

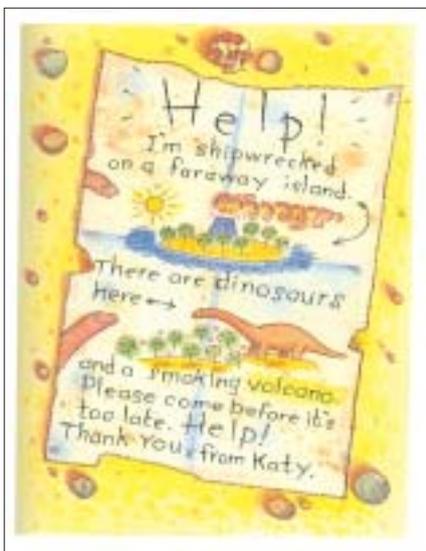
Enquiry in the Early Years

Lesley Stanton

Many teachers, nursery staff and pre-school leaders are concerned about including the multi-cultural aspect of knowledge and understanding of the world into their planning. It is worth acknowledging that it is only referred to in bands 3 and 4 of the 'Stepping Stones' (DfEE/QCA, 1999), i.e. for 4-5 year olds:

- Observe, find out about and identify features in the place they live and the natural world.
- Find out about their environment and talk about those features they like and dislike.
- Find out about past and present events in their own lives, and in those of their families and other people they know.
- Gain an awareness of the cultures and beliefs of others.
- Begin to know about their own cultures and beliefs and those of other people.

Page from *Tom and the Island of Dinosaurs* by Ian Beck. Reprinted by permission of the Random House Group Ltd.



Prior to this the emphasis is on exploring the child's own environment and exploring feelings about events that are special to them within the circle of their family and friends.

How can we provide opportunities for pupils to learn about other people, places and cultures while making it interesting and relevant to them? When exploring anything outside the pupils' direct experience we have to provide them with a context on which to pin the ideas so that they can make sense of what they are learning.

Looking at cultures and beliefs is potentially quite a difficult area especially for settings that do not have a multi-ethnic intake. Frequently-used topics include Chinese New Year, Divali and Eid Mubarak. While there is nothing wrong with these, there are many more opportunities that can be explored, thus avoiding the possibility of repeating the same topic time and time again in different years!

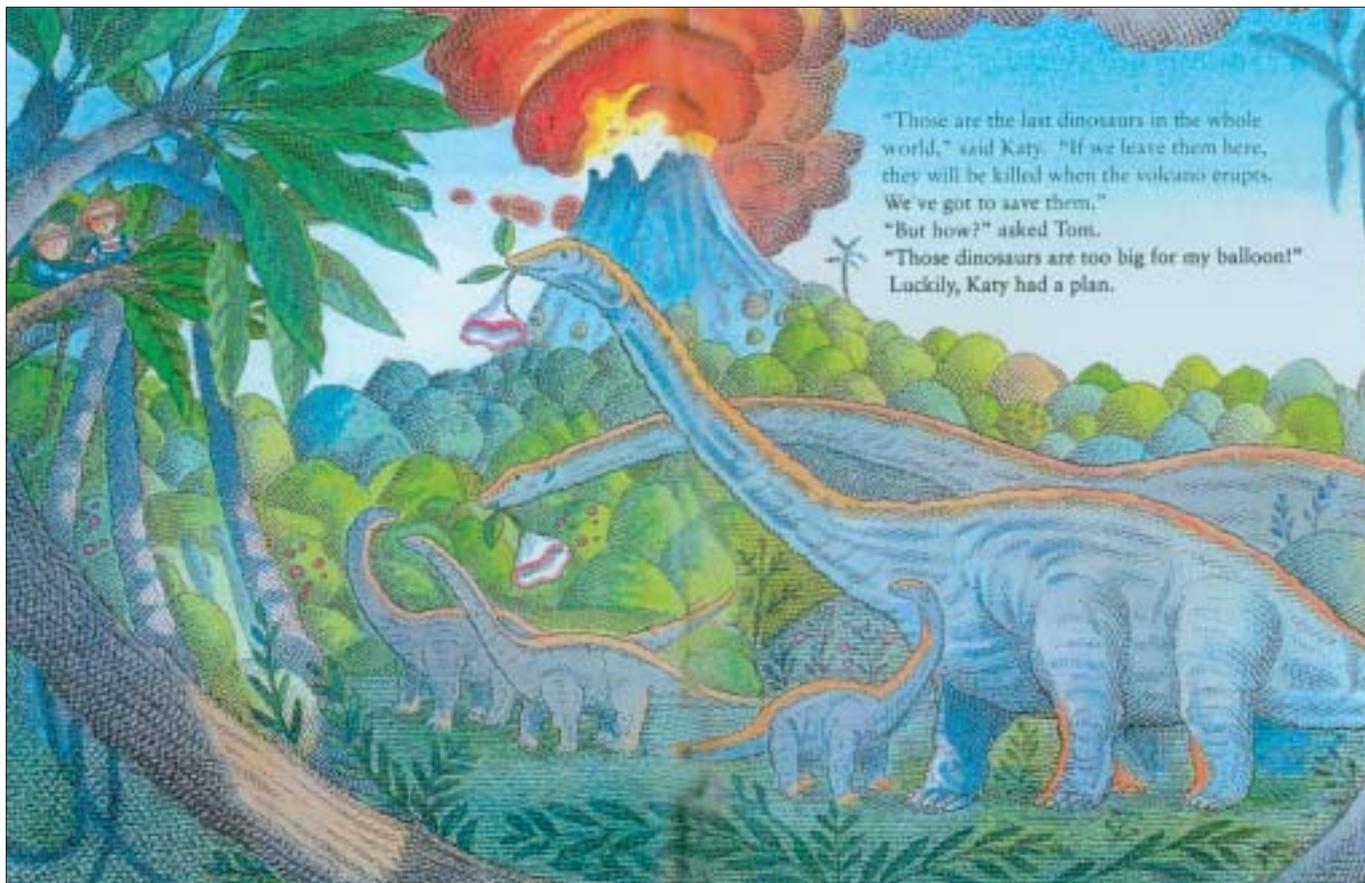
Broadening horizons

The world is a very big place so why do we often limit ourselves to studying India or China because they link with festivals? Why not take advantage of all the places that you or your staff visit on holiday. Using a bear in the style of 'Barnaby Bear' can be done by anyone. The pupils' interest can be stimulated by preparing the bear for his/her holiday – make a passport, prepare an itinerary, locate places on a map/globe, pack a suitcase, make travel tickets, discuss how they will travel, set up a travel agents/airport in the role play area. The following activities will build on this interest:

1. Discuss with the member of staff what they might collect (e.g. postcards, small artefacts, museum brochures, tickets, examples of traditional dress – even more if you have any budget!) and

which sort of locations and features to photograph with the bear, for example: churches/cathedrals/other places of worship; buildings of historical interest; shops and markets; types of transport; interesting people or traders; physical features.

2. Use a greeting in the language of the country visited when addressing each pupil at registration, perhaps teaching the class an appropriate response.
3. Set up an 'interest table' of artefacts and images.
4. Introduce the artefacts and discuss them with the whole class. If you have a mystery object can the pupils guess what it is/is used for?
5. Use the photographs to develop questioning skills. Ask questions about what/who is in the photo. Ask what the pupils would like to find out about this place/these people. Mount the photographs on large sheets of paper and write the questions around the photo. Ask if the pupils can offer answers or interview the member of staff to provide insider information.
6. Use more photographs to introduce and develop geographical language. Discuss what is similar in their area. Go out and take photographs of similar locations or features in your local area and use to discuss similarities and differences. Talk about which places the pupils like best and encourage them to give reasons for their preferences.
7. Laminate the photos and use them for sorting activities.
8. Look at traditional dress and places of worship. Discuss similarities and differences with the pupils' direct experiences, for example of special festivals, Saints days, weddings and christenings.



Pages from *Tom and the Island of Dinosaurs* by Ian Beck. Reprinted by permission of the Random House Group Ltd.

9. Try making and tasting food from the country. Explore the smell, feel and shape of the ingredients first.
10. Look at writing from the country, e.g. on posters, advertising or vehicles. Is it the same or different to ours? Do they have a different alphabet? Learn a few simple words and try writing some of the letters.
11. Collect non-fiction books that focus on the area being studied and have a variety of atlases and maps.
12. Find photographs and information about the country on the internet. Older pupils could make a poster or brochure to advertise the place using pictures and information that they have collected.

Start with a story

There are a growing number of stories and books of photographs that focus on people from other countries and cultures. Care does need to be taken when choosing to ensure that they portray a realistic picture and not stereotypes and prejudices.

Topics that can be explored with a story as a focus include:

- homes
- clothes/weather/climate
- daily routines
- food
- family members
- jobs
- celebrations

Always remember to talk about the pupils' own experiences and how they are similar to or different from those of the children being studied.

Just some of the excellent books available include: *A is for Africa* (Onyefulu, 1996); *Jamaica Louise James* (Hest, 1996); *A Balloon for Grandad* (Gray, 1994); *Handa's Surprise* (Browne, 1995); *Wake up World* (Hollyer, 2002); *My Granny went to market* (Blackstone, 1995); *We're going on a Bear Hunt* (Rosen, 1993); *The Train Ride* (Crebbin, 1997); *Penguin Small* (Inkpen, 1994); *Tom and the Island of Dinosaurs* (Beck, 1995); *The Turtle and the Island* (Kerr Wilson, 1991); *Bringing the Rain to Kapati Plain* (Aardema, 1992); *Hot Hippo* (Hadithi, 1986); and *The Patchwork Quilt* (Flournoy, 1995).

Stories that have a particular physical geography focus, looking at different landscapes, climates or issues of environmental concern, can stimulate interest and lead into every area of learning. Small world play with the sand, water, 'tuff spot' (a builder's mixing tray), track-ways and model farms can easily be built up to reflect the focus of the story. The theme might also be taken outside or used in the role-play area where large scale environments could be created with appropriate clothes and artefacts.

Figure 1 shows the planning grid for how a story with a geographical focus can be used across all the areas of learning.

Work on the local environment can follow on from reading a story about a contrasting environment. Plan a walk around the school or in the immediate vicinity. Encourage the pupils to look all around them and listen to the sounds (and even record them). Take photographs of the key features, make rubbings and talk about things they like and dislike. Back in the classroom use the photographs to make a big book of your walk. If you have recorded the sounds these could be linked to the book so that the sounds can be played in the appropriate places. This will become a prized possession that can be kept in the reading corner and shared with another age group or with the pupils' parents/carers.

The walk will also provide opportunities for early mapmaking. Ask younger pupils to draw their impressions from the walk onto a roll of wallpaper and use an adult to scribe their comments and interpretations. Older pupils could make a picture map with drawings, photos, signs and symbols.

Once you have tried this out I am sure that you will be inspired to extend outwards to other venues, such as places of worship, shops, supermarkets and markets or parks, even if it does require risk assessments to be completed prior to the visit!

Our world is an exciting place!

Our enthusiasm can inspire the pupils we work with to enjoy exploring the world

Learning intentions	Learning activities
<p><i>A sense of place</i> Show an interest in the world in which they live. Comment and ask questions about where they live and the natural world. Observe, find out about and identify features in the place they live and the natural world. Find out about their environment and talk about those features they like and dislike.</p>	<p>Explore the vocabulary of volcanoes and different types of landscape on the island. Role-play with dinosaurs in the sand/water. Make their own Dinosaur Island then re-tell the story or create their own. Draw the story onto a sheet of wallpaper. Use non-fiction books/photographs to find out more about volcanoes. Make boats made from found materials to take the dinosaurs from one island to another. Make an island camp and role-play being explorers. Encourage the pupils to suggest things to include, e.g. tent, maps</p>
<p><i>Exploration and investigation</i> Show curiosity, observe and manipulate objects. Examine objects and living things to find out more about them. Investigate objects and materials by using all the senses.</p>	<p>Water play, ice cubes and frozen water balloons. Use dough and clay to make dinosaurs eggs, bones and volcanoes. Use shells to make prints in modelling clay. Collect found materials to make a large collage.</p>
<p><i>Design and making skills</i> Construct with a purpose in mind, using a variety of resources. Use simple tools and techniques competently and appropriately. Build and construct with a wide range of objects, selecting appropriate resources and adapting work.</p>	<p>Make a boat with found materials. Design and make flowers for the island. Make a nest for a baby dinosaur to hatch in.</p>
<p><i>Communication, language and literacy</i> Sustain attentive listening. Re-tell narratives in the correct sequence. Show an understanding of the elements of stories, sequence events, main character etc. Explore and experiment with sounds, words and texts. Question, comment and respond relevantly. Sing/say rhymes and songs by heart. Extend vocabulary, especially by grouping and naming. Imagine, recreate roles and experiences. Use writing as a means of communication. Attempt writing for different purposes.</p>	<p>Listen to the story. Sequence the events in the story by drawing and labelling a map of Tom's journey. Plan their own way of rescuing the dinosaurs. Create their own ending to the story. Learn rhymes and songs linked to the theme. Learn new words linked with dinosaurs, volcanoes. Use non-fiction texts. Make labels for the models. Role-play the story. Design a flower to attract the dinosaurs, draw plans and instructions for others to follow. Promote emergent writing to write messages in a bottle.</p>
<p><i>Creative development</i> Explore the different sounds of instruments. Use available resources to create props to support role-play. Introduce a storyline or narrative into their play. Play co-operatively as part of a group to act out narrative.</p>	<p>Use instruments/sound makers to illustrate the story. Role-play the story/island camp.</p>

Figure 1: Using *Tom and the Island of Dinosaurs* (Beck, 1995) for geographical understanding.

around them. They are naturally inquisitive at this age and want to find out more. Geographical enquiry can give them the means to do this and enable them to make sense of the world. It also encourages the development of the positive attitudes and skills that are needed for them to be responsible citizens in a multi-ethnic society and in a world where the environment is under threat.

References

- Aardema, V. (1992) *Bringing the Rain to Kapati Plain*. London: Puffin Books.
- Beck, I. (1995) *Tom and the Island of Dinosaurs*. London: Corgi Children's.
- Blackstone, S. (1995) *My Granny went to market*. Bath: Barefoot Books.
- Browne, E (1995) *Handa's Surprise*. London: Walker Books.
- Crebbin, J. (1997) *The Train Ride*. London: Walker Books.
- DfEE/QCA (1999) *Curriculum Guidance for the Foundation Stage*. London: DfEE/QCA.
- Flournoy, V. (1995) *The Patchwork Quilt*. London: Puffin Books.
- Gray, N. (1994) *A Balloon for Grandad*. London: Orchard Books.
- Hadithi, M. (1986) *Hot Hippo*. London: Hodder Children's.
- Hest, A. (1996) *Jamaica Louise James*. London: Walker Books.
- Hollyer, B. (2002) *Wake up World*. London: Frances Lincoln.
- Inkpen, M. (1994) *Penguin Small*. London: Hodder Children's.
- Kerr Wilson, B. (ed) (1991) *The Turtle and the Island*. London: Frances Lincoln.
- Onyefulu, I. (1996) *A is for Africa*. London: Frances Lincoln.
- Rosen, M. (1993) *We're going on a Bear Hunt*. London: Walker Books.
- Lesley Stanton is Early Years Adviser, Staffordshire*
 (lesley.stanton@staffordshire.gov.uk).



Acknowledgements

Stanton, L. (2005). Enquiry in the Early Years. *Primary Geography*. Spring 22–24. © Geography Association, 2005. Further material and International Associate Memberships are available from the Geographical Association website <http://www.geography.org.uk/>