How do we make sense of a place?

CPD activity

Places are complex: distant ones no less so than places which are familiar to us. This activity invites teachers to explore their own responses to places which have left a profound impact on them.

• Firstly, teachers will need a minute or two to identify a place which is significant to them.

• Placing one of their hands on a sheet of A4 paper, with fingers spread and the middle finger touching the top edge, they draw around it.

• They then turn the sheet of paper around, and draw a tree growing from the ‘roots’ made by their fingers. The tree represents the place itself.

• Each finger is labelled, representing a different dimension of people’s response to the place: emotional, previous experience, intellectual, people & perspectives, a ‘thumb’ for any other key elements.

• Participants think about what will go into each finger, and share their thoughts with a partner.

• During feedback, they might suggest alternative labels for the fingers.

Teachers then use the fingers as a checklist for their teaching, for example:

• Emotional response – how are we enabling children to make an empathetic and personal connection to the place?

• Previous experience – what spaces are we offering children to share prior knowledge of this place, or experiences of other places which offer insights?

• Intellectual response – how will we help children think critically about what they are discovering and experiencing? To question? To consider questions about fact and opinion in information sources?

• People and perspectives – are we offering a broad range of perspectives from and about the place, including from people who live there?

• What is missing? – what else will children need or want to learn?