

# Story and Geography

## September Theme



### You are what you read: cultural, personal and local identity

Everyone knows the expression 'you are what you eat', but have you ever thought about the impact reading has on you – in other words 'you are what you read'? The books and magazines you choose to read are often influenced by your friends and family, your culture, personal likes and dislikes and your connection with places. The great thing about reading is that it can transport you to different places and give you an appetite for understanding what makes other people tick.

Many authors like to focus on places they are familiar with and pass along first hand knowledge and experiences to their readers. There's also a whole genre dedicated to story telling from an outsider's perspective – travel writing. Authors such as [Michael Palin](#) and [Bill Bryson](#) write about the physical and human world, what they see, who they meet and how their experiences make them feel. They use a blend of styles to explain their thoughts and encounters, from simple anecdotes to deeper analysis. In their tales you often find that the journey is just as important as the destination.

Extracts from travel books could be given to your students as models for writing about their own experiences on holiday or even in their own area. A nearby library may be able to suggest some books set in your area, and the local history department could provide some historical literature which the students can re-write to show how those places have changed over time.

Have a look at [Common Ground](#), an Arts Council project inspired by the book *Common Ground: Around Britain in 30 Writers* by John Simmons, Rob Williams and Tim Rich (Cyan Books and Marshall Cavendish, 2006). The original book looked at 30 writers and the places which inspired them, from classic British novelists to popular modern songwriters. The website has been created in the spirit of the book and aims to become an online guide to Britain's writers and their work, 'famous or forgotten, current or centuries old'.

Many fiction books would not work without strong geographical settings. There are romantic descriptions of the Lake District in the *Herries Chronicle*, (Pan Macmillan, 1939) Hugh Walpole's novel about a dynasty over the centuries, which is almost photographically accurate and can be compared favourably with the descriptions and sketches made by [Alfred Wainwright](#). (See also the [BBC programmes](#) about Wainwright).

Northumbria University have brought writing about your local area into the digital age with the [Mywalks](#) project which involves uploading photographs, text, maps and sounds to their website to tell people about places you love. Look out for the Autumn 2008 issue of *Primary Geographer* for an article on 'Mywalks' by Paula Owens where she states:

‘ Mywalks is a concept which encourages individuals of all ages to re-engage with familiar surroundings and record their responses whether through photographs, written comments or sound recordings. This results in a unique interpretation of a route and can form the starting point for much fruitful discussion about how we view places.’

You may already be involved in this process if you have taken part in the GA's [Worldwise](#) activities which include [My Places](#). If you haven't explored My Places, read what other primary and secondary students have written about their places, and then contribute your own masterpiece!

There are many other ways of writing about places – have a look at [Alaska: Landscape Inspirations](#) by Wendy North which takes the form of a photo gallery with notes next to each image. You could also create a blog to talk about your local area or to keep friends and family up to date with your travels. Most blogs are free to set up - visit [TravelBlog.org](#) or [Blogger.com](#) for inspiration.

You may wish to start a local project with your cluster schools. Have a look at the [Primary Handbook Extension Project](#) on the GA website which includes some ideas for using the Primary Framework.

You could display photographs of your local area on the IWB and gather students' positive and negative opinions of places - have a look at [Geograph](#) if you're struggling to find photos of your area. Then apply emoticons using [Quikmaps](#) to build an 'emotional map'.

See *Primary Geographer* Autumn 2008 for an article by Wendy North describing how you can use [Local Studies](#) software to create a sense of identity with your everyday areas.

We hope you have already gained inspiration from our [book review](#) page - please help us to maintain this section by sending in your favourite reads (full of geographical descriptions!) to [agreaves@geography.org.uk](mailto:agreaves@geography.org.uk)

And finally, don't forget to get your students involved in the Geography and Story Competition where some great prizes are up for grabs. Further information is available in this [leaflet](#).