



To the ends of the earth

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5 Investigating and exploring geography

The GA believes in geographical enquiry: that is, in students as active participants and investigators, not just the passive recipients of knowledge.

Geography is quintessentially a ‘discovery subject’. There was a time when it was *all* about exploration, describing and assembling information about the world: literally, geography was ‘writing the world’. It is still about exploration and discovery, but using the media and digital technologies as well as first-hand experience. Today, geography can embrace many forms of enquiry and exploration, using imagination and creativity to think critically about what we see.

Geography’s heritage is not an innocent one. For example, in the nineteenth and early twentieth century, textbooks often encouraged British schoolchildren to look at the world in ways we can now see are racist. Contemporary school geography questions received ideas and conventional wisdom, and plays an important role in challenging the prejudices that sometimes limit our understanding of ourselves and others.

This is a highly significant aspect of geography’s contribution to education. It enables us to ‘travel with a different view’¹.



Discovering the world using GIS

‘Who we are, and what we can achieve, depends on how we see ourselves against the enormous pressure of how others see us.’



Judy Ling Wong, UK Director of BEN (Black Environment Network)



Geography can engage young people's fundamental curiosity and questions:

Identity: Who am I? Where do I come from? Who is my family? What is my 'story'? Who are the people around me? Where do they come from? What is their 'story'?

Place in the world: Where do I live? How does it look? How do I feel about it? How is it changing? How do I want it to change? Can I influence this?

The physical world: What is the world (and this place) made of? Why do things move? What becomes of things?

Human environment: Who decides who gets what, where and why? What is fair? Who decides? How do we handle differences of opinion?²

Enquiry and investigation lie at the heart of geographical thinking. The disciplined geographical mind is well placed to respond to these fundamental questions.

viewpoints

'You can travel the seas, poles and deserts and see nothing. To really understand the world you need to get under the skin of the people and places. In other words, learn about geography. I can't imagine a subject



more relevant in schools. We'd all be lost without it.'
Michael Palin,
actor, writer, traveller

'The best thing about geography is that it gives you the ability to gain an insight into the workings of our planet and all its abundant natural wonders ... geography and geology give you this kind of long-term perspective on what happened in the past, to



influence our decision making in the future'

Iain Stewart,
broadcaster and academic

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