

MAPS FROM MEMORY

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Rationale

Energising and enjoyable! This is what 'maps from memory', a thinking skills strategy, can do for geography. It is a great way of making geography a challenging subject for all abilities and age groups, including adults. Basically, it is a lively way of encouraging people to look carefully at the component parts of maps and diagrams and to devise strategies to commit them to memory and reproduce them at the same time as having fun. It is a useful vehicle for differentiation. Pupils, students and practising teachers all stay on task, although you may need to be prepared for a little running when people go back to their tables to avoid forgetting anything!

Visual literacy is central to our subject yet how many times are pupils given a map to shade and label but gain no understanding or recall of the information or concepts involved? The lesson objective may be to encode and record information, to internalise a map or diagram but, instead of serving a cognitive function, the map serves only as an illustrative or decorative one. Clearly recalling and understanding are not the same thing, but drawing from memory can play a key role in the process. The strategy is a powerful way of improving visual literacy, a point worth noting given that visual skills are often found lacking by GCSE and A level examiners.

It is fantastic how well people remember the maps from memory, both the details of the map as well as the strategy. A loyal teacher who attends the geography courses I run for the LEA had two attempts at maps from memories activities about twelve months apart. Her group gained from her experience as she remembered that it was important to discuss a strategy before embarking on the exercise and relating the shapes of countries to an object was useful too. The task requires a great deal of cognitive work which helps to put the map into their long-term memory.

The skills needed to look at, interpret and remember visual information are both transferable and generic. All skills need rehearsing so the more subject areas that employ the strategy the better it is for geography and for improving pupils' ability to think and learn throughout the curriculum. Furthermore, teamwork and communication skills are encouraged in a light-hearted, competitive way, a point especially worth noting given that competition can be a stimulus to raising achievement in boys.

Organisation

"Where are... India and Chembakolli?"

To answer the enquiry question, focus activities on specific questions, e.g. Which countries and seas border India? What shape is India?"

(QCA Unit 10 A Village in India, A Geography Scheme of work for Key Stages 1 and 2)

Here is an ideal opportunity to use the Maps from Memory strategy!

Select a map that is uncomplicated and decide on which labels are relevant. For the India and Chembakolli map, I enlarged the appropriate section from the world map provided by QCA and modified it accordingly. I would include Afghanistan on this map since the events of September 11 2001. Two copies are needed for the classroom and have to be 'displayed' in separate positions where pupils can't see them from where they are working, e.g. on the outside of the door or under cover at the front of the class. There needs to be enough space for about 5 pupils to gather around each map. You also need to print off enough maps for one per group for use at the end of the session. Tables need arranging for group work. Remove any useful maps on display, or use post-its to conceal relevant parts; hide globes etc. as cheating may be a devious strategy! Depending on the age and thinking skill experience, I sometimes provide the labels on the board and go through pronunciation so that the names of places can be used correctly throughout the exercise.

Arrange the class into mixed ability groups of three. Give each member a number- one, two or three bearing in mind that number ones may have the challenge of drawing the main outline and number threes will have the final attempt at completing the map. I have found that traditionally low ability pupils can be given a big ego boost from the task of number three, sometimes resulting in rapturous applause from their team members when the visual task is finished successfully.

Instruct the class that as a group their 'mission objective' is to reproduce the map as accurately as possible. All they need is one pencil per group, a piece of blank paper and may be an eraser. Group members come up one at a time in numerical order and without paper or a pencil. I give each of them about 30- 45 seconds to look at the map. All the ones come up together, the twos together and so on based on my regulation of visits. Allow three visits per person, nine for the group in total (even if you have one or two groups of, say two or four). Time is allowed after each visit to work on their map. Be prepared to vary this so that, e.g. they have a long pause before the final visit. Depending on their experience, you can suggest they plan an overall strategy. Specific tasks for individual group members soon materialise, e.g. to memorise and draw the shape and location of Bangladesh or to find the position of the Arabian Sea.

Monitor the conversations and their thinking whilst at the main copy of the map and surreptitiously earwig on their collaborations and map work with their groups. You'll hear thoughts such as "India is the shape of an ice cream cone, Pakistan looks like a vulture, Bhutan could be a one-wheeled car and

Bangladesh reminds me of a certain Pokemon." Most pupils realise that getting the 'main lines' of the map, such as the coastline, is crucial. Some pupils use a kinaesthetic approach and trace round parts of the map with their finger. One boy traced the shape onto the side of his head "...to try and get it into his brain." A mnemonics approach has been used to remember labels. When using a map of the British Isles for this strategy, a few primary children in each class usually place Ireland to the east of Britain. A research project in itself!

The debriefing is a fundamental part of the exercise and pupils will be 'biting at the bit' to compare their map with the main one. It can be split into two related phases: assessment and reflection on how they did it. For the assessment pupils can check for accuracy 'whether it's right or not' and detail 'if it's all there'. Depending on their experience of this thinking strategy, I usually avoid neatness as an assessment criteria because a collaborative task with time restrictions doesn't facilitate neat work. Also neat work may not be accurate or detailed. Borrowing an idea from my numeracy lessons, I ask pupils to decide as a group how they scored from 1-5, 5 being very good and to show me this through holding the relevant number of fingers up. Discussion about ways they went about the task and how to improve can then occur: e.g. not to be too pre-occupied with the words at the start of the exercise and not to make lettering too large; each person needs a clear focus for their visit to the main map and to take more time to really appreciate the features and inter-relationships of the map. The idea of transferring these cognitive skills to other aspects of geography, e.g. memorising diagrams, and other areas of the curriculum should form an important part of the debriefing.

Enjoy!

References

Leat D. Thinking with Maps, Mapping News, Issue 16 Autumn 1999.

Nichols, A. (Ed.) (2001) More Thinking Through Geography, Cambridge: Chris Kington Publishing.

EVALUATING GROUP WORK

'Evaluating group workis an important life long skill for pupils to develop.....it is a significant part of NC English up to KS4.(Nichols,A.(2001) More Thinking Through Geography 'Chris Kington Publishing

Date: _____

Name: _____

Put a tick in the right hand column in a position between left and right to indicate how much you agree or disagree with the statement

Statement	Strongly Disagree	Strongly Agree
	↙	↘
I enjoyed working in this group		
We used our time to good effect		
We organised ourselves well		
We were imaginative in our approach		
We were all involved in the tasks		
We were interested in the tasks		
I listened to what others had to say		
The others listened to what I had to say		
I had things to say but didn't say them		
The group had more ideas than I had on my own		
We were all involved in reaching decisions		
Differences of opinion were resolved sensibly		
I had influence on the decisions		
There were ways in which I hindered the work of the group		
The group was dominated by some members		
The end results were good		

I could have helped the group more if...

The group would have worked better if...

Next time I am involved in group activities I will...

I will also...