

Discussions with photographs

Geography teachers rely heavily on photographs to bring the real world into their classrooms. When you use photographs focus on getting pupils to 'see' and 'interpret' the geographical data presented and also to pay attention to how the images have been created and for what purpose. (A photo is just an image, it is not necessarily the truth or fact.) A good way to approach this is by pupils' learning through discussion.

The ideas outlined here are suggestions that you could use as a focus for discussions. Discussions are particularly effective for eliciting feelings/attitudes and alternative interpretations about place. Some are possible with one large projected image for whole-class discussion; others need each pair or small groups of pupils to have access to images in hard copy or on computer/tablet. Consider using 'buzz' groups where pairs discuss first and then you ask for a class response.

Pupils often respond most readily to pictures that have a 'wow' factor – physical features/hazards - , or that involve people – perhaps with facial expressions or postures that pupils can think about. Using a variety of photographs of the same topic or theme, and sharing pupils' responses can avoid crude generalisations.

Consider ways you can use some of these in your lessons: (they are in no particular order). You need to think how the questions/activity can help pupils to learn geography in the context of the photos you are using.

Use a selection of photos on a **place** and ask:

- What is this place like to look at, visit, and live in? How do you think the pictures were chosen, by whom and why? What do you like/dislike about this place? What do you think is missing in the pictures?
- Which photos do you react strongly to, like, are pleased by, dislike, are annoyed by, find interesting, familiar, strange?
- What questions would you like to be answered about this place? Share or compile a class list.
- Look at a photo, then turn it over (or turn off the computer image) and write down as many things as you can that are in this place. Compare lists with a partner/whole class. Why are there certain things you notice/remember? Are these the most important things shown about this place in the photo?
- Be a detective – what things are in the photo, what is going on, where is it, when is it? - What is the evidence?
- Create a spider or bubble diagram to show what geography is in the photo
- BEFORE you look at the photo of a place, write down what you expect to see and compare this with your partner. Then reveal the photo and compare it with what you expected.
- Choose a photo and mask or cover part of it after discussion with your partner. Pass it on to another pair to explain what they see and what they think the rest of the photo will show.

- Ask pupils to respond to a photo of a place they do not know or have not been. ... Are there familiar things in the photo? Are there things shown that seem unlikely or unreal to you? Does anything surprise you? Why? How would you feel if you were in the photo?
- What was the role of the photographer? – Were the people cooperating with the photographer? Was the photographer ‘unseen’ by those in the photo? Were they intruding? (To help pupils to understand that a photo reflects how the photographer perceives a place, which can distort the truth)
- What is good about a photo to represent this place? How could it be improved? What other view, scene or people should be included?
- Create captions for a photo that represent i) the photographer’s intention; ii) what you see and iii) something quite different.
- Make up a story for a photograph. – what is each person doing, and why? What do you imagine they are thinking? What sounds would there be? What language is being spoken? What happened before the photo was taken? What happened next?
- What would the scene in the photograph be like at other times – at night, early morning, in other weather conditions?
- Select a photo and put it in the centre of a large piece of paper. Write as many questions as you can around the photo, after discussing these with your partner. Pass your paper to another pair for them to answer.

Each of the above activities encourage pupils to give open responses to the photo stimulus about a place. As the teacher you have to use your professional judgement as to when you should intervene, or supply additional information, especially if pupils are responding with stereotypical views.

(Last update June 2021)