

ART AND GEOGRAPHY: CHILDREN'S OWN PLACES

GEMMA KENT AND MARGARET MACKINTOSH

Art is a fantastic stimulus for exploring local place. Studying works of art enables pupils to understand that different people see and interpret the world around them in a variety of ways. It also supports pupils in developing their own views. Gemma and Margaret explore two examples by looking at sculpture and architecture.

'To look is an act of choice... We never look at just one thing: we are always looking at the relation between things and ourselves... The photographer's way of seeing is reflected in his [sic] choice of subject, the painter's way of seeing is reconstituted by the marks he makes on canvas or paper, yet, although every image embodies a way of seeing, our perception or appreciation of an image depends also upon our own way of seeing' (Berger, 1972).

Sculpture and the local area

George Segal's *Rush Hour* sculpture (1987), located near Liverpool Street Station in London, was used as part of an investigation into our local area (but the activities here could be adapted for public art in your area). I began by taking the pupils to view the sculpture (Figure 1), which many of them pass every day, but rarely stop to observe closely. We discussed who the people might be, through questions such as: Where are they going? Where are they coming from? What are the clues in the landscape? Why did the artist choose to locate the sculpture here?

Back at school, the pupils recreated the sculpture in the form of a still image. We used a 'thought tracking' technique to invite individuals to speak in role as a character from *Rush Hour*, explaining their thoughts or feelings aloud. This can be done by tapping each person on the shoulder or by holding a cardboard 'thought-bubble' above their head.

Using this technique enabled pupils to put themselves in another person's shoes and see a landscape through someone else's eyes. They spoke freely as the character, but we also offered questions



Figure 1: Pupils visit and pose alongside George Segal's 1987 sculpture, *Rush Hour*. Photo © Gemma Kent.

to prompt geographical thinking: How do they feel about their surroundings? Do they enjoy their journey to and from work? What is the weather like? What would they like to alter/improve or keep the same about their environment?

'They all look the same, but people are more diverse than this.'
'You think of the city as a busy place, but it shouldn't just be business people. London is full of all different people.'
'It's not only business people in our area. There are also police, making sure everyone is ok and doctors helping people who are sick.'
'It is quite representative, as there is a majority of business people, but our area is more mixed than this. There are children and people in casual clothes. Some people have jobs where they don't dress like this - shop-keepers, actors or nannies.'
'I don't think it shows life in our area. One colour, one material - it only shows one mood.'
'It's not just business in this area - there are other things too. There should be street cleaners or school children.'
'In our area there are a lot of business people, but it's not only business people. People do lots of different jobs - artists, photographers...'

Figure 2: Pupils' comments about the sculpture.

The pupils were also asked whether *Rush Hour* gave the 'only' view of our local area, or a partial perspective. They felt quite strongly that the sculpture displayed only the feelings of 'busy business people' (Figure 2).

After discussion on how they would like to represent our local area, the pupils began to design and make their own sculpture (Figure 3). They used clay, but could have used their own bodies and/or junk modelling techniques. The key to ensure that this remains a geographical activity, rather than becoming an art lesson, is in the generation of ideas during the ensuing discussion and decision-making process, not necessarily the finished product.



Figure 3: Pupils create their own version of *Rush Hour* to represent their views of their local area. Photo © Gemma Kent.



Figure 4: Dame Zaha Hadid's (2011) Riverside Museum, Glasgow. An iconic building at the heart of a regeneration area. Photo © Ronnie MacDonald (Creative Commons licence).

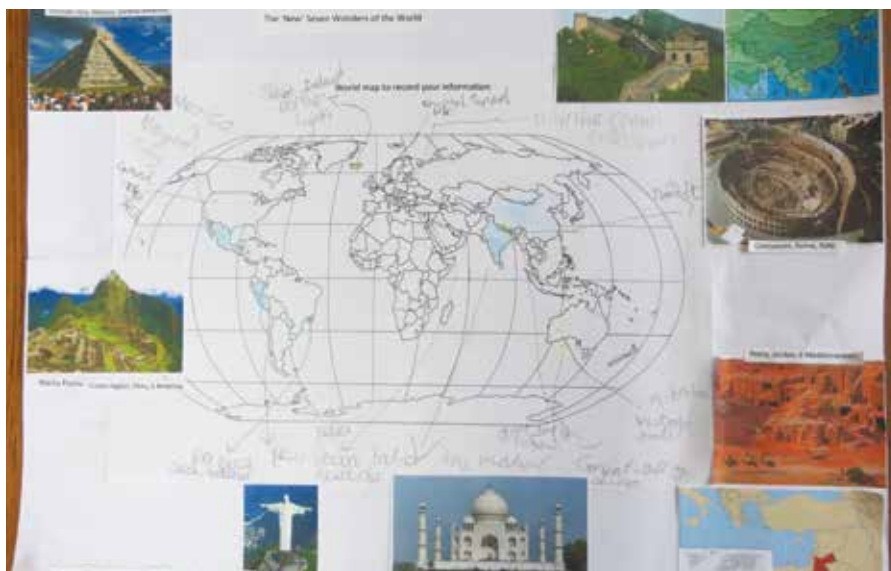


Figure 5: Inspired by iconic architecture, pupils researched different Wonders of the World and illustrated and located them on a world map. Photo © Margaret Mackintosh.

Therefore it is a good idea for pupils to work in pairs or small groups. These pupils were keen to show the diversity of the area in their sculpture: they wanted people to know that the area is not just for business people, but also for artists, dancers, young and old, disabled and able-bodied people alike.

Architecture and regeneration

The dramatic architecture of Dame Zaha Hadid's (2011) Riverside Museum, on the banks of the River Clyde in Glasgow, is part of the regeneration of the harbour front area (Figure 4). I used it as the starting point for investigating iconic buildings, their design, function and location. The Museum stimulated pupils' interest in locally and internationally important buildings, and encouraged them to consider issues of change and regeneration.

Zaha Hadid's architecture is described as 'neofuturistic'. An internet search reveals images of many of her commissions, whether they were built or remained on the drawing board. Pupils speculated on the function of each building, and gave overwhelmingly positive opinions on Hadid's structures. Having been amazed by Hadid's special creations, and sensitised to building design and use, the pupils became 'architects' and designed their own school or home of the future.

Asked 'Where are our local special buildings?', pupils then began to explore local architecture. After discovering both the historic and the modern, and noting changing styles of housing, they identified 'special' buildings: some they chose were special through architecture, others through function or relevance to the pupils' lives. Next the pupils discussed what architecture they would like to see in their local area in future, which led to consideration of conservation,

development, redevelopment and regeneration, especially following industrial decline and taking account of people's housing and employment needs.

To illustrate the notion of iconic architecture, the pupils were given lists of the Seven Wonders of the Ancient World, of the Modern World, of the Engineering World and the Natural World. They researched, located and illustrated on a world map each set of the 'Wonders', with posters made for each category (Figure 5).

Ways of seeing location

Both Segal's sculpture and Hadid's architecture led to the development of local trails. Inspired by Segal's *Rush Hour* sculpture, pupils identified and took photographs of public street art in their local area, including sculptures and monuments. They created a map-based, illustrated sculpture and art trail. (Pupils in rural areas may need to visit the nearest town or city to locate sufficient examples.) Inspired by Hadid's architecture, pupils identified and took photographs of their perception of the 'special' buildings in their local area to create a map-based, illustrated architecture trail. Older pupils could convert the information gathered in either of these activities into a geographical board game.

Through fieldwork, both of these art and geography routes explored and located geography in the local area and led pupils to a greater understanding and appreciation of their area's art, architecture and, of course, its geography. Both George Segal and Zaha Hadid changed these pupils' ways of seeing their own location.

References

- Berger, J. (1972) *Ways of Seeing*. London: BBC/Penguin Books.
 Kent, G. and Mackintosh, M. (2014) *The Everyday Guide to Primary Geography: Art*. Sheffield: Geographical Association.



WEB RESOURCES

An art trail that includes *Rush Hour* (produced for adults):
www.broadgate.co.uk/Content/PDF/BroadgateArtLeaflet.pdf
 Seven Wonders of the World:
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wonders_of_the_World

Gemma Kent is Deputy Head teacher at The Lyceum School, London. Margaret Mackintosh is a member of the Primary Geography Editorial Board and formerly a primary teacher, teacher educator and Editor of Primary Geography. Both are members of the GA's Early Years and Primary Phase Committee.