Watching me, watching you ... (key stage 3)

What the photo says

- How does the built environment affect people’s attitudes to crime?
- Are some places safe, whilst others are dangerous?

There are 4.2 million CCTV cameras in the UK; we’ve all seen them, attached to buildings and street furniture everywhere. Surely they need investigating: they affect how people use space, and thinking geographically means that we should be thinking about space and our use of it. Perhaps CCTV can help us see connections between places that are often missed.

Young people have grown up with CCTV, and the images they capture are often used in the media to portray negative stereotypes of young people. Students will be aware of CCTV cameras in their schools and have views on ‘safe’ and ‘unsafe’ places within their school grounds.

This photo, and the suggested activity, will encourage young people to share their experiences of CCTV and of places they visit and use.

This photo (CCTV cameras at Victoria Station, London) demonstrates that geography matters, because geography helps us to live our lives as knowledgeable citizens. It encourages us to ask questions about place and space and how we use it. The photograph encourages us to be aware of our own community. You could use it to set up a local enquiry in which students investigate the notion of ‘safe’ and ‘unsafe’ spaces in their local area.

Lesson idea

Context: part of a unit of work on the geography of crime.

Other resources

- song Stars of CCTV by the band Hard-Fi (on CD/MPs), Warner Music UK
Suggested activities
Project the photograph onto a screen. Play students the song Stars of CCTV. Put the following lines from the song onto the whiteboard:

‘And every move that I make, Gets recorded to tape,
So somebody up there, Can keep me safe.’

Ask students to think about how many times a day they may be recorded by CCTV: does this make them feel safe? Do the cameras help to reduce crime?

Give students an A4 sheet each and ask them to sketch the view from one of the cameras. Ask them to think about what the cameras see:

- Is it so important that it needs nine CCTV cameras to record what is happening?
- Is the space safe for people to use?
- Are the cameras there to make people feel safe?

After they have completed their sketches ask them to work in pairs and discuss what they have drawn. Pull together as a whole class and select some sketches to discuss.

Following discussion ask students to think about the operator in the CCTV control room. Get them to write an extract from an imaginary diary of the events that the CCTV operator may log for a typical day. What crimes were witnessed?

You could follow up this activity with ‘Your Turn’ Activities 3 and 4 from page 95 of Geog.2.

Does the school have CCTV cameras? If so, who monitors them? Ask a senior teacher to come in and answer questions on their use. Ask the students to consider, if there was enough money in the school budget to site two new cameras, where they should go.

Plenary
Read students the Times article ‘CCTV boom has not cut crime, says police chief’ (access at: www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/news/uk/crime/article3877670.ece) and lead into discussion:

- Do CCTV cameras help reduce crime?
- Do they make people safer?
- How do CCTV cameras intrude on our lives?
- Do students mind that they are being recorded?

Curriculum opportunities
Citizenship: Cross-curricular work (refer to Teaching Geography article by Beth Draper)
Community cohesion: Students thinking about whether spaces are ‘safe’ or ‘unsafe’.
Personal learning and thinking skills: Through sketch activity and discussions.

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