

Making animals

This is a thinking activity concerned with planning and decision making allowing for particular constraints. One of the early versions was to design an animal, hence the title. The basic premise of the original activity was that students have to design an animal that would be adapted to live in a particular environment. The constraints they had to think about are environmental factors and how animals can adapt to particular conditions. The idea can be applied to other situations where there are specific parameters or constraints – the reference shows how it has been applied to improving a shanty town and migration. This is a very flexible activity!

The three important characteristics of the generic strategy are:

- a context to work within
- features to choose – to design something in that context
- constraints on their choice – such as the number of features or the amount they can spend.

Refer to the example of ‘Backpacking in Italy’ in Leat, D and McGrane, J. ‘Diagnostic and formative assessment of students’ thinking’, *Teaching Geography*, January 2000. This includes the resources used. A similar task could be applied to other locations.

Some hints on managing ‘Backpacking in Italy’

- The task benefits from a good introduction or ‘framing’ to establish the relevance and purpose of the decisions they are being asked to make.
- Ensure that you focus on the place aspects of the context – where is the geography?
- The activity works best in pairs for working cooperatively on the decisions.
- Eavesdrop their thinking so you can use this in the debriefing.
- Expect a range of responses: some students may struggle with the interrelationship of human and geography factors in this example.
- Warn students that you will expect them to justify their reasons for what they pack.
- In the debrief push the students for these justifications, and you may have to play the devil’s advocate to get them to argue out their justification.

Reference

- Nichols, A. and Kinninment, D., (2001) *More Thinking through Geography*, London: Chris Kington Publishing

Case studies to illustrate ‘making animals’

- Nichols’ examples are natural regions, migration, shanty town.

(Last updated May 2017)