

Teacher's notes

Maps as Stories, Stories as Maps

Lesson aims

Develop students thinking about maps as tools for storytelling rather than just a way to direct a physical journey.

Students learn how to use rich descriptions as well as powerful blank spaces in their creative writing.

Lesson objectives

Students produce a map of their favourite open space or park and use that map to compose a poem.

Resources

Whiteboard

'**The Silent Park**' by Vivian Usherwood, 1972 © Centerprise Trust

Pens, Highlighters & Paper

Students should be given access to a grid map like Google Maps or an Ordnance Survey map (for their home area)

Example of children's maps, from Talking Time and Place, courtesy of HEC/Maggie Hewitt

To learn more about Centerprise Young Writers visit:

<https://www.ahackneyautobiography.org.uk/trails/education/1>

<https://www.ahackneyautobiography.org.uk/stories/hackney-writers>

Starter activity

General class discussion.

Activity 1:

Background: Vivian Usherwood was a 12 year old boy living near the River Lea in Hackney when he wrote the poem '**The Silent Park**'. Vivian's poetry collection was read by thousands of people after it was published by Centerprise in 1972.

Show Vivian's picture before starting the activity, to help provide some context. At the end of the activity students should have identified the blank space in Vivian's poem. The thing Vivian is frightened of is 'nothing' but it changes everything. It inspires the reader to imagine what is around the words.

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Activity 2:

(See page 3 for table to support exercise)

These quotes might help to provide some context for the exercise. First discuss the concept of maps as more than just a way to take a traveller from here to there. They can also form the basis of a story; a way to track the emotional along with the physical journey.

- *"So authoritative is the grid, that it has all but eliminated our sense of map-as-story."* – **Robert Mcfarlane**
- *"The writer is an explorer. Every step is an advance into a new land."* – **Ralph Waldo Emerson**
- *"To ask for a map, is to say, 'Tell me a story.'"* – **Peter Turchi**
- *"No map can show everything... Could it, it would no more reproduce the world, without the map, we already have. It is only selection from the world's overwhelming richness that justifies the map."* – **Denis Wood**

Activity 3:

Make sure the questions are projected on the whiteboard for anyone who might miss a question during the visualisation activity.

Activity 4:

Before starting their writing exercise it will be useful to have some discussion on the idea of blank spaces in works of fiction or poetry.

Students should be encouraged to think about blank spaces on the maps and think about what has been left out and why. Like a map every story or poem contains blank spaces. What things do people do every day that their favourite works of fiction leave out? What about horror films which keep the monster hidden from view? Like in a magic trick, the reader is persuaded that the world of the poem is full despite everything that is missing.

Sometimes a blank space is powerful. However, sometimes a blank space can have a weaken the writing; it can feel like a hole. For example, when a character has no thoughts or feelings, he or she bores us.

Plenary

Students should recap and evaluate the session through a set of questions and written responses.

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Activity 2: Note down similarities and differences between the maps.

Similarities		Differences	
Example map	Student map	Example map	Student map

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'The Silent Park' by Vivian Usherwood, 1980 © Centerprise Trust Ltd

The Silent Park

The park is silent!
There is no one about
The swings are not moving
The dogs are laying quiet
The birds are sleeping
And the park is dark
No one dares to enter
They're scared of nothing
Only the trees and wind in the distance
Grass is everywhere
Only me, no one else
I am scared
Trembling
I quicken my stride as I go home
The echoes make me cold
Cold as a doughnut.

Grumbling Mother

Grumbling, grumbling, she is.
She grumbles night and day.
Now I am there I wish I was here.
Wherever you go, grumbling is with you.
You can't get away.
But I don't take any notice of
Grumbling Mother.

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Student's map:

Fabbiha's way to school, courtesy of HEC/ Maggie Hewit



Teacher's notes

Student's map:

Frazer's way to school, courtesy of HEC/ Maggie Hewit

