

Young European Heritage Makers 2026-2027

A Guide for Teachers and Heritage in Schools Specialists

European Heritage Days
Laethanta Oidhreachta na hEorpa

An Chomhairle Oidhreachta
The Heritage Council

What is Young European Heritage Makers?

Young European Heritage Makers (YEHM) is a Europe-wide initiative within the European Heritage Days programme, a joint programme of the Council of Europe and the European Union. It gives children and young people the opportunity to explore, reflect on and express what heritage means to them through creative, child-led activities.

The initiative encourages participants to:

- Discover heritage in their local area
- Explore connections between local and European heritage
- Share their own stories, ideas and perspectives
- Develop creativity, critical thinking and curiosity
- Become active participants in safeguarding heritage for future generations

Who Can Participate?

The competition is open to children and young people under 18 years of age in two categories:

Ages 6-11

- No restriction on group size.
- Entries can include drawings, paintings or photographs.
- Each submission must include a short written story or explanation (maximum 800 words) written by the children.
- Videos are not accepted in this category.

Ages 11-17

- Groups must consist of 2-4 participants to be eligible for European-level evaluation.
- Entries can include drawings, paintings, photographs or a video (maximum 3 minutes).
- All entries must include a written description (maximum 800 words) created by the young people.



What Counts as Heritage?

Children and young people can explore many different forms of heritage, including:

Natural Heritage

- Biodiversity
- Native species
- Rivers, lakes and coastlines
- Woodlands and landscapes

Built Heritage

- Historic buildings
- Monuments
- Castles
- Bridges and townscapes

Cultural Heritage

- Music
- Dance
- Traditions
- Language and folklore

Community Heritage

- Family stories
- Migration histories
- Festivals
- Local memories and customs

Participants are encouraged to ask:

- *What does heritage mean to me?*
- *What is special about my place?*
- *What European story can I find in the heritage around me?*



The Role of Teachers and Heritage in Schools Specialists

The YEHM initiative places a strong emphasis on authentic child participation.

Adults should support and enable children to investigate heritage but should not direct the creative process. Facilitators play a supporting, not leading, role.

Facilitators should:

- ✔ Encourage curiosity and discussion
- ✔ Help organise activities
- ✔ Provide safe access to heritage sites and resources
- ✔ Support uploading entries
- ✔ Create opportunities for children to explore heritage independently

Facilitators should not:

- ✘ Choose the topic for participants
- ✘ Write or edit children's text
- ✘ Direct the creative interpretation
- ✘ Submit projects that reflect adult perspectives rather than children's voices

Projects that appear to be adult-authored or adult-directed may be disqualified

What Makes a Strong Entry?

Entries are assessed on:

- Originality
- Creativity
- The participant's understanding of heritage
- Personal reflection and interpretation
- Connections between local and European heritage

Judges consider how well entries respond to questions such as:

- What does heritage mean to you?
- What do you know about European heritage?
- What European story can you find in the heritage around you?
- What is the most interesting part of your local heritage?

Irish Case Studies

Case Study 1:
Belmont National School, County Galway

Ireland's Selected Entry for Young European Heritage Makers 2025



Belmont National School explored the story of an ancient ash tree standing on a historic hillfort in County Galway. A group of pupils created and performed an original poem imagining the ash tree as a witness to generations of local life and community history. Their project combined poetry, biodiversity, local history and landscape heritage.

Why It Worked

- Started with a local place familiar to the children
- Connected biodiversity with history and folklore
- Reflected children's own ideas and creativity
- Used poetry and performance to tell a heritage story
- Linked local heritage to broader cultural themes

Key Message: Sometimes the most powerful heritage stories are found right outside the school gate.

Case Study 2:
Fedamore Community National School, County Limerick

Ireland's Selected Entry for Young European Heritage Makers 2024



Fedamore Community National School represented Ireland with a short film called The Irish Elk, exploring the story of this prehistoric animal and its connection to the local area during the Pleistocene era. The project was developed through the Heritage in Schools Scheme with support from Fiona Linnane, Heritage in Schools expert and composer. Pupils led the visual storytelling, while also engaging in sound recording, music composition, shadow puppetry, performance and video production.

Why It Worked

- Explored local natural heritage
- Combined science, history and creativity
- Encouraged pupil ownership of the project
- Used multiple creative methods including film and music
- Demonstrated successful collaboration with a Heritage in Schools specialist

Key Message: Heritage projects can connect many curriculum areas while allowing young people to tell their own stories.

Project Ideas

- Interview community members about local traditions.
- Investigate a local landmark, monument or historic building.
- Explore a native species or local biodiversity story.
- Document a traditional skill or craft.
- Research place names and their meanings.
- Create art inspired by local folklore or mythology.
- Explore family or community migration stories.
- Investigate how a local heritage story connects to Europe.

Awards and Recognition

Ages 6-11

One entry from each participating country may be selected nationally and will receive:

- A special European Heritage Days certificate
- An European Heritage Days goodie bag

Ages 11-17

One national entry may be submitted for European evaluation. Five winning groups from across Europe will be selected and invited to Strasbourg in May 2027 for a cultural visit that includes visits to European institutions.

Key Dates

Date	Activity
1 September 2026	Competition opens
September-December 2026	Heritage activities and submissions
15 December 2026	Submission deadline
February 2027	European winners announced
May 2027	Strasbourg visit and celebration for European winners

Heritage in Schools

The Heritage in Schools Scheme offers schools access to specialists in areas such as archaeology, biodiversity, folklore, built heritage, local history, traditional skills and natural heritage.

Every Child Has a Heritage Story to Tell

Young European Heritage Makers offers children and young people a chance to discover heritage, connect with their communities, explore Europe's shared cultural heritage and share their own unique perspectives through creativity, curiosity and imagination.

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