

## Using images with children



Photographs help bring geography to life with pupils of all ages. Well-chosen pictures can be invaluable in helping pupils to make sense of both the known world and beyond. Photo interpretation is not reliant on reading skills, leaving children free to identify, interpret, and discuss; quite distant places become accessible through recognition of features, links to their own locality and – of course – images of people and animals.

However, we often assume that what children see in pictures is the same as what adults see, and that their ability to ‘question’ a picture is a skill that they automatically develop. In fact, though, children need guidance both in the selection of detail and how to interpret it. Ways in which you can help them to develop picture interrogation skills include:

- helping them see the whole picture as well as identify its different parts (foreground, middle ground and background)
- using specialist vocabulary for labelling or annotating a picture
- providing them with a range of skills and techniques for sketching, labelling, questioning, comparing and evaluating
- encouraging them to compare and contrast a range of pictures in order to broaden their understanding of what is illustrated
- giving them the opportunity to take their own pictures and discussing the techniques involved
- ensuring they understand that the picture does not usually tell the whole story – it is a moment in time in a particular place

## Why is a photograph taken?

Most photographs are taken for a particular reason, and it is important to discuss with the children what they think the purpose of any given picture might be. Purposes might include:

### **Documentation**

These photographs generally record an event and create a solid memory of an occasion or a particular person. Examples might be birthday parties, a passport picture, New Year’s Eve or a royal visit. Children may have come across these in looking at important places or events in history. It would be interesting to ask the children to make a list of ways in which people’s lives are documented – school photos, driving licences, houses for sale and so on.

### **Communication**

Sometimes an image – of an earthquake or volcanic eruption, for example – conveys far more than the written word, and is commonly used for its impact by the media. Take some recent newspapers into class and talk about what the images are hoping to convey to the reader. Does it matter that many of them will be in black and white? It may be appropriate to ask the children to discuss particular images without teacher interpretation so they can explore their own ideas, feelings and ideas, and this is often best done in small groups rather than as a whole class activity.

# a different view

a manifesto from the Geographical Association



© 2009 Geographical Association

## Artistic expression

This type of photography is a form of expression: just as an artist would paint or a musician would compose, so a photographer's pictures are a means to express feelings or share a view with an audience. Make sure children understand that although such pictures are not necessarily crammed with action and information, by 'reading' them they can discover what messages they are trying to convey.

## Asking the right questions

In the early stages children may find it hard to respond to a very general question such as 'What does this picture show?' It is usually better to focus on specific things in the picture, such as 'Can you find any clues which suggest this might be a hot country?' or 'Do any of the pictures tell us how the houses are made?' This approach will encourage them to look for evidence in the pictures and begin to make links between what they see and what they know already. Remember, though, that photographs are likely to provoke even more questions, some of which may not be easily answered. You need to be prepared, with activities such as looking for more information on a globe or on a map as well as using a range of other resources.

<p><b>Basic enquiry questions</b></p>	<p>Where do you think this place is?            What can we see people doing?            What is the weather like?            Would you like to live here? Why or why not?</p>
<p><b>More focussed questions</b>            (Sometimes the use of a magnifying glass will encourage children to look very carefully and closely at a picture)</p>	<p>What do you think 'X' is used for?            Is it old or new? Why do you say that?            Are there similar buildings in our area?            Can you find:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• a bridge?</li> <li>• a hill?</li> <li>• a small village?</li> </ul>
<p><b>Questions to encourage thinking, viewpoints or feelings</b></p>	<p>If you were in this picture how would you feel, what might you see or smell?            In which picture do you think you would be most likely to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• need a sunhat?</li> <li>• use a car?</li> <li>• ride on an animal?</li> <li>• get really cold?</li> <li>• not understand a word of the language?</li> </ul>
<p><b>More complex questions, such as research or prediction</b>            These are higher order questions and need children to understand and feel comfortable with a number of situations and possible consequences of humans or physical actions</p>	<p>Can you find something which is the same in all the pictures?            Which scene will change most in 20 years, 100 years?            What would happen if the people here had electricity? How would their lives change?            What would the effect of a train station be in this place?</p>

# a different view

a manifesto from the Geographical Association



© 2009 Geographical Association

## Further activities using pictures

### ***Questions we would like to ask***

Give children a picture, placed on the centre of a large sheet of paper. Ask them to write down the questions they would most like answered about this picture. Discuss as a class group. How many questions were similar? Can we see any categories of questions (facts, opinions, supposition)? How can we find out the answers? (Try to identify some ways of finding out possible answers as the activity loses much of its purpose if there are never any answers, merely questions!)

### ***Sorting pictures***

Ask the children in groups to sort their pictures into sets. You may provide some suggestions to begin with (those with water, homes, people in them). Then ask the children to work out categories of their own. Which place would they most like to visit and why? This can be a group response, which means they have to discuss and come to a majority decision.

### ***Drawing from a description***

One person holds the picture so the person doing the drawing cannot see it. The person with the picture gives instructions to help the person drawing it. Compare the two. How hard/easy it is to give instructions clearly? Is there a technique for giving a good description? (This is a good literacy activity.)

### ***What a memory!***

In groups everyone looks at a given photograph for a given length of time (30 seconds-1 minute). The photo is turned over and the children have the same amount of time as they saw it for, to list as many things as they can remember about it. They can either write individual lists or discuss as a group with a nominated scribe.

### ***Me in the picture!***

This can take a variety of forms. Children can draw a picture of themselves on a post-it, stick it on the photograph, and then describe what they can see, feel and hear from their new perspective. Or you could place the photo on a larger sheet of paper, and ask them to write speech bubbles around the photo recording what they or other people might be saying.

### ***Outside the box!***

This activity acts as a reminder to the children that a photograph is only a snapshot in time of any particular, place, person or situation. Place the photograph on a sheet of paper and ask children in pairs to draw what is happening out of shot, on either side of the picture. They will need to discuss the possibilities before deciding on their picture extensions. Display the results and ask the children to share their decisions with the rest of the class.

### ***A question of scale***

Children need to experience photographs in a range of sizes, from downloaded images to postcards and snapshots taken in a variety of locations. They can be asked to add to the growing collection with their own contributions. Remember, though, that as your collection grows its proper storage and management will become quite an issue. Now I know I had an excellent picture of this somewhere...!

*Paula Richardson, GA Publications Board and educational consultant*