LANDSCAPES AND BED SHEETS

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Here, Jon shares an activity that explores human and physical landscape processes, which was inspired by a workshop at the 2017 Geographical Association Annual Conference.

This year's GA Annual Conference hosted a fabulously eclectic assortment of workshops, lectures and networking opportunities, abundant in teaching titbits and treasures: each one shining and sparkling in the Surrey sunshine. Primary teachers habitually model and support pupils with their learning by coaching them to share and adapt or 'magpie' ideas, while simultaneously bestowing a sense of academic honesty. It was no wonder then that throughout the two days teachers could be observed swooping back and forth, wide-eyed and frenzied like magpies in a jeweller's shop unable to resist a bit of bling!

One such jewel was delivered during the truly inspiring 'Geo-gnome' session, run by Sharon Witt and Helen Clarke, where reference was made to the use of a bed sheet as part of a scientific study of a landscape (Kibble, 2008). You can read more about the Geo-gnomes in the Spring 2018 issue of *Primary Geography*!

Thinking geographically, I immediately began to wonder how many human and physical processes could be explored using a bed sheet and a few everyday items found in a primary school, together with another gem 'magpied' from Sharon and Helen: a laminated cardboard finger puppet.

The starting point is simple: divide the class into four groups and give each group a quarter of a king-sized bed sheet. Ask them to spread it over their table, complete with its clutter, to create a three-dimensional landscape. Next, ask them to add items using equipment provided, such as blue/black/yellow wool, lolly sticks, conical water cups, cotton wool, marbles, blue/green/brown felt and unifix cubes/half cubes, to the landscape one at a time, discussing each positioning collaboratively (Figure 1). Pupils can do this in any order, but placing the rivers and natural features on first will help to determine where they can fit the human features in. You could follow the suggestions shown in the Figure 1. Once everything is in place, the groups can adjust the features as the pupils reflect on any connections that become apparent when they look at the bigger picture.

Their 3D landscape is now complete and the groups can now enjoy a wealth of possible themes and activities. Suggestions are as follows.

- Explore the landscape using a compass and a puppet (such as Barnaby Bear). As a route maker, Barnaby can direct his audience through the challenges, sights, sounds and highlights of a journey through the landscape.
- Create a 2D map of the landscape, with key, compass rose and scale bar.
- Proposed development: this could be a theme park, High Speed Rail Link or something controversial (e.g. a quarry, industrial estate or fracking site).
- Develop and write a narrative based on a journey through the landscape.
- Change the underlying physical landscape to one that is flatter, one that is more rugged, or one with a dominant feature (e.g. a lake, canyon or wide river).
- Ask pupils what other features they could add to their landscape. What would they use to represent these?
- Link the 'settlement islands' around the classroom using junk model bridges.
- Write/speak a set of instructions to enable Barnaby Bear to navigate from one point to another.
- Expand on the reasoning for site selection and subsequent growth.
- Where would Barnaby Bear live and why? Where would you live and why? What about an elderly person, a disabled person, a farmer, a teacher…?
- Redesign the landscape by rearranging the 'clutter' under the sheet. How would they redesign the landscape? What would they place on it?
- Where is it likely to be warmer/colder/windier/more sheltered in their landscape? What would this mean in terms of the 'settlement' of people, or the habitats of animals and plants?
- Barnaby is going on a camping trip – where in their landscape should he pitch his tent each night and why? The focus could include weather, flooding, slope angle, access to food and water or other points of general safety.
- Use a dust sheet over a table, bench or climbing frame outside and undertake similar activities, but at a much larger scale.
- Ask pupils to recreate a section of a local OS map using the sheet and whatever can be found around the classroom.
- Pupils pose questions to others in their group, asking, for example:
  - Where would you be most likely to find a… cliff/valley/deep (fertile) soil/beach/hotel/sheep/eagle?
  - Where would you feel most… comfortable/happiest/worried/scared/excited?
  - Where would you most like to… visit/have a picnic/explore with an adult/explore alone/stay the night/fly over as an eagle?

A magpie constantly returns home, carefully integrating into the very fibre of the nest the trinkets and precious artefacts collected on its travels. In the same way it is imperative that, as teachers, we constantly return 'home' to the National Curriculum; thereby ensuring that the precious activities and ideas that we have collected are maintaining the necessary coverage and progression in geography.

In a broad sense the open-ended, creative and hands-on activities above are aimed at meeting the defining statements within the primary geography orders, to 'inspire in pupils a curiosity and fascination about the world and its people that will remain with them for the rest of their lives' (DfE, 2013). These words are echoed in the 2017 EYFS framework: 'igniting children's curiosity and enthusiasm for learning' (DfE, 2017). On a more exacting level, they aim to meet individual statements as exemplified in Figure 2.

Although this article focuses on EYFS and KS1 it takes only a little imagination to adapt some of the activities for KS2.

The best ideas are often the simplest. Like those outlined here, ideas may start as a single kernel, but quickly and organically sprout in a multitude of directions and manifestations. The GA Annual Conference is a rich source of precious kernels just waiting to pique the curiosity and stimulate the imagination of a whole new audience and fruit widely.

References

DfE (2017) *Statutory Framework for the Early Years Foundation Stage*. London: DfE.

DfE (2013) *The National Curriculum in England: Framework document*. London: DfE.

Kibble, B. (2008) 'Shadows and stone circles: a storyline', *Primary Science*, 103, pp. 33–5.

Rivers

Instruct each group to use the marbles and blue wool to plot the route of three or four rivers across their landscape.

Tip: The marbles will, like water, follow the path of least resistance under the force of gravity.

Railway tracks

When they place the yellow wool railway tracks on, ask the pupils to discuss their experiences. You could also ask specific questions, such as: do trains generally go up hills?

Wind turbines/mills

Groups place their wind powered features (lolly sticks and cone cups) on the landscape.

Discussion tip: focus on localised weather and climate. Traditional windmills needed to be accessible for the transport of corn/flour to the mill.

Settlements

Using the Unifix cubes/half cubes, groups can create an array of villages, towns and cities. Pupils should consider the number of each type of settlement and how to represent the differences on their landscape (e.g. a city could be denoted by a cathedral).

Discussion tip: what infrastructure do settlements need? Was this different in the past?

Roads

Instruct each group to use the black wool to lay down roads across the landscape and to include at least one crossroads.

Discussion tip: what will influence the positioning of the roads (e.g. gradient, rivers, settlement location)? What engineering might be used to help access to some areas of their landscape (e.g. bridges and tunnels)?

Livestock

There is likelihood that the placements of cotton wool livestock or snow would be similar. This opens up the discussion to looking at the links between higher, harsher climatic zones and livestock farming.

Flood plain/lakes/marsh/woodlands

Use pieces of green, brown and blue felt to demonstrate various land uses. This can stimulate a range of discussions on where specific land use is most likely to occur naturally.

Figure 1: Creating the landscape. Photos © Jon Cannell, used with thanks to the staff of Galton Valley Primary School, Birmingham.

Phase	Activity	Curriculum coverage
EYFS	Explore the landscape using Barnaby Bear puppet. Barnaby then directs his audience through the challenges, sights, sounds and highlights of his journey.	**Understanding the world** Pupils know about similarities and differences in relation to places, objects, materials and living things. They talk about the features of their own immediate environment and how environments might vary from one another. They make observations of animals and plants and explain why some things occur, and talk about changes. **Personal, social and emotional development** Making relationships: pupils play co-operatively, taking turns with others. They take account of one another's ideas about how to organise their activity. They show sensitivity to others' needs and feelings, and form positive relationships with adults and other children. **Expressive arts and design** Being imaginative: They represent their own ideas, thoughts and feelings through design and technology, art, role-play and stories.
KS1	Creating and discussing the 3D map and the features it holds.	**Human and physical geography** Use basic geographical vocabulary to refer to: • key physical features, including: beach, cliff, coast, forest, hill, mountain, sea, ocean, river, soil, valley, vegetation, season and weather • key human features, including: city, town, village, factory, farm, house, office, port, harbour and shop **Geographical skills and fieldwork** Use aerial photographs and plan perspectives to recognise landmarks and basic human and physical features; devise a simple map; and use and construct basic symbols in a key

Figure 2: Exemplification of ensuring the activities undertaken maintain the exacting level of National Curriculum coverage and progression. Source: DfE, 2013; 2017.

WEB RESOURCES

Book for the 2018 GA Conference:
www.geography.org.uk/conference

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