

GEOGRAPHICAL JOURNEYS THROUGH TIMELESS TALES

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In this article Joy, Dan and Lorna look at using the outdoors to develop an understanding of both physical and imaginary journeys.

Outdoor learning is a powerful pedagogical tool that can support pupils' understanding of place, their sense of belonging and storytelling. Within a broad and balanced curriculum, the outdoors can be used to help support different subjects, including geography. Through a cross-curricular approach – that incorporates both English and design technology – pupils can improve their geographical skills by engaging with the outdoors and making stories come to life. Using a storybook as a hook, we provide examples of how fictional contexts can be used to explore journeys and develop a sense of place with young pupils.

There are compelling arguments for taking pupils outdoors: they can have direct contact with the natural world and it nurtures their creativity while supporting young learners to respect and understand the environment (CLOTCH, 2006). Work outdoors also develops their geographical skills by enabling pupils to explore the physical and human features of their school grounds, create maps, and observe similarities and differences. Stories form the heart of this work; many include both a physical journey as well as an emotional, personal journey for the characters involved. Pupils that use the outdoors to construct, re-tell and extend these stories will develop a better understanding of their environment and its geography. We offer two examples of how to incorporate these elements to create meaningful learning experiences.

Let the 'Wild rumpus' begin!

Maurice Sendak's (1963) *Where the Wild Things Are*, a timeless tale of Max who journeys to a far-away land, is a story that never ceases to ignite the curiosity and imagination of pupils (despite being half a century old). This delightful, yet surreal, tale has the potential to offer rich cross-curricular opportunities for purposeful learning within its dreamlike, fictional backdrop. Geography and outdoor learning run like threads throughout the story with the obvious link of journeying to a distant and undiscovered land. In addition, subjects such as design and technology (DT), art and music can

complement the geographical focus and (of course) drive the core subject of English in engaging and inspiring little learners. The key stage 1 geography programme of study (DfE, 2013) underpins the ideas that follow, but these can be adapted to suit the Early Years Foundation Stage (DfE, 2017) and the early learning goal, 'Understanding the World'.

The journey that Max makes in his boat across the sea to a new land links with the vocabulary of physical and human geography. The creation of land yachts in DT is a wonderful hook. Pupils can use their yachts to tell the story of the voyage in a multi-modal way, using geographical language and narrative structure to describe the terrain and set the scene. Their land yachts could be adapted to incorporate a map for the sail with a route marked out (Figure 1). And a great deal of fun can be had in having a Wild Thing land yacht race!

Once on the island the 'Wild rumpus' would commence with a "We're going on a Wild Hunt" song adapted and crafted by the pupils to incorporate geographical vocabulary and noisy 'junk' musical

instruments. The outdoor environment is the ideal space for further navigation using maps with simple grid references and compass points. Pupils can create a map, then challenge each other to follow directions/find their way using the symbols, routes and key.

Max's role as 'King of the Wild Things' (Sendak, 1963) presents the ideal opportunity to consider global and environmental issues including sustainability, particularly with the posse of 'Wild Things' making a mess (Figure 2)! A 'Wild Rumpus' would not be complete without a shelter – built in the outdoor or woodland area. The pupils can consider 'micro-climates', making decisions about the best place to build their structure. Seasonal weather patterns and climate could be explored, weather vanes and rain gauges designed and perhaps even a weather report transmitted via 'Wild Thing' Television.

There are endless possibilities for driving geography, English, DT and many other subjects using this fabulous story, and its potential is not limited to young pupils.



Figure 1: Setting sail with a map to guide us on our travels. Photo © Lorna Williams.



Figure 2: Beware the posse of Wild Things! Photo © Lorna Williams.

Spike Jonze's (2009) film *Where the Wild Things Are* offers a deeper, more thought-provoking plotline for use with older pupils and the potential to explore geographical concepts while forging strong cross-curricular links.

A rambling route with Rosie

The comment 'Oh, is that geography?' is sometimes heard from teachers who are not always clear exactly what constitutes geography in the curriculum. This may be due to such teachers basing their understanding of Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) Curriculum/National Curriculum (NC) geography on their experiences at secondary school. While the NC geography (DfE, 2013) may appear content driven, it does offer flexibility with pupils developing their geographical knowledge, skills and understanding through the way the subject is delivered rather than just from the planning (Geographical Association, 2019). A teacher's pedagogical approach to the curriculum can bring geography alive and make it a fun subject to engage with. Here, we offer a creative way to use the story of *Rosie's Walk* (Hutchins, 1968) as a hook into the teaching of geography and other curriculum subjects. This approach can apply to the EYFS or key stage 1 National Curriculum.

Rosie's Walk tells the story of a hen who walks around a farmyard, unknowingly being followed by a fox. As Rosie the hen happily passes different features, the fox encounters obstacles resulting in accidents. Rosie eventually returns home unaware that the fox has

been following her, but the fox ends up worse the wear after his adventures.

A fun way to start is to share this story with the whole class. Pupils can be encouraged to explore emotions and feelings and use higher order thinking. Following discussion, pupils can create a map of Rosie's route that includes all of the features from the story. Pupils are given the names of specific features (such as 'beehive', 'pond', 'fence', 'haystack', 'mill' and 'yard') and asked to match the words to features on their maps. What other features can they add to the map?

Pupils can explore where Rosie travelled – teachers can reinforce the idea that all routes (which can be circular or linear) have a start and an end. Encourage pupils to use positional language to describe how Rosie goes 'through', 'over' and 'under' different features on the map.

Developing a sense of place helps pupils to identify physical and human features that characterise that place. Use the opportunity to support pupils' imagination further by suggesting other features they may like to add to their farm. Creating maps gives opportunity for pupils to develop meaningful symbols, which can lead to their creating a bespoke key. It also supports pupils' sense of direction by identifying where on a map they would find certain features using compass points.

Using *Rosie's Walk* in DT can offer an authentic and meaningful learning experience for pupils. They can design and create the farmyard environment either as a small world in the classroom or as a larger scale model outdoors, incorporating the physical and human features of the farmyard. Using the model will promote role-play opportunities, thus enhancing pupils' communication and

language development. For example, as pupils discuss the story they will use prepositions and time conjunctions. Labelling the model will also provide opportunities to rehearse spelling rules and use relevant geographical and descriptive vocabulary, which will support their oral retelling of the story and allow them to innovate and invent their own versions of *Rosie's Walk*.

Conclusion

The cross-curricular approaches described above support pupils' progress with geographical skills, designing and making activities while developing their knowledge of stories and multi-modal texts. The curriculum encourages teachers to facilitate quality learning opportunities. With clear implementation, the use of storytelling both within and outside the classroom can offer numerous benefits. It allows pupils to experience 'moving' and develop key geographical skills. It can help develop a relevant and meaningful curriculum: pupils lead their learning and make decisions about how to work within a facilitated environment. A journey involves a character travelling from one place to another, but just how this takes place is entirely in the hands of the pupils. By using a range of approaches and pupil-led activities, they can experience a character's journey within a narrative, focus on key geographical skills and share a sense of purpose. Thus, pupils will continue their personal journey as a learner and geographer.

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