

Why teach about planet Earth?



Earth is our home

Earth is our home in space, a unique speck in the unimaginably vast cosmos and the only planet in our solar system capable of supporting life as we know it. This little blue planet provides us with all our needs as a species: air to breathe, water to drink, food to eat and an amazing range of resources for clothing, shelter, warmth and succour. However, a good deal of human activity that is concerned with the development and use of these

natural resources also threatens our continued existence on this planet. Understanding how, at the simplest level, Earth provides for our needs today and how our actions influence its future bounty (for good and bad), can help young children begin to make informed decisions about the way they live their lives now and in future contexts.

Awe and wonder

Awe and wonder are fantastic hooks for learning, stimulating pupils' natural curiosity to want to know more. Children today are more likely to spend time on virtual exploration of the world than they previously did, and while virtual learning has a role to play, first-hand experience is vital as it has the power to make all the senses come alive. Taking the time to appreciate the world will stir the imagination of young learners.

Learning about our planet helps us to think about sustainable futures

Being 'wowed' by the power and beauty of Earth in all its diversity from a young age helps pupils realise that our planet is special and worth protecting. This book will enable pupils to appreciate the physical and human world outside their immediate



experiences, and give them a greater sense of how they fit into the bigger picture. Belonging to something helps instil feelings of responsibility, while making connections between global events and our everyday lives helps us to think about 'what if?' scenarios. This title provides pupils with the beginnings of a geographical vocabulary so they can start to discuss ideas and issues in informed ways.

We live in an interconnected world

Geography helps explain how we are connected to the world. Our daily activities impact on other people's lives and environments as do other people's activities on ours. Young children should have opportunities to develop their awareness of the wider world at

Around four fifths of children play video/computer games at least a few times a week on their own or with friends (79%), with 37% playing every day (Ipsos MORI, 2009, p. 2).

Studies show that, almost to a person, conservationists or any adults with environmental awareness had some transcendent experience in nature when they were children (Charles *et al.*, 2009, p. 14).

an early age and deepen this over time, rather than purely starting local and venturing into the global domain when they are older. These lessons will help pupils begin to make global connections and develop a sense of how the world works.

References and further reading

Charles, C., Louv, R., Bodner, L., Guns, B. and Stahl, D. (2009) 'Children and nature 2009: a report on the movement to reconnect children to the natural world.' Available at www.childrenandnature.org/downloads/CNNMovement2009.pdf (last accessed 24 August 2010).

Ipsos MORI (2009) 'Futurelab gaming in families survey analysis'. Available at www.futurelab.org.uk/resources/documents/project_reports/becta/Gaming_in_Families_survey_analysis.pdf (last accessed 24 August 2010).

NASA (2007) 'World book at NASA'. Available online at www.nasa.gov/worldbook/earth_worldbook.html (last accessed 24 August 2010).

Prior and future learning

The book is aimed at years 1, 2 and 3 but can be adapted for use with other age groups.

Prior learning

Through their work in the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) pupils should have used globes and looked at, or drawn, simple maps. They would have been introduced to an idea of the wider world through storybooks, role play and artefacts.

Pupils would have had ample opportunity for outdoor exploration and play. They have developed a basic vocabulary to help them recognise and name some local environmental features. They should be able to express simple views about their surroundings.

Pupils will have been supported to ask simple questions about their everyday lives, recognising some of the basic things needed to support life such as food, water and shelter. They will have been able to offer answers to some questions using given resources and careful scaffolding.

Earth is a small planet in the vastness of space. It is one of nine planets that travel through space around the sun. The sun is a star – one of billions of stars that make up a galaxy called the Milky Way. The Milky Way and as many as 100 billion other galaxies make up the universe. (NASA, 2007)

Future learning

From years 1–6, pupils are unlikely to experience structured support in outdoor settings on a daily basis yet ongoing familiarity with the outdoor environment is necessary to develop and consolidate environmental vocabulary. Fieldwork in the school grounds and the immediate school surroundings is an integral part of this in years 1 and 2, while from years 3 to 6 pupils should have opportunities to explore the wider locality and also to travel further afield, maybe on a residential trip.

By the end of year 6, pupils should be able to apply their geographical understanding at different scales and in different parts of the world. They should be able to explain their own and others' views on environmental change and describe how geographical processes affect different places and the lives of people living there. For example, pupils might examine in more detail how food and water supply and distribution is affected by a range of geographical factors, and discuss current and future effects on their own and others' lives. They might explore in more detail how sustainable energy solutions are affected by geographical location and how people's consumption of resources links to human and environmental wellbeing.