

WILD WEATHER!

LAUREN CAMPBELL

Lauren explains how she let geography, and her pupils, lead the way on an exciting weather project that infected the wider curriculum with purpose and excitement.

Introduction

Having studied geography at Edinburgh University as an undergraduate, it remained at my core when I moved into primary teaching. I always try to find exciting ways to include geography in my teaching practice and, considering the subject is so diverse and multi-faceted, it is not difficult. I am fortunate that my school actively encourages creative cross-curricular learning, so it is often a building-block in my theme.

Stimulating interest

Last year, as an NQT, I taught a year 3 class. At the end of the school day we often watched CBBC Newsround, which is a valuable resource for stimulating geographical discussion in itself. The pupils found the weather reports fascinating, especially when extreme weather occurred elsewhere in the world. They frequently asked questions such as 'How does that hurricane do that?', 'What do people use all that extra rain that falls for?', 'Why does the temperature change?' and 'How do you know if a storm is coming?' As we know, the best type of learning occurs when it is led by pupils' passions and interests, thus our 'Wild Weather' learning theme was born.

Getting started

I shared our theme with the Science co-ordinator, who sourced us an electric weather data logger and weather station. The pupils decided the best place to put the weather station was outside the classroom high on a section of gate (Figure 1). We set up the logger screen in the classroom in order to share the data on a daily basis. The pupils were captivated: every morning there would be a rush to check the weather vane and data logger. The pupils recorded the data and compared it over a series of days.

I created a weather reporters' area of the classroom where the pupils could make their recordings and added some charts on cloud type and cover. I placed one thermometer in the classroom and attached another to the wall just outside the classroom, which enabled the pupils to make comparisons. The pupils read scales, plotted graphs and made predictions; what had started as a geography-based project began to involve both maths and science.

Weather wondering

While comparing the temperatures from the weather station with our own thermometer in the classroom, the pupils noticed that different temperatures were recorded. This discrepancy really interested the pupils and gave rise to questions on the location of the weather vane including 'Was the nearby tree in fact impacting our recordings?' and 'Was the station sheltered from the wind and rain?' This interest then extended to their recordings of wind speed and direction. The pupils spotted the weather vane on top of the school and used that to compare wind direction. The questioning continued, with pupils discussing whether the height of the vane had any impact on the direction shown. It was wonderful to hear their daily use of geographical language in the classroom.

Curriculum links

The interest the pupils were taking in the weather topic was palpable; it crept into areas of the curriculum that I had not anticipated. For example, in science we had been growing vegetables but were due to go on half-term. Some pupils became concerned about how the plants would be watered when people went away for long periods. (They tried to convince me to water the plants every day during the holiday; despite their best efforts I resisted.) However, one of my SEN



Figure 1: The pupils decided this was the best place in the school grounds to site their weather station. Photo © Lauren Campbell.

Dancing the weather

The cross-curricular links extended further when my class was invited to take part in a dance competition for schools in south London. As any dance style and theme was acceptable, my pupils wanted to incorporate their weather learning into the dance, so we decided to do a 'Storm dance' (Figure 3). The excitement was palpable: even the most reluctant and least confident dancers in the class got on board. We spent time reviewing different weather systems videos (see web panel) and deciding how these could be conveyed through dance in terms of shape, pace and movement. The geographical learning really came through when pupils made suggestions such as 'We could twist our bodies to show the hurricane', 'You could be still in the middle of the group to show you are the eye of the storm' and 'We could go quicker at this point to show the speed of the wind as it changes direction'. The rehearsal process and performance were a huge success.



Figure 3: The pupils chose to incorporate their weather learning into the dance. Photo © Lauren Campbell.

Leading with geography

I am committed to using geographical themes with my pupils, and the topic of 'Wild Weather' allowed them to lead their own learning. This personalised learning is very effective in that it encourages high levels of pupil engagement and extension. The theme also supported my belief that geography can be incorporated across the curriculum, and I look forward to leading with the subject again.

WEB RESOURCES

BBC Wild Weather video: www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b04tqbxc
 RSPB Wild Weather: www.rspb.org.uk/fun-and-learning/for-families/family-wild-challenge/activities/wild-weather/
 Wild Weather poster download: www.open.edu/openlearn/nature-environment/order-your-free-wild-weather-poster

Now in her second year in post, Lauren Campbell currently teaches a year 2 class at Brindishe Manor Primary School, London, UK.

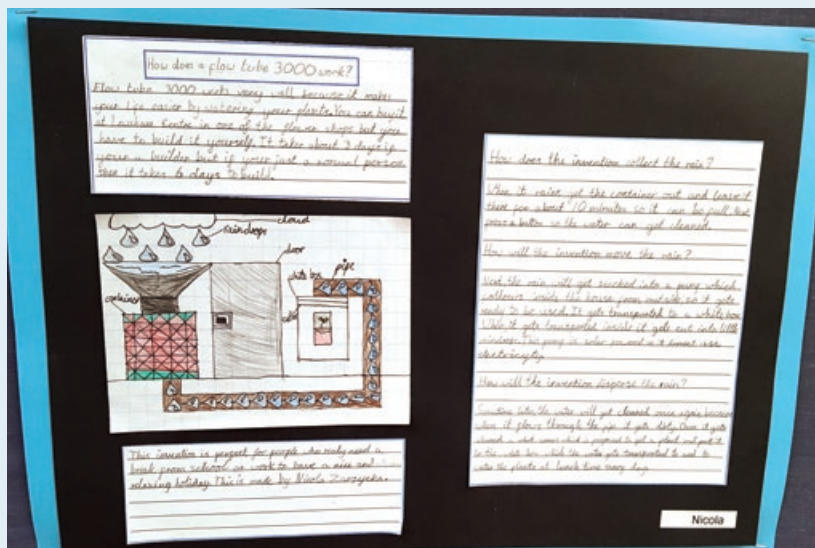
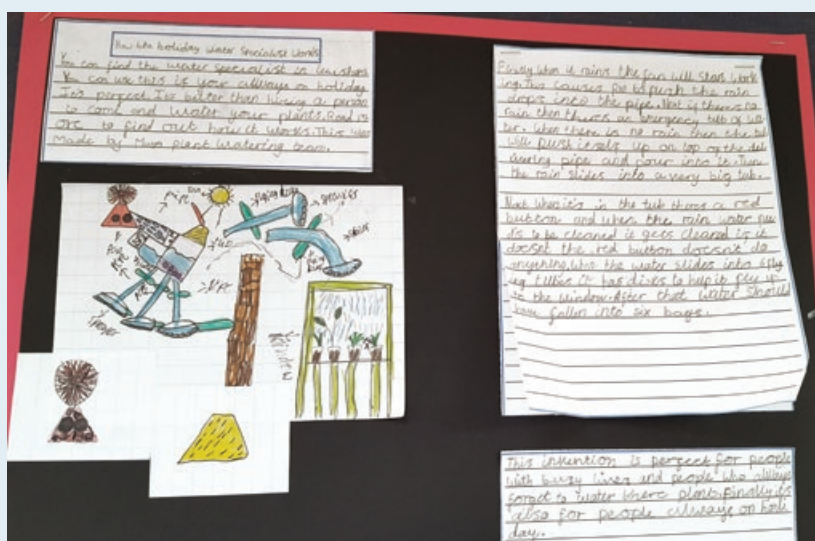
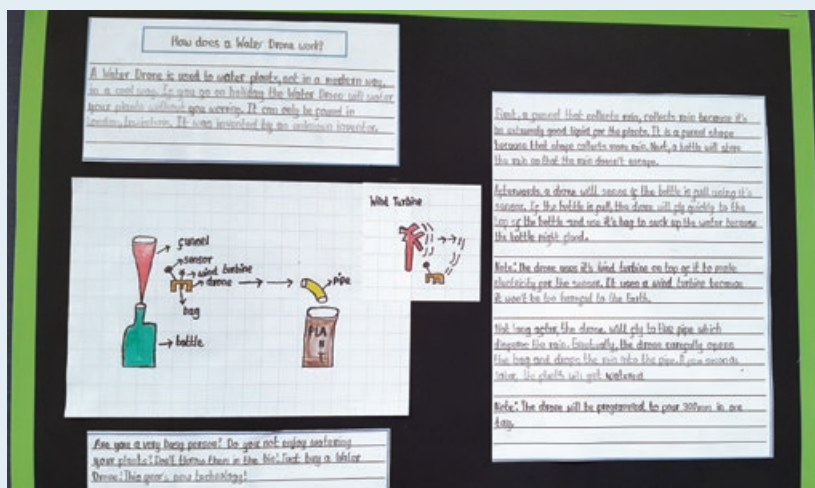


Figure 2: Pupils designed their own rain-harnessing inventions and wrote explanatory texts on how they work. Photos © Lauren Campbell.

pupils suggested that we should put the plants outside and let the rain water them. This idea immediately stimulated discussion and a project for the pupils to design their own rain harnessing inventions. We also tied this into literacy learning with pupils writing explanations of how their designs

worked (Figure 2). The pupils' designs opened up discussion on the principles of renewable energy – another interesting aspect related to weather that I had not anticipated focusing on (see Green, pages 20-1).