

Learn Academies Trust: Big Ideas in Geography

Our ambition is for children to learn to ask questions about the how and why in Geography, marvelling at the world around them and the way it operates and changes. We are planning our curriculum to teach geographical facts and skills, but our pupils also need to understand that their lessons are not a one off: that they are part of a big picture of learning about the world.

Our Geography Big Ideas are key geographical concepts that the children will revisit again and again, providing a progression of understanding against each concept. When we plan our curriculum knowing how and where each unit of work contributes towards an understanding of each Big Idea will help to develop the children's understanding of the bigger picture of the world and the way they can be a part of its future.

To learn more about the idea of using key concepts in curriculum planning, see <https://cambridge-community.org.uk/professional-development/gswkey/index.html#back-to-top-ZDg4Z1eYTz>

In our Learn-AT Geography curriculum, we have seven Big Ideas:

Place Scale Space Change Environment Inter-Connection Sustainability

This document goes through the thinking behind each of these Big Ideas and gives some examples taken from the national curriculum programmes of study.

It is recommended that each school uses the Learn-At Big Ideas Geography planning document to plot their curriculum against the big ideas, so that teachers can see how and where each idea is introduced or revisited as the children progress through school.

Space

- Geographic space is the 3D surface of the earth
- Geographers look at patterns over the earth's surface (geographic space)
- Geography recognises that people use space differently and that patterns change over time

Geographers don't think spaces are empty! Places are different to spaces: places can be divided into spaces. For example, you're a school is a place, with different spaces in it. Each of these spaces has its own purpose. Larger places can also be divided into spaces: towns can be divided into different spaces for housing, shopping, and recreation; Countries are spaces that can be divided into counties, regions or landscapes. Geographers like to investigate the ways in which people use and change the spaces that they live in, and at the way that spaces are linked together.

There are 3 different sorts of space investigations that Geographers like to consider:

- Location: where the space is on the earth
- Spatial distribution – the shapes and patterns formed by the way spaces are arranged on the earth
- Organisation – how and why things are the way they are in the spaces.

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If considering space in Geography, students are going to be looking at details within places, and thinking about why they are different to other spaces. They might find out about other spaces that are similar and find them, or investigate ways in which spaces are connected together. Geographers like to understand the locations, patterns and planning of spaces because it helps them to make sense of the world.

Place

- A place is a space with meaning.
- Places are specific parts of the earth's surface
- Places range in size from home and local area to states, nations, regions and continents
- Geography describes places and explains characteristics
- Personal experience gives us perceptions and viewpoints, leading to a sense of place

Places are parts of the surface of the earth that are identified and given meaning by people. They can vary in size: a classroom is a place, so is a kitchen, so is a country, a continent and the planet! Places influence the people and animals that live on or in them. The climate, landscapes, habitats, resources and transport infrastructure of a place affect the way people and things live, move and interact. For humans, places can also have a social and human impact on them. Some people have special links to particular places. As well as places influencing people, people also have an impact on place. The ways that we live and the actions and decisions that we take can change places. Geographers like to be able to understand places. They think about what makes places the way they are, and about the ways in which the places or the things in the places are changing. If you're teaching children about place they might be learning the names of different continents, oceans and locations on the earth but they will also learn names of particular features of the places, or about why a place is particularly important to some of its inhabitants.

Environment

- The environment is all our living and non-living surroundings
- Environment contains natural and human-built features
- People use, alter and manage environments
- Geography looks at the interactions between people and environments

Our environment is the circumstances, people, things and events around us. Geographers are particularly interested in the physical environment around us: this may be natural or man made. Today there are very few truly natural environments on the earth: most have been adapted by people over time and most environments are now a combination of natural and human features. Humans can change environments by building on them digging things out of them, moving things around, growing things on them and introducing new species to them.

We have also changed some environments by changing the climate of the world – this happens globally and in microclimates around cities.

Geographers like to study different environments to understand the ways in which people, weather and natural forces have shaped the world around us. Understanding how things got to be the way they are now helps geographers to think carefully about how to manage environments for the future.

Interconnection

- No object in geography can be viewed alone – they are always interconnected
- Interconnections may be through physical processes, such as weather, erosion, the water cycle
- Interconnections may be through human movements of people, ideas, money and trade
- Geography investigates systems of interconnections

Everything on earth is connected in some way, in a small or a big way. The living systems of the earth, such as plants, animals, oceans, soils, climate and the atmosphere, are all connected to each other and work together in some way. These natural living processes, along with things like water cycles and food chains, connect people and places together, but there are also human processes like migration, trade and transport that connect people between different countries.

Geographers are really interested in understanding the way that things are connected and are also interested in what happens when one part of the interconnected system changes. For example, changes in climate can affect what grows in a location, changes in the plants in a particular habitat affect the way inhabitants can live in a place, and changes in the availability of natural resources or transport systems affect the way people live and move.

In primary geography, understanding interconnections is a core part of understanding why and how things happen to people and systems in our world.

Sustainability

- Sustainability is about something remaining indefinitely into the future
- Examples that geography focuses on include ecosystems, resources, communities, ways of life
- Geography emphasises the values of sustainability

When things are sustainable, they are able to stay the same over a period of time. Geographers know from their understanding of interconnection and change that keeping things the same around the world often means keeping things safe. Sustainable living means being able to do what we want to in our world without using natural resources up, leaving future generations unable to use them. Our world needs to be managed in a sustainable way to maintain its future.

We can work in different ways to maintain sustainability.

Locally – we can recycle and reuse materials wherever possible.

Nationally – the government can support, promote and fund initiatives like renewable power sources (solar and wind farms) and the development of infrastructure to support electric cars, for example. Sometimes, taxes can be used to promote or discourage different ways of using and producing energy.

International – some worldwide charities have promoted international environmental efforts which have made big changes in industries like the fishing industry. Sometimes, there are agreements between world leaders to try to bring down harmful pollutants.

Understanding how important our environments are, and knowing ways to protect and enrich them, is a key part of being a geographer.

Scale

- Scale in geography ranges from personal through local, national, regional, to global
- Geography looks at places, space, interconnections, environments at all these different scales
- Maps at different scales are a key resource in geography

When we understand things in our own context properly it is easier to understand them in a different context and at a bigger scale. Geographers study things at a small scale to understand how they might work at a larger scale. For example, knowing how long it takes to walk and drive a kilometre helps to understand the scale of a journey to the local supermarket which might be several kilometres away. This can then be compared with the difference to Leicester or London. Similarly, knowing the number of cars passing in a unit of time in a local place, or visitor numbers to a local attraction, helps make comparisons at different scales when learning about traffic and tourism in other areas.

Inquiries into how people use spaces and places can be carried out at a range of scales: local, regional, national, international and global.

Maps are a representation of the physical features of places and spaces: studying and producing them at different scales helps children to be able to get a concept of what a place is like by making comparisons between familiar and unfamiliar maps.

Change

- Awareness of change over time and space is essential in geography
- Geographers investigate the physical and human reasons for change
- Geography uses understanding of change to predict into the future and plan for the future

The concept of change helps us to see the world as something that doesn't stay the same. Our Earth is always changing. Some of the changes are fast and easy to see and explain (a piece of cliff falling into the sea) others are harder to notice because they take place over a long time. Sometimes the changes are caused by people and sometimes they are caused by natural events like tectonic plate movement or weather. Sometimes they are not as easy to explain as other times. Changes can affect small numbers of people (a snowstorm) or large numbers of people (an earthquake). They can happen quickly, like a volcanic eruption, or slowly, like climate change. Changes like plant conservation can be good; while changes like deforestation can be bad.

Geographers like to notice and understand changes and think about why they have happened and what might happen next as a result of the changes. They also like to look for patterns in the way changes happen and think about why those patterns are occurring.