

5Ws: A thinking activity

It is common for teachers to pose all the questions. The 5Ws approach encourages students to frame and ask the questions. It is a good introductory activity for an enquiry and helps students to understand that one form of evidence might not provide all the answers.

It is a valuable technique because students have to:

- consider the logic of asking particular kinds of questions
- decide in what order questions should be posed
- think what they *need to know* and why they need to find this out – before they begin
- sort through the adequacy of the information; this often leads them to realize the source/s they are using may not hold all the answers and they may have to seek elsewhere.

5Ws encourages different kinds of questions, including descriptive or factual responses and ones that seek explanation. Its main limitation is that it does not explicitly encourage questions focusing on different aspects of geography. For example, it is possible to ignore questions probing aspects of physical geography. 5Ws generally uses: What? Where? Who? When? and Why? – but It can be extended to draw attention to processes ('How?'), to a futures dimension ('What might happen if...?') or an ethical dimension ('What ought...?').

You may wish to use the framework provided at the end of this document.

Some hints on managing 5Ws

- The teacher can give the 5Ws headings, or can ask the students to generate them at the start of the activity.
- A good technique to use is *think-pair-share*. First students take time to think individually (silently) then share with a partner, then pairs share with the whole group.
- The context for them asking the questions can be important. In the earthquake example, students took on the role of reporters. They have to frame the questions *before* they reach the earthquake site, bearing in mind the news item they will need to write.
- *What remains unanswered* is a key question for the teacher to ask? How could they find out that information?
- An important question to ask during a debriefing of this activity is, '*What makes a good question?*'
- A variant is to give out different photographs (or other resource) get one group to write the questions and another group to answer them.
- Be prepared for the reaction from some students that they would prefer you to give them the questions to answer!
- Less able students can find generating questions difficult – and often offer closed questions without a geographical focus. You will need to give them support to get started. It helps if you clearly define the 'big question' for the activity – 'writing a report on'... is too vague!

Reference

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

Roberts, M. (2023) *Geography through Enquiry: An approach to teaching and learning in the secondary school*. Geographical Association. Second edition. Sheffield: Geographical Association. p 49.

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5W's and How

What?

Where?

Why?

When?

How?

Who?