

OUR EVERYDAY WONDERLAND

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Imogen shares examples of how geography can be used to develop pupils' sense of wonder while embracing a different way of seeing.

The world is full of wonder, from the smallest objects to the largest landscapes. The Geography National Curriculum in England states that the purpose of high-quality geography is to 'inspire in pupils a curiosity and fascination about the world and its people' (DfE, 2013). Catling and Willy (2009) suggest that geography should develop pupils' sense of wonder, and the learning journey in geography begins with the wonder and curiosity of the everyday (Major, 2011).

What is wonder?

The *Oxford Dictionary* (2015) defines wonder as ‘a feeling of amazement caused by something beautiful, remarkable or unfamiliar’ or ‘a desire to know something; feel curious’. For Piersol (2014), wonder is about abandoning preconceptions and embracing strange, new ideas; and, for me, wonder is a moment or object that leads pupils to ask questions and learning naturally follows on. The initial ‘wow’ of wonder can lead to questions of ‘how...?’ and ‘what if...?’, thus stressing the importance of developing a deeper understanding and knowledge.

The puzzlement that goes with wonder leads to the longing for an answer (Piersol, 2014), and without a feeling of wonder it is unlikely that we will question the world around us (Major, 2011). Trotman (2014) suggests a skilful educator is necessary to generate and sustain wonder, and describes a pedagogy of discovery for enquiring minds. Nevertheless, Piersol (2014) claims that teachers often present the world as fully-known, with definite answers. Thus, because the mystery has been removed learning can become boring. Egan (2014) argues that, if we offer pupils a curriculum that lacks awe and wonder, we lose important educational opportunities. According to Trotman (2014), a curriculum that enables wonder to flourish with meaningful connections to the lives of pupils is necessary.

Wonder is open to interpretation and unexpected; thus, it cannot be measured, and, in schools, it would be difficult to evidence pupils' progress. Wonder can manifest itself in many forms.

including discovery, make-believe, creative representation and the combination of passion and an enquiring mind (Trotman, 2014). The term 'wonder' is not explicitly referred to in the English geography National Curriculum; instead the curriculum places a high value on 'core knowledge' (Owens, 2013). Here, there is a tension with a place-responsive pedagogy (which involves engaging with the world and developing meaningful experiences and connections to place (Mannion *et al.*, 2013)) and an approach that invites wonder.

An invitation to wonder

Wonder can be invited in, but, as Egan (2014) suggests, pupils can learn to view the ordinary as wonderful. Providing a safe supportive environment will encourage pupils to reveal their uncertainties and wonderings – as Murdoch (2014b) points out, the best wonderings happen when pupils have space and time to think and reflect.

To encourage pupils to ask questions, they need to be exposed to opportunities for doing so (Murdoch, 2014a). When pupils pose open-ended questions, teachers need to respond enthusiastically with their own wonderings, so as to encourage further learning. In other words, to model the process and language of wonder.

Wonder around school

This lesson focuses on embracing a new way of seeing. As year 4 pupils explored the school grounds, they paused to wonder and pose questions, then used these experience to create ‘wonder maps’.

Initially, I shared examples of natural objects that look like they could be something else. To get the pupils thinking from different perspectives, we went into the school grounds to find similar objects, including a leaf that could be a shield or a boat. The pupils chose their own object, then (in a circle) we shared the artefacts and justified our reasoning. They produced novel ideas, such as ‘this red apple could be a giant ruby’. Here, Murdoch (2014a) suggests that engaging pupils in the exploration of their environment is a perfect way to nurture curiosity.

Mapping wonder

Back in the classroom, I shared 'My everyday wonderland' map of my garden (Figure 1). Then the pupils led the way around the school grounds, stopping at points of interest. Using an iPad they took photos of features from different angles in order to explore different perspectives, then created their own wonder books. Pupils used the visual thinking frame: 'I see, I think, I wonder...' to record their thoughts and questions in their own books.



Figure 1: My 'everyday wonderland' map of my garden was the stimulus for the pupils' own work, using the school grounds and the 'I see, I think, I wonder...' visual thinking frame.

They began to imagine there were fairies hiding in the school grounds, and this became a theme of their responses to different places, such as fire sticks, the eye tree and the magical, yellow fairy carpet (Figure 2). Trotman (2014) suggests that imaginative possibilities can be catalysts for moments of intrinsic motivation, and Wright (2011) comments that imaginative discourse can deepen geography's personal meaning.

Before returning to the classroom we used a compass to orient ourselves, and spent time discussing what we needed to include on our wonder maps. Then, back in the classroom, pupils referred to their wonder books and photos when creating their maps.

Pupil learning

In evaluating the lesson, all pupils said they now see places and the school grounds from different perspectives. They enjoyed creating the wonder books and maps, some even chose to use them in their own gardens.

In order to allow pupils' creativity free rein, the activity was deliberately open. As a result, they formulated insightful questions and used their imaginations. Their responses indicate the pupils were thinking flexibly and have developed their map-making skills.

Combining place-responsive pedagogy and allowing pupils to think creatively motivated them to use their imagination: the quality of work they produced clearly demonstrates their full engagement. I agree with Scoffham (2013), we need a vision of primary geography that respects pupils as playful and imaginative learners. Questions that begin 'What if...?' enable pupils to view a situation from new perspectives (James and Brookfield, 2014), and to approach problems in an original way. We have everything to gain by encouraging our pupils to see the familiar from a different perspective.

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Figure 2: The pupils' imaginations created fire sticks, the eye tree and the magical, yellow fairy carpet. Photos © Imogen Thackrah.

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