

Introducing maps in the Early Years

Tim Kennington and Emily Rotchell

As maps are now statutory in EYFS settings, Tim and Emily describe how they planned a unit of work on 'introducing maps', which they use with very young pupils.

Early Years and map work

Many Early Years practitioners have been using and creating maps with pupils in nursery schools and reception classes for many years. It was only in 2021 that maps became a statutory part of the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) in England. The new requirements and earlier reports by the DCFS (2009) on the importance of play and exploration in Early Years inspired our unit of work for a reception class on 'Introducing maps' (see web panel for download). We also used Paula Owens' excellent *Maps and Mapping in the Early Years* (2022) to aid our planning.

Planning our unit

When planning we decided that, as well as using the EYFS statutory framework, we would draw on some of the elements of the key stage 1 National Curriculum,

which could be carefully scaffolded for our Early Years pupils. These additions included 'using directional and locational language, describing simple routes, recognising landmarks, devising a simple map and using fieldwork' (DfE, 2013, p. 185).

Wiegand (2006) ascertained that map work with very young pupils is more effective when it relates directly to the pupil. This influenced our decision to include picture books when introducing new maps to the pupils, and we model map use within some of the stories. This article describes the four lessons and associated free-flow activities we created on this topic for Early Years (feel free to use/adapt these lesson ideas – the medium-term plan and *YouTube* video (see web panel) will help with your planning).

To facilitate the activities described below, make sure your classroom has different types of maps for pupils to use, including:

- plans of the school, classroom and outdoor area
 - stories with maps displayed in the reading area.
- ### Lesson 1: *Henry's Map*
- The unit starts with a lesson focused on pupils' understanding of what a map is and how it might be used, with specific reference to *Henry's Map* by David Elliot (2013). During the story-reading part of the lesson, ensure you have toy animals and a model farm available. To make it more interactive, the pupils can place model animals in their 'correct' location at the farm as each part of the story is read. In the story the main character, Henry, creates a 'child-like' map of where the different animals live, hence the book's title. After reading the story, use 'talk partners' to discuss the key question of the lesson: 'what is a map?'. Where needed use the story as an additional prompt: What did Henry's map do? Why did Henry make the map? Pupils can then explore the classroom looking for maps and every time one is found ask the pupils 'What does this map show us?'. This activity works well with other stories such as *Little Red Riding Hood* (Figure 1).
- wall maps of the world and the UK
 - globes
 - underground, tram, rail and road maps in the transport play area
 - a treasure map (see below)



Figure 1: Locating characters from a story on a map. Photo © Tim Kennington.

Lesson 2: Fox's Socks

In preparation for lesson 2, hide items of clothing (or pictures of them) around the classroom and outdoor area. Use *Fox's Socks* by Julia Donaldson and Alex Scheffler (2020) as the hook for this lesson. The items could be those in the storybook (vest, shirt, bow tie, hat and socks), or you could create your own character and items based on the pupils' interests. After reading the story, invite groups of pupils to take turns on a 'treasure hunt'. Provide a full-colour A3 plan of the classroom or outdoor area to help the groups locate each item, you could include pictures on the layout of the classroom and outdoor area to familiarise pupils with the map and mark the location of items with an X. After the treasure hunt has been completed by all groups, work with the whole class using a map on the interactive whiteboard (IWB). Recap on the location of lost items and pupils can discuss where the best places are to keep things so you do not lose them.

Lesson 3: The Treasure of Pirate Frank

The focus story for the third lesson is *The Treasure of Pirate Frank* by Elspeth Graham and Mal Peet (2017). Display a clear illustration of the map used in the story on the IWB. As you read the story, pause at key moments and ask the pupils to plot the boy's route. Ask 'What clues in the book show where the boy is on the map?'. The pupils should be able to link landmarks in the illustrations to the landmarks on the map. Employ the positional vocabulary within the story in different situations in the classroom. Encourage pupils to use directional language to recall the boy's journey. Make use of programmable robots (e.g. a Beebot) and the compatible city map (called 'Community map') on the Terrapin website (see web panel). Set pupils challenges for routes (e.g. from the library to the animal rescue) and ask them to describe the route and use the directions to program the robot. Once pupils are familiar with programmable toys, integrate their use into some of the free-flow activities.

Lesson 4: Investigating our local area

In the final focus lesson, tell pupils that they are to investigate 'our local area' and use maps to record what they find. Display a simple pictorial map of the local park showing, e.g. a wooded area, a field, a pond and pathways (and any other relevant features) on the IWB and give pupils copies of the same map. Visit the park and invite small groups of pupils to explore different areas, recording anything they think is important or significant on their map. They can either draw the feature onto their map or use lines to

match up a picture (shown below the prepared map) to its location. Back in the classroom, use the pupils' maps to discuss what they found out about the local park, what they thought was important and how they recorded their findings. Add pupils' drawings to the IWB map to create a definitive 'final' map. Print it out and display the map prominently, ask parents/carers/visitors to add sticky notes around the map with their response to it.

As part of this unit, pupils are also encouraged to bring into school a hand-drawn plan of a room or outdoor space. Pupils introduce their plans in a 'show and tell' activity; as a class talk about each plan and ask pupils to look for clues as to what is shown. Can they see 'landmarks' such as items of furniture?

Free flow activities

These activities can be introduced as time allows.

Role play area

Ask pupils to imagine they are at the airport waiting to board a flight to X, Y or Z. Encourage them to use the world map and globes to discover what they will be flying over. Will they fly over forests, or oceans, or mountains?

Art and crafts area

Use *The Gruffalo* picture book (Donaldson and Scheffler, 1999) – it is highly likely that your pupils will be familiar with this popular story. Set up toys based around the story on a tablecloth or large play mat that looks like the woods. Invite pupils to design the route of the mouse: Can they place the animals and trees in the correct places to create the journey the mouse follows until it reaches the Gruffalo?

Transport area

Use a large road play map and encourage pupils to drive the toy vehicles on different routes.

Outdoor area

Pupils can use chalk to draw maps of the outdoor area on the ground. A teaching assistant can guide them through the process. For example, they can ask pupils about the location of key landmarks such as 'where is the sandpit going to go?', and/or ask pupils to think about the distance between items. Model the use of locational language such as 'next to', 'opposite', 'near' and 'far'.

Pirate table or tuff tray

Create a small pirate island on the tray or table, add notable landmarks (e.g. palm trees, volcano, pirate ship, treasure chest). Create laminated treasure maps showing the island, including all the landmarks. If used as a focus activity, hide the treasure and, using a dry-wipe pen, mark the spot with an X on the laminated maps. Invite

pupils to find the treasure on the island using the map. Some pupils may go further by hiding the treasure and marking X on the map themselves for others to find.

References

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- Wiegand, P. (2006) *Learning and Teaching with Maps*. Abingdon: Routledge.
- URLs visited 29/3/23



Web Resources

Download the medium-term plan: <https://www.geography.org.uk/Journals/Primary-Geography>

Early Childhood Maths Group spatial reasoning resources: <https://earlymaths.org/spatial-reasoning/>

Owens et al. (2022) 'Geography in the early years: guidance for doing wonderful and effective geography with young pupils' <https://portal.geography.org.uk/journal/view/J003131> (requires login).

Terrapin: <https://www.terrapinlogo.com/mat-downloads.html>

Tim's video on the planned intent, implementation and impact: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WLSbqWdQpDQ>

Tim wrote an assignment about the intent, implementation and impact of a unit of work that introduced maps to the Early Years while studying at the University of Roehampton, London, in 2021–22. He now teaches a reception class in Croydon. Emily is a Senior Lecturer in Primary Initial Teacher Education at the University of Roehampton.