was later discovered as an artist, and Picasso described her as 'a shining Naif'. She has also acted in movies, and married the cinema director José Luis Gonzalvo.

https://www.romarchive.eu/en/literature/literature-countries-and-regions/romani-literature-germany/





Helios Rodriguez, Spanish Roma 1905-1956



Helios Rodriguez was a painter, poet, visual artist and political activist, but he is renowned for his graphics work in the first half of 20th century. He was born in Seville in 1905 into a poor Romani family. Helios was always very proud of his Romani heritage, advocating for the rights of Roma in Spain. He was sometimes known as 'the artist of the red tie' because of his communist and anarchist connections. Because of these convictions, he was persecuted and pursued by the police during the dictatorship of Primo de Rivera. He was eventually arrested and imprisoned several times, but it was during his final six year spell in prison that he spent alone in his cell where he painted some frescos to honour the prisoners and the Virgin Mary, the patron saint of prisoners and the city of Barcelona. This now-destroyed cell was transformed into a sacred place and was named Capilla Gitana (The Gypsy Chapel) because of the Roma features of the subjects.





Writers

Ceija Stoyka, Austrian Sinti 1933-2013



Austrian-Romani writer, painter, activist, and musician.

Ceija was born into a family of horse traders who lived a nomadic life travelling around Austria. In 1943, Ceija was deported to Auschwitz with 200 members of her extended family – her father had previously been murdered by the Nazi regime in 1941. When her family arrived in Auschwitz, Ceija's mother lied to the SS, telling them that Ceija was 16 but small for her age (when she was actually 10 years old). This meant that she was considered old enough to work in the forced labour section of the camp, saving her life. In 1945, Ceija, her mother and four siblings were liberated from Bergen-Belsen, with the rest of the extended family having died in the camp. They returned to Austria where Ceija and her family made a living selling carpets. Later, Ceija became a writer and a spokesperson for recognition of the Romani Genocide. At the age of 56 she began to paint, and the trauma of her experience during the Holocaust was reflected in her work. She died in 2013.

"I'm afraid that Europe is forgetting its past and that Auschwitz is only sleeping. Anti-Gypsy threats, policies and actions worry me greatly and make me very sad."

Katarina Taikon, Swedish Roma 1932-1995



Katarina Taikon-Langhammer was a Swedish Romani activist, leader in the civil rights movement, writer and actor, from the Kalderash community.

During Katarina's childhood, Romani people still lived in camps in Sweden and were forced to move often, which made it hard for the children to get any education. Taikon didn't learn how to read and write until she was in her teens.

Katarina dedicated her life to improving conditions for Romani people in Sweden and throughout the world. Through her tireless work, Romani people were granted the same right to housing and education as all other Swedes. In 1953, the 1914 ban on Romani immigration ended. This led to other Romani people seeking refuge in Sweden, but even there they faced an enormous amount of prejudice from the Swedish authorities. Katarina decided she needed to tackle this another way. She felt that education was the only way to combat racism against her people, and from this belief she began writing her popular series of children's books about her own childhood, 'Katitzi'.

Katarina died of brain damage after falling into a 13-year coma, following a cardiac arrest. She has been called the Martin Luther King of Sweden.

https://www.taikon.se/english





Scientists/Mathematicians

Natalya and Lyubov Pankova, Russian Roma 1924/1925-1991





Lyubov Pankova was a Russian Romani and a biologist, while her sister Natalya Pankova was a chemist. They were the daughters of Nikolay Alexandrovich Pankov (who among other things translated Alexander Pushkin's poem 'The Gypsies' into Romanes). Their studies were interrupted by the Second World War, when they went to work in a weapons factory. After the war they resumed their studies and both graduated. Natalya Pankova developed around 30 prospective designs for cyanide dyes (for which she was granted an inventor's certificate), as well as being a talented singer and watercolour artist. Lyubov Pankova earned a PhD in human biology, going on to work in the field of clinical physiology - she had a particular interest in the physiological characteristics of children and teenagers. In addition, she is the author and co-author of many textbooks dealing with animal and human physiology, and of more than 50 scientific papers. She has also authored a memoir that is yet to be published.

Doctor Schack August Steenberg Krogh, Danish Roma 1874-1949



Doctor Schack August Steenberg Krogh was a Danish professor at the Department of Zoo Physiology at the University of Copenhagen from 1916 to 1945. His mother was from a Romani background. Schack contributed a number of fundamental discoveries within several fields of physiology and is famous for developing the 'Krogh Principle'. Many biologists appeal to the so-called Krogh principle when justifying their choice of experimental organisms. The principle states that "for a large number of problems there will be some animal of choice, or a few such animals, on which it can be most conveniently studied".

https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s40656-018-0231-0





Sofia Kovalevskaya, Russian-Roma heritage 1850-1891



Sofia Kovalevskaya was a Russian-born mathematician who made significant contributions to the theory of differential equations. She was a pioneer for women in mathematics around the world and the first woman to obtain a doctorate in this field. She was from a Russian noble family and her grandmother was Romani.



FRIENDS, FAMILIES & TRAVELLERS

Sportspeople

Rabbi Howell – footballer, English Gypsy 1867-1937



Rabbi Howell was born in 1867 in a Gypsy camp in Dore, and in 1895 made history as the first Romany footballer to play for England. Throughout his career, Howell was known in the newspapers as 'The Gypsy'. Howell's first cap came in 1895, scoring in a 9-0 victory over Ireland, but he had to wait until 1899 to claim his second. Whether it was to do with his background or a class matter that he was only asked to play two games, we shall never know. In 1903 he broke his leg and was no longer able to play. Tragically, 119 years later this pioneering player still lies buried in an unmarked grave.

https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-south-yorkshire-27490919

Johann Trollmann- boxer, German Sinti 1907-1944



Johann 'Rukeli' Trollmann was born in 1907 near Hannover, Germany, and was a popular German Sinti boxer. He started boxing when he was eight years old and became famous in the late 1920s. By 1933 he fought for the German light-heavyweight title. Despite winning 29 out of 52 fights, he was still discriminated against and referred to by the right-wing media as 'The Gypsy in the ring'. As part of the ethnic cleansing enforced by the Nazis against the Roma and Sinti, he was sterilised in 1938. Trollman had to divorce his non-Sinti wife to protect her and his child. In 1942, he was sent to Neuengamme concentration camp where he was tortured. He was soon recognised as the accomplished boxer and the Nazis exploited this by forcing him to train troops during the night. He was murdered in a revenge attack before the war ended at Wittemberge camp in 1944.

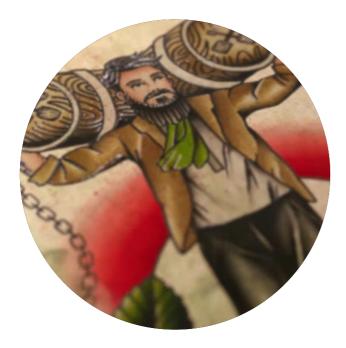
https://www.hmd.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2015/09/Johann-Trollmann-life-story.p



FRIENDS, FAMILIES & TRAVELLERS

Pioneers

James Squires, English Gypsy 1754-1822



James Squires was born in Kingston upon Thames and both his parents were Romany. James was convicted of theft in 1785, and in 1788 was transported on 'The First Fleet' to Australia. He went on to found the first ever commercial brewery in Australia using hops and barley. James Squire brewery remains a globally recognised brand to this day. He also ran a farm, a tavern, a butchers and a credit union, as well as becoming a town constable. Because of his successful ventures, he became a generous philanthropist and when he died in 1822, more people attended his funeral than anyone else's at the time in Australia, as testament to his standing and respect in the community.

Resources

https://www.romaniherstory.com/

https://www.vidaweb.org/twenty-gypsy-women-you-should-be-reading/

http://www.imninalu.net/famousGypsies.htm

https://www.romarchive.eu/en/literature/literature-countries-and-regions/romani-literature-germany/



FRIENDS, FAMILIES & TRAVELLERS

Contact Details:

Address

Friends, Families and Travellers
Community Base
113 Queens Road
Brighton
BN1 3XG

Telephone 01273 234 777

Email fft@gypsy-traveller.org

Like us on Facebook /FriendsFamiliesandTravellers

Follow us on Instagram
@FriendsFamiliesandTravellers

Follow us on Twitter @GypsyTravellers

View us on Youtube/FriendsFamiliesandTravellers

gypsy-traveller.org