

Get started with GIS ... on the internet ... for free

by David Mitchell



GIS ... you've heard about it, but aren't too sure what all the fuss is about. In fact, you're really not sure it's worth a lot of your valuable time.

Sounds like you? The chances are you have asked the questions below: hopefully the following answers show that there are simple, free and exciting ways for your pupils to learn with GIS.

What is GIS?

GIS stands for Geographical Information Systems/Science. A GI system has three components:

- a map
- data that can be displayed on the map
- a piece of computer software that lets you choose which data is displayed and how.

Why should I use GIS?

For fun. Just ask a pupil who has used *Google Earth*. You are likely to hear 'wow!' more often in class. There are lots of ways of using GIS in every part of geography – from locational studies to an individual coursework enquiry. GIS can add variety to your lessons and enthuse pupils and teachers alike, and it is getting easier to use GIS all the time, through the internet.

For a strong and healthy subject.

Thinking *spatially* about something (be it a place, a human issue or a physical system) is a fundamental part of geography. Every time a pupil uses a map, they are *thinking spatially*. GIS helps us do that quickly, accurately, and comprehensively. It reminds ourselves, our pupils and society at large of geography's unique way of understanding the world through spatial patterns and relationships. GIS also features in the geography national curriculum and increasingly in exam board specifications.

For a future workforce. GIS is perhaps the most obvious way in which geography

is valued in the current world of work. Just about every conceivable sector of industry and public service depends on GIS – it is essential to retail, agriculture, the emergency services, building and planning ... in fact it is difficult to think of a field which does NOT need GIS.

How do I use GIS?

The best way to get started is just have a go on the internet for free. More on how to do this overleaf, with ten techniques for lessons.

This article is free to GA members in the January 2007 issue of GA Magazine

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