

STUDYING TOPICAL EVENTS IN GEOGRAPHY & HISTORY

WHY?

Children are interested in topics in the news. We can help them to understand the issues and/or can use this interest to develop useful knowledge & understanding.

HOW?

A 'Topical Issue' entry in any medium term plan (half term or several weeks of work) will remind teachers and make the study legitimate.

The teacher also needs to know what part of the medium term planning can be omitted if a topical issue is studied.

Some topical events can be planned for (e.g. World Cup) while others are unexpected (e.g. Volcanic eruption)

The methods used will vary with the topic, access to resources and time for planning and for study that is available.

Some suggestions are:

- Using extracts from newspapers and one good headline/picture to stimulate pupils to ask enquiry questions in pairs/small groups. They then find the answers to the questions (scanning text for information). Relevant blank maps are useful. The recording of information can revise or develop the current language work / genre. (e.g. Italian earthquake 2009, Iceland volcanic dust 2010)
- Produce a pack on a topic from a large picture or interesting article. This could include copies of the photograph, labels, newspaper article (may be adapted), relevant map outlines, further reading. (e.g. Floods in SE France 2010)
- Use the citizenship Enquiry table as a framework for the study and remember time line and maps.
- Having a simulated role-play or a debate on an issue if there are conflicting views and no 'right answer'. For a role-play, cards for the different roles need to be prepared as this is an opportunity to inform children not just allow them to repeat prejudices.

What resources are there?

For primary children, it should be possible to prepare a good enquiry on a topical issue with the information from one or several broadsheet newspapers. (So, no problems! Don't be worried!)

However, if any one on the staff has additional knowledge, use it. (If you are really uncertain about a topic and pupils want to know more try a Key Stage 3 book – that will give you plenty of detail).

Useful sources are:

- Newspapers (remember tabloids have a reading age of 9 and broadsheets often have good maps/pictures)
- Children's' Newspapers e.g. First News (weekly and also good for literacy); Dorling Kindersley periodical; National Geographic for Kids.
- Subject websites e.g. Geographical Association (geography.org.uk), Royal Geographical Society (rgs.org.uk)
- BBC News: articles, interviews, video clips. Easy search method.
- 'Newsround' (good level for children so adaptation probably not needed)

Useful resources to have at hand are:

- Relevant blank maps to use
- Timeline

How do we ensure the enquiry is 'geography' and/or 'history'?

We need to pause and think about:

- The implicit patterns & processes, concepts, knowledge & understanding, environmental issues etc. in the topic. Why is this topic relevant for geography & /or history? The breadth and depth will vary with age group and attainment of pupils. E.g. World Cup will include where countries are (useful world map knowledge) but could also include:
 - Time/distance/travel from UK
 - Southern Hemisphere and contrasting seasons with UK
 - Countries (Republic of South Africa) & continents (Africa)
 - Our links with South Africa (e.g. citrus fruits & grapes)
 - Peoples of South Africa, legacy of apartheid

- Finding out more about the different countries
- Comparison with another, similar event – close or distant in time
- The range of skills important in these subjects e.g. for geography we have sheets showing wide ranges of activities & progression in:
 - Enquiry (easy to include)
 - Map work (need relevant blank maps and atlas / globe)
 - Fieldwork (probably difficult / not relevant) but can use
 - Photographs / videos
- In history, we have sheets for activities in:
 - Enquiry
 - Using artefacts
 - Photographs

For any topical study, there are the usual opportunities to revise & develop key skills of:

- Language (listening, speaking, reading, writing)
- Mathematics (especially data analysis & graphs)
- ICT (obtaining and / or recording information)

What reference resources are useful?

It can be helpful if teachers have access to some resources for background information or additional illustrative material. However, these are not essential.

Some resources found useful in the past have been:

- A good atlas
- A UK/world historical atlas
- History of Britain reference books
- Meteorological Office web site
- British Museum “History of the World through 100 objects”
- Reference book on ‘Disasters’

Who initiates the study of topical events?

What are the respective roles of the subject leader(s) and the class/year teachers in this school?

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