

Urban landscapes and visual literacy: Imaging places

(Source: GA project KS4 ICT - using digital learning resources from an idea contributed by Noel Jenkins)

Introduction

A typical student will be exposed to hundreds of images over the course of Key Stage 3 and Key Stage 4. The selection and analysis of photographs is regarded as a key skill by all current and proposed GCSE specifications, though in many cases students will have had little opportunity to choose images themselves. This lesson explicitly teaches some of the skills involved in the selection and analysis of photos, and while the theme is urban decay and regeneration, the underlying concepts are applicable to any topic.

It is always desirable to use photographs taken by the students and/or teacher in the first instance. The Internet offers a seemingly infinite number of images, and students should be taught that it is not acceptable to harvest images from a Google search, with little regard for intellectual property rights. The photo-sharing site *Flickr* (<http://www.flickr.com/>) represents an alternative way to discover images and offers a number of features that makes it an extraordinarily useful resource for the geography classroom.

Key Geography Objectives

- To be able to find an urban location using a virtual globe or online map such as Google Maps
- To be able to use evidence from satellite images to describe urban land use
- To select representative images from the location that illustrate the concept of urban decay and the need for re-generation.

Key ICT Objectives

- To locate a place on an online map
- To select and use images from Flickr
- To annotate photos using a word-processor or presentation software
- To understand the issues of copyright when using images.

Running the Activity

1. Begin the lesson by copying and pasting an image from the Internet into another document, and then asking what laws have been infringed. Key points:

- Copyright: any photograph made in the UK or by a UK citizen since August 1989 will be in copyright for the life of the photographer plus 70 years.
- The photographer has the right to be credited as the author of the work.

- Photographs cannot be copied or adapted without the copyright holder's permission (though the principal of Fair Dealing means that it is unlikely the teacher has infringed the law unless the image is not credited, the image is cropped or manipulated or the photograph is scanned or uploaded to a web site or VLE).
- Stress that copyright is there to protect individuals and their rights to make money from their work. In other words copying a photograph in most situations is tantamount to theft.

2. Select a suitable urban location on which to base the research. This example uses Salford, Manchester. The first activity is to get students to locate Salford, and Google Earth is ideal for this. Spend a few minutes locating some of the obvious nearby landmarks such as Manchester United's ground Old Trafford and the city centre. Students should be able to describe some of the features of Salford's urban environment that are evident from the imagery.

3. Hold a brief discussion on some of the likely issues facing the area, (optionally students could look Salford up on the *Up My Street* (<http://www.upmystreet.com/>) to see if they can find corroborating information). The teacher then introduces the term 'urban decay'.

4. Get students to search *Flickr* for some images that could be used to illustrate the term urban decay. They should be encouraged to search through images that are shared under a creative commons license, by following the instructions provided in the download below.

5. The selected images can be downloaded (note that there is usually an option to download larger versions of Flickr images for better quality). Students add an image credit to the picture (the URL of the image page and the Flickr username of the photographer is sufficient). They annotate the image using a word processing or presentation application to explain why it represents the idea of urban decay.

6. To complete the lesson, students could switch their attention to look for some images of local urban regeneration. In the case of Salford, there are many pictures of Salford Quays. Once again a representative image could be downloaded, credited appropriately, and annotated.

Further Ideas

- The term 'geotagging' applies to digital photographs with location data attached. Google Earth uses geotagged photos and provides a good resource for photos of places all over the world.
- It is straightforward to use the polygon tool in Google Earth or Google Maps to create some urban land use zones. This helps the students look more closely at the imagery, and think about exactly what they are looking at.
- Students could make use of the Motivator tool found at Big Huge Labs (<http://bighugelabs.com/flickr/motivator.php>) to create a pair of images with suitable captions that contrast urban decay and regeneration. This would be a great way to extend creativity and visual literacy and could result in a wall display.

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