

THE Primary Geographer

INTERVIEW



Anita Ganeri. Photo: Walter Swann.

Anita Ganeri is a full-time author of children's information books, specialising in geography and natural history. She has just finished a new *Horrible Geography* title, *Horrible Geography Handbook: Polar Survival*, and is in the middle of writing a series about how animals are adapted to life in the desert.

What does geography mean to you?

I am not a specialist geographer – I feel that I must say this from the start. But, over the last ten years, since I have been writing the *Horrible Geography* series for Scholastic, geography has come to play a very important part in my life. In the course of researching and writing the books, I have met many extraordinary people, visited many extraordinary places, read many books of extraordinary adventures and had many adventures of my own. They have all added to my knowledge, understanding and appreciation of the world around me, which, after all, is what geography is all about.

What is your most memorable experience of school geography?

My first memory is of drawing a map of our classroom – earth-shattering stuff! Then there was the project on coal mines...we stuck a real bit of coal into our exercise books with horribly messy results. My best memory, though, is of

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my geography teacher, Mrs Gosling. When I met her again recently, after many years, she was horrified to hear that I was writing books that described geography as 'horrible' but recovered when I explained that this was actually a good thing!

Where is your favourite place?

Can I have three? They would be Madagascar (seeing lemurs was a dream since childhood), Iceland (ice and fire is an unbeatable combination) and Namibia (desert, wildlife and wide, open spaces). I appreciate these places so much better now that I have a better knowledge of geography. Closer to home, Ilkley Moor is always stunning, rain or shine. Sorry, that's four.

What is your favourite geographical activity?

Apart from writing the *Horrible Geography* books, it has to be visiting volcanoes, particularly if they are active. It is absolutely thrilling to see the Earth in action, literally. If anyone thinks geography is boring, it should be compulsory for them to visit a volcano. They would never complain again.

How important do you think geography is today?

Increasingly and vitally so. The world is changing so fast, and global warming is casting such a strong and dangerous shadow, that geography is crucial. The more we can understand about the world around us, our place in it and our responsibility towards it, the more likely we are to be able to preserve it. This isn't an option anymore, this is critical, but I am cheered by how many young people are so eco-aware and interested.

What has geography taught you?

Above all, it has taught me to truly appreciate the world around me. This sounds rather grandiose but it doesn't just

mean volcanoes, it is also what I can see from my office window. The difficulty, it seems to me, is that geography is not deemed to be a glamorous or popular subject, and this can only be, I think, because it is misunderstood. When I visit schools, especially primary schools, I am often shocked and disappointed to find out that some students don't even know what geography is. It seems that geography has an image problem, and it is a terrible shame. How can volcanoes, earthquakes and icebergs be boring, especially when you are only eight? (NB This is NOT a dig at teachers who do a brilliant job!)

More widely, there seems to be a lack of connectedness. There are so many wonderful TV programmes being made, from *Planet Earth*, to *Coast*, to Michael Palin's brilliant travelogues. The odd thing is that, while people watch them avidly, they don't seem to make a connection between what they are seeing and geography.



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Anita Ganeri lives in Yorkshire with her husband, two children and two rescued greyhounds. Anita has a website www.anitaganeri.co.uk