

READING THE WEATHER

JANE WHITTLE

Jane presents a range of activities to help pupils explore weather concepts through fictional texts.

Stories open up new ideas about the world, but while pupils are often innately curious about weather processes, the geography behind these processes can be challenging. However, 'well-chosen books have a powerful impact in the classroom, they can engage pupils' interest, excite curiosity, provoke questions, pose dilemmas and spark imaginative responses' (Tanner and Whittle, 2013), and Sam Usher's books, *Snow* (2014), *Rain* (2016) and *Sun* (2017) provide an exciting combination of fiction and real-world geography. You can use the following geographical activities to encourage different year groups to explore the weather in Usher's stories (or others, see web panel).

Preparing for weather

In each of Usher's books, the boy must collect provisions for his adventures outdoors. Ask pupils to focus on this aspect of the stories and make a list of what the boy needs to prepare for each type of weather. An extension would be to ask the pupils why they think the boy needs each item, helping them to develop mindfulness towards how to stay safe.

Discussing the weather

Many questions could stem from reading the stories, including: why is the weather different in the same location? The boy is excited to have adventures in the different weather, how do weather and feelings connect? Why do you think the boy wants to be the first person to walk in the snow? When the author uses the phrase 'the sun beat down', what does it mean? What words and phrases do we use to describe the weather? Where does the snow and rain go after the story? Find the comparatives in *Sun* (Usher, 2017); ask what other comparatives can you think of



Sam Usher's books, including *Sun* (2017), provide an exciting combination of fiction and real-world geography. Photo © Jane Whittle.

to describe the weather? What different activities does the boy carry out in different weather?

Turn fiction into non-fiction

As Pike (2016) states, 'geography always links with language, as geographers need to access many different types of information in their geography enquiries'. Pupils could write a non-fiction book to accompany the stories; encourage them to include a glossary (see pages 28-31 for an example) to ensure that they incorporate the correct vocabulary. In *Snow* (Usher, 2014) the boy says 'I hope it snows again tomorrow'. After exploring weather signs and symbols, pupils could create a weather forecast map to accompany this story.

Expand the story

While Usher's text goes into detail about the weather, much information is also conveyed through the intricate illustrations. Stopping at each one and asking pupils to expand the story will encourage them to study the illustrations and use their prior knowledge. Pupils could create their own storybook for other types of weather (e.g. Fog, Storm), but they will need to research the weather type to ensure their character's adventures are accurate.

Point of view

Pupils could rewrite one of the stories from the point of view of the weather system or from an animal in the story. Pupils might like to discuss the adventures they plan to include and may have examples of their own adventures to share. Giving them time to talk about weather adventures will help pupils to foster personal connections.

Explore the sky

Each book has pages that focus on the sky. Pupils could compare and contrast how the sky transforms depending on the weather and think about the colours of the sky and the different cloud formations. This is a wonderful opportunity to create weather colour wheels.

References

- Pike, S. (2016) *Learning Primary Geography: Ideas and inspiration from classrooms*. Abingdon: Routledge.
- Tanner, J. and Whittle, J. (2013) *The Everyday Guide to Primary Geography: Story*. Sheffield: Geographical Association.
- Usher, S. (2014) *Snow*. London: Templar Publishing.
- Usher, S. (2016) *Rain*. London: Templar Publishing.
- Usher, S. (2017) *Sun*. London: Templar Publishing.



WEB RESOURCES

Download a list of other suitable weather books: www.geography.org.uk/pg

Jane Whittle is PYP Co-ordinator at the International School of Como, Italy. She is the co-author of 'Back2Front: The Americas' and a member of the Primary Geography Editorial Board and the GA's Early Years and Primary Phase Committee.