

Toponymy : the language of place names

A workshop to explore the names of local towns

This session plan was produced for English Language Day 2010 for a visit to Andover Museum by Vigo Junior School KS2 (Year 5). It can be adapted for use at a local museum, archives, local studies centre or heritage centre. This is a led session, requiring the skills and knowledge of museum/archive staff, but can be adapted to be shorter.

Session time : 2 hours approx

Location : Local museum/archives/local studies centre/heritage centre with staff able to explain collections/displays and a meeting room with capacity for the entire group

Resources required:

Old Maps: old maps of the area, white gloves

Local Icons: clipboards, worksheets and pencils

Toponymy Research: Toponymy List (to be made locally - local place-name information for these lists available at the Institute for Name-Studies at <http://www.nottingham.ac.uk/~aezins//kepnp.php>), place-name-lists, extra resources (e.g. OS map, Google image)

Map Making: cardboard grids, A1 sugar paper (1 per 4/5 pupils), metre rulers (1 per 4/5 pupils), grey marker pens

Outcomes: using research skills, observational drawing, introduction to historical maps and caring for them, creative work using prompts

Skills and links: Geography, Literacy, Art, group working skills, observational skills, applying knowledge, creativity

Session timings:

- Introduction (10 minutes)
- Old Maps/Local Icons (25 minutes)
- Local Icons/Old Maps (25 minutes)
- Toponymy Research (20 minutes)
- Map Making (40 minutes)
- Plenary and feedback (if time at end)

The session could be divided into 2 x 1-hour activities

- (1) a visit to a local museum/archives (Old Maps and Local Icons)
- (2) follow-up to be completed at school (Toponymy Research and Map Making)

Session plan

Intro to site, H&S and topic - (10 minutes max)

Use a local place name (e.g. 'Andover) to introduce history of names and local features (e.g. Andoverf has been called 'Andeferas' and 'Andeferan'. These very old English names probably refer to the rivers that flow through the town which has always had water mills right from Roman times. 'Town Mill' is a pub today)

Set the group their challenge of investigating local place names. This is called 'toponymy'.

Old Maps / Local Icons - split class into 2 - (25 minutes per rotation)

Old Maps

The group stays in the meeting room and looks at maps from the collection with a member of staff. Discuss care of collections, and investigate how old maps look different from modern ones. Think about the history of the local area and how this has been mapped throughout time. Key features: maps as tributes to wealthy landowners, different ways of mapping, local landmarks that have remained constant, use of icons on the maps.

Local Icons

Pupils are given clipboards, pencils and Local Icons worksheet. In the display galleries, the pupils find names of local villages/towns and try to think of what those place names mean. They look for objects/pictures in the displays associated with villages/towns in the area and sketch these on their worksheet. These will be used later.

Toponymy Research - in meeting room. Split whole class into groups of 4/5 – (20 minutes)

Pupils are given the Toponymy List* of local place names and their meanings. Session leader explains that this is like a dictionary which explains place names (e.g. '-ton', '-shaw'). Other resources to distribute could include a Google image of the area, a local road map and a local OS map. Each group is given a different place-name-list of local village/town names which appear on the Toponymy List and tasked to find out as much as they can (e.g. what does the name mean? Is it near a feature on the maps/image such as a road/river? Pupils are encouraged to add their own information as well (e.g. my uncle lives there, I once played football there. There's a big hill there. I went fishing there). Groups compile as much info as possible.

Map Making – (40 minutes)

Groups are given A1 sheets (plus pens, rulers, pencils, scissors, pritt sticks). Cardboard grids are laid across the sheet and the grid is copied to the sheet below using the ruler. Groups have to look at all the information gathered on their place names. They then have to create their own imagination map to include all the places. They must illustrate the map to show the features of the name. Maps could include contemporary map symbols as well as old fashioned illustrations and the 'icons' they sketched earlier.

If time – groups present their maps to the rest of the class. Pupils could try and invent new words using the word segments in the Toponymy List.

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