

Doing a Geography Week

Why do a geography week?

- To demonstrate how stimulating and enjoyable geography can be!
- To expand pupils' knowledge and awareness of countries and climate zones, which have been limited by time constraints and a narrow focus on QCA units, for example *A Village in India* (Chembakolli). Readymade resource packs on Mexico, the Caribbean islands, Kenya, India and Bangladesh mean these are popular areas for study, but do result in whole areas being neglected - what about South American countries? And countries we have strong historical links with, such as New Zealand or Australia? Or the largest or expanding countries such as the USA, China and Russia? How about the new EU members of Eastern Europe? Or a country which would allow you to focus on sustainability issues – Iceland, for instance, which is using natural geothermal energy for heating?
- Planning from the programme of study objectives allows you to take your geography beyond the QCA units and be creative.
- A geography week forms a portfolio of evidence and information about quality practice for school review, SEF or to inform a new co-ordinator.

Why focus on different environments/places?

- Stunning physical landscapes inspire and motivate pupils – even without the people!
- They awaken pupils' interest in environments, climate zones and different countries.
- Parents love it – they deplore locational ignorance. In the 21st century we are more globally aware than ever, but our place knowledge is poor.
- They develop atlas use: naming places, and understanding where they are in relation to other places. This spatial awareness is just as important as naming the place!
- Barnaby Bear can travel to the places you or your pupils choose.

How can we give geography week a real purpose?

Get the pupils to present their work to a specific school or community audience by:

- Displaying boards around the school
- Making a display for the local library
- Giving a presentation to parents (Year 5 or 6)
- Inviting curriculum governors in to view the work
- Presenting to parallel or younger classes
- Presenting work in an assembly
- Emailing a partner school in the UK or abroad.

How do we organise it?

'What can we do in a week?' 'How much time should we allocate?'

Be creative! Experiment; decide how much time you can realistically give.

Could you:

- Abandon the normal timetable for a week?
- Abandon the normal timetable apart from assemblies and PE?
- Abandon the normal timetable, but keep particular subjects like music and PE to investigate countries through their music and dance?
- Use the mornings only for geography?
- Use afternoons only for geography whilst keeping to the core subject timetable?

What about planning for learning and teaching?

- You and/or your geography co-ordinator must secure the full support of your headteacher, and the geography co-ordinator must support non-specialist colleagues.
- Plan ahead with your SMT – maybe a year in advance.
- Hold a staff meeting to involve staff in decision-making and in trying out activities they can do or adapt with their pupils. It's worth trying out some of the activities listed on the *Geography from Square Two* page and relevant ones in the *Geography from Square One* area (www.geography.org.uk/squareone). Unless your colleagues are natural enthusiasts, avoid just asking them to 'do' a country or environment from cold.
- Have a range of suggestions to make to staff. If geography is a low priority to them, they will need your suggestions and ideas to support their activities.
- Be prepared for questions about losing units/content which staff would normally expect to work on over the year. Depending on how you define the time for a 'week' you may be adding a lot of extra hours – or making sure geography happens. It depends on your starting point!
- Could you write to all parents and governors when you have an idea of what your focus will be, to see whether there are any 'experts' out there who could contribute to your pupils' learning?
- With staff, think about the resources available in school. Used in new and creative ways, resource packs and library books can add to website resources!
- Ask colleagues if they have any photos, videos, CD-Roms, music or artefacts from a country that they have visited? Could they use those resources with their own class, or brief another teacher to use them?
- Could each member of staff be a country 'expert' so they could rotate classes with adapted resources and ideas?
- TAs can be an excellent human resource – do they have any resources or knowledge that could be included and used?
- How much choice do pupils have in their learning journey? Can you involve them in planning their learning journey about the environment and still match the investigation to the National Curriculum PoS?

Which environments, countries or areas should we choose?

Choose countries/environments which will work for your own school background, interests and links. Have suggestions to put to staff or pupils if you are working through pupil choice to kick start discussion.

- Have you focused on places appropriate to your school's multi-cultural backgrounds?
- Have you focused on places with which your school has links, to the exclusion of other parts of the world or continents?
- Could each year group pick a different country or place which will develop work on contrasting climate zones?
- Could each class choose a different one?
- Could groups within the class pick a country/climate zone of their choice?
- Could the class/year group/key stage take a different continent and investigate a country or environment from their chosen continent?
- Can you obtain music or stories relevant to the area chosen?
- Do you have enough resources – internet, books, atlases, globes, photos, artefacts?
- Have you chosen places that challenge stereotypes and perceptions, e.g. cities in the desert such as Las Vegas, Dubai and Alice Springs?

Other themes for geography weeks

- Use topical events such as **Water Week**, the **Commonwealth Games**, the football **World or European Cup** or the cricket **World Cup** (taking place in the West Indian islands, Spring 2007) as a stimulus for investigating the places or issues concerned.
- Look at the Worldwide pages of the GA website (www.geography.org.uk/worldwise) for suggestions of themes and activities from current and previous **Worldwise Geography Action Weeks**. The Worldwide theme for 2006 is Education for Sustainable Development (ESD).
- Plan a local **fieldwork** week.
- Organise a multi-cultural week, but ensure that you clearly identify the **geography learning objectives**. Tasting curry in key stage 2 is fun but not a geographical learning activity unless pupils have seen the spices, identified the plants and know how and where the plants grow.

Potential pitfalls

Looking at traditional costumes is more history than geography – children and adults across the world tend to wear the global uniform of jeans and T-shirts. Also, be careful with costumes – many countries now only use them as part of their own cultural awareness in festivals or for tourist events.

A week's too long?

- Then go for a **day!** or:
- Incorporate a focus on environments and countries into a **new unit for your class or year group**, or into a **review of the geography and wider curriculum**. For a new unit you could make geography the context for a core subject such as literacy, and do relevant linked work on another foundation subject such as DT or music.