Learning the Landscape through Language

RESOURCE SHEET: SHROPSHIRE RIVERS

This resource pack combines aspects of English (language), History, Geography, Art and Design, Design and Technology and Science, using medieval place-names to understand both Shropshire's rivers and settlement alongside rivers. Place-names are one of the earliest pieces of evidence for the British landscape, and they can tell us a great deal about what early communities considered to be important. The exercises outlined below will help students to explore the human geography of Shropshire's rivers, and to think about human interactions with and responses to major landscape features, like rivers.

This pack includes a set of exercises, a map of an unnamed landscape (map one), a PDF file on places and names, a PDF file on Shropshire rivers, a map of Shropshire (map two), a set of icons to use with map two, and a set of Snap cards. These exercises are suitable for the whole class to do together, or for children to work on in groups. You will need a printed copy of map one for each group. You will also need to print the icons for use with map two. You will also need one printed copy of map two.

Exercise one – part one

Begin with everyone together as a group to think about places and their names. On a screen, show the children the 'places and their names' PDF. This provides images of a mountain, a river, a forest, a city and a village. Ask the children if they can think of any examples of these features – what are their names? For example:

- Mountains: Everest, Snowdon, the Wrekin, the Long Mynd
- Rivers: the Severn, the Rio Grande, the Teme, the Thames, the Onny
- Forests: the Amazon, Sherwood Forest, Wyre Forest
- Cities: New York, London, Shrewsbury, Paris, Cardiff, Worcester
- Villages: Norbury, Highley, Snailbeach, Kinlet

Explain that these names are called place-names. Everyone is going to think about place-names, how they were created, and why they might be useful. Spend some time thinking about the names that the children have called out during this exercise. In particular, think about:

- How old do you think these names are (Quite new? Hundreds of years old? Older?)
- Who decided to use these names? (The people living there/nearby? People in authority, like the government, kings or queens? Explorers? New settlers?)

Exercise one – part two

Again, begin with everyone together in a group, and show the 'Shropshire Rivers' PowerPoint slides/PDF. This shows three pictures: Shrewsbury, the M54 motorway and the River Severn. Using the timeline provided, ask the children to move the images into the right position on the timeline. Before they begin, talk about the three different 'dates' on the timeline. Which of the features is likely to be the earliest? Which one the latest? Ask the children to justify their choices (e.g. why do

you think the River Severn is millions of years old?). Now look at the next slide 'Man-made or natural?' Ask the children to think about how each of these features was created, and whether they were constructed by human or natural processes. The final slide helps us to think about how we date things. Dating features that were constructed by humans is much easier for us. We can use lots of evidence to date man-made features (e.g. documents, archaeology).

Exercise two – part one

We're now going to think about rivers, and in particular, the River Severn. Because we know that the River Severn is very, very old, we will begin by thinking about who lived in Britain in the past, and what languages they spoke. The next slide includes another timeline, indicating when different people were living or arrived in Britain. To remind the children which are the earliest/latest ends of the timeline, ask them to remember which were the earliest (River Severn) and latest (M54 motorway) features.

Using a process of deduction, the children should be able to work out which group arrived at which time, and they can move the icons to the right date. Once the icons are in the right position, ask the children to think about the different languages that all these people used. All of these languages have influenced the English language that we all speak and write in today. The next slides show us that the earliest known name for the River Severn was British, and that this name was passed on to the Romans, and then to the Anglo-Saxons.

The next slide shows a map of Shropshire's main rivers, alongside the meaning of each of their names. The earliest of the names are British (and possibly Welsh, as the British language developed into Welsh). Some of the rivers were re-named by the Anglo-Saxons in their language, Old English. Ask the children to think about these names. What sort of words are used to describe these rivers? Quite often, adjectives have been used. Think about what some of these names mean – for example, what does 'strong, powerful' mean in the context of a river (perhaps a river with a strong current, or fast flowing?). You could perhaps ask the children to describe what they think each of these rivers was like using the river-names (bear in mind that some of the rivers may not now resemble their original description for a variety of reasons – straightening, draining, silting etc.). You may also like to come up with a set of words that would describe local rivers and watercourses (this could be part of a field-trip).

Optional exercise

Ask the children to think about the transmission of language, and in particular the river-name 'Severn'. Ask them to write their own interpretation (in the form of a story or poem) of how the name came to be transmitted between the Britons and the Anglo-Saxons. They may be inspired by the medieval legend of the princess Sabrina, or by more practical aspects of the inter-communication between the Britons and the Anglo-Saxons. Some things to consider might include:

- How did they communicate together?
- Did they learn each other's language?
- Were some pieces of information (like the name of the river) very important, and if so, why?

Exercise two – part two

Begin (either as a group or individually) by looking at the slide 'Why are rivers important in the past?'. This slide shows a number of icons, alongside corresponding words. Ask the children to pair up each word with its relevant icon. After they have completed this exercise, to reinforce the connections between the words and the images, play a game of Snap using the words and the icons. The game can be played in one of two ways (perhaps for younger and older groups):

- Match the words together, and the icons together (e.g. 'water' + 'water')
- Match each word with its corresponding icon (e.g. 'water' + the image of the water bottle)

Exercise three – part one

Begin with the slide 'Rivers and World Cities'. Ask the children to look at each of these cities alongside the rivers. Now look at the next two slides (Shrewsbury and Bridgnorth). Each slide shows two different maps of each town, several hundred years apart. Ask the children to look at the maps (you could perhaps split the class into two groups, and ask each group to look at one set of maps).What do they notice about each town (they have expanded). The PowerPoint version of

these slides are animated, and if you now click on each of them, the area shown within the earliest maps is now highlighted on each of the modern OS maps (to obtain this resource as a PowerPoint slide, please contact us at namestudies@exmail.nottingham.ac.uk).

Both these settlements expanded alongside the River Severn. Think again about the 'world cities'. Ask the children whether they think that these cities were always this big. Return once again to the words and icons from Exercise Two (part two). Do these help us to think about why all these cities expanded? Think especially about Shrewsbury and Bridgnorth.

Exercise three – part two

Using the slide 'Anglo-Saxons and the River Severn', now think about how the Anglo-Saxons visualised the River Severn. Have the images and words from exercise two (part two) handy, so that the children can think about why each of these settlements might have been important.

Look at the settlement names with the children, and ask them (where possible) to place a relevant image next to a settlement site. For example:

Settlement	Detail	Category	Image
Shrewsbury	In the loop of the river, in a defensible site, with extensive views	Protection and defence	Castle
Emstrey	On an island	Protection and defence	Castle
Melverley	The site of a mill and a ford	Water-power AND Travel	Water-mill AND Boat
Montford Bridge	A site that first had a ford, which was replaced by a bridge	Travel	Boat

Bridgnorth	The site of a medieval bridge	Travel	Boat
Danesford	The site of a ford	Travel	Boat
Quatford	The site of a ford	Travel	Boat

What do these connections tell us about the importance of the river to the Anglo-Saxons? You could think about the following aspects:

- There are lots of references to crossing the river, at fords and bridges. This tells us that people travelled and communicated with each other. You might want to think about what they were travelling for (trade, government, meetings etc.). See also the slide that pictures a Shropshire ford – you might want to think about what it would have been like to cross a river or stream using a ford (wet!).
- How does the river help to provide protection and defence? Look carefully at how the River Severn loops around the city of Shrewsbury – it would have been a good site from which to look up and down the river, to see who was coming, especially as the earliest settlement was situated on a hill. It also meant that people could only enter the city on land from one side, because the river protected the rest of the settlement. Emstrey would originally have looked like an island at the edge of the River Severn. This would have been a good place to build an important church, and to afford it some protection.

There are some more names on our map that we haven't looked at yet. We'll look at these as part of Exercise four.

Exercise four

For this, you will need the map of Anglo-Saxon settlements, some game counters (you can print these out from the slide, which lists three boys names and three girls names), the game cards and a dice. Split the children into groups, or they can play individually. The idea of the game is to travel along the River Severn as an Anglo-Saxon from settlement-to-settlement. Everyone starts just above Melverley, travelling in the direction of the flow of the river (so, if the first team rolls a one, they will land on Melverley and so on). Take it in turns to roll the dice, and move along the river. For each settlement that is landed upon, you will need to read and act on the appropriate card! When playing, if one go results in being moved on to another settlement, that is the end of your turn and there is no need to read another card during this turn. The winning team is the first team to reach Quatford.

The game highlights some of the additional things that the Anglo-Saxons noticed about the River Severn – that in places, it was liable to quite extensive flooding (Buildwas); and that some places were excessively wet (Buildwas, Colemore Green). The name Mountford Bridge indicates that there was a ford there before the bridge was built, suggesting an advance in technology.

It also emphasises that the place-names acted as a kind of 'map' for the Anglo-Saxons. So, for example, whilst the name Danesford would have told people that it was a place at which they could cross the river, they also knew that they might have to hunt around to find the 'hidden' ford. A place-name like Buildwas would also have alerted Anglo-Saxon travellers to the fact that they might occasionally get caught in floods there!

Exercise five

Using the map of River Severn settlement as a guide (from Melverley to Quatford), ask the children to design and illustrate a map of this section of the river as the Anglo-Saxons would have seen it. This will include drawing (or constructing as a 3D model) a bridge at Bridgnorth, a mill at Melverley, and so on. Some thought will need to be given as to how to represent the flooding at Buildwas and the wet moor at Colemore.

These exercises support the following aspects of the National Curriculum for Key Stage 2:

Geography

- Developing competence in the skills needed to interpret maps
- Communicating geographical information
- Describing key aspects of human geography
- Identify key topographical features; understand how these have changed over time

History

- Understanding Britain's settlement by the Anglo-Saxons
- Undertaking a local history study
- Understanding how knowledge of the past is constructed from a range of sources (including place-names)

English

- Develop pupils' spoken language, reading, writing and vocabulary
- Make links between known and new vocabulary and discuss the shades of meaning in similar words
- Plan writing by discussing and recording ideas
- Writing (composition): note and develop ideas, drawing on research where necessary
- Draft and write by selecting appropriate grammar and vocabulary, understanding how such choices can change and enhance meaning
- Draft and write by describing settings, characters and atmosphere
- Draft and write by organising paragraphs around a theme

Science

- Observe phenomena, looking more closely at the natural and human-constructed world around them
- Asking relevant questions and using different types of scientific enquiries to answer them
- Compare and group things together
- Use logical reasoning

Art and Design

- Use a range of materials creatively to design and make products
- Use drawing, painting and sculpture to develop and share ideas, experiences and imagination
- Develop a wide range of art and design techniques in using colour, pattern, texture, line, shape, form and space

<u>Design and Technology</u>

- Design purposeful, functional, appealing products for themselves and other users based on design criteria
- Select from and use a range of tools and equipment to perform practical tasks
- Select from and use a wide range of materials and components, including construction materials, textiles and ingredients, according to their characteristics
- Build structures, exploring how they can be made stronger, stiffer and more stable