

Title: **Making meaningful geographical connections in the company of pigeons.**

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## **Making meaningful geographical connections in the company of pigeons.**

### **Introduction**

Getting to know the world around us is about being present in places by looking, knowing and wondering. Attending to place is a powerful pedagogy, which encourages embodied, sensory encounters that foster different ways of seeing and understanding our world. A 'pedagogy of attention' promotes close noticing, builds geographical confidence, re-imagines place relationships, and engages learners in eco-playful experiences.

Attention fosters geographical wisdom: of the local and the global; of the familiar and not so familiar; and of cognitive and emotional dimensions. This approach involves children in thinking, enquiring and imagining around key concepts of significant spaces and places, scale, processes, interdependence, and spatial and environmental change. The development of deep wisdom is playful. Geography can be playfully explored with pigeons.

### **Learning in the company of pigeons**

Learners, young and not-so-young, appreciate a companion to share their geographical explorations. Contextualising learning through characterisation is an opportunity to brighten and (re)animate the world. A character, such as a pigeon, has the potential to:

- connect children and teachers with their local place
- personalise children's geographic encounters
- provide contexts for lively, spirited enquiry
- develop alternative perspectives and offers a different view
- enhance children's observation skills as they notice clues, signs, symbols, features and patterns.

Meet 'Pigeon Steve'. He made his first public appearance in a workshop at the Geographical Association Conference at the University of Manchester in Spring 2016.



Figure 1 Pigeon Steve brightens the world

### **Connecting pigeons and geography**

A pigeon has local and world knowledge and therefore can be a friend to the primary geographer, nurturing 'curiosity and fascination about the world and its people' (DfE , 2013). Pigeons are special:

- Pigeons have local wisdom and know places
- Pigeons know the best locations to stop for food, to shelter, to roost
- Pigeons tend to congregate in places of geographical significance
- Pigeons have adopted urban spaces all around the world.

We seek to tap into their knowledge. They are an accessible, all year round companion to the geographical enquirer. Pigeon geography is light-hearted and cheerful; it is also scholarly and offers considerable possibilities as a context for geography in the National Curriculum.

### **Pigeon geography in the National Curriculum**

For the creative curriculum maker pigeon geography has rich potential as a catalyst for building locational and place knowledge, making sense of human and physical features, and understanding complex processes. Pigeon geography also encourages engagement and curiosity in fieldwork as children collect, analyse and communicate responses to places through playful fieldwork. Resources such as photographs, maps and globes from a pigeon's eye view can focus geographical attention. Media such as journals, sketches and other personal narratives from a learner's eye view can evidence children's ways of knowing the world.

The following are examples of geographical enquiries, as starting points for classroom activities. These can be personalised for your locality and the specific needs of your children.

#### **Activity 1: A local geographical enquiry**

Create a photopack. This could be prepared for the children, or with the children. Each photograph shows a significant feature of the locality, such as a bridge, a road junction, street furniture, land use, buildings, signs and symbols, or industry. Each photograph also features a pigeon companion, perched helpfully to draw attention to the feature. Unless you can train a local bird to pose appropriately, you might use a cardboard cut-out image!



*Figure 2: An example from a photopack.  
Winchester – home of #pigeongeography*

This is a good opportunity for geographical conversation.

- Where is this place?
- What is it like?
- What would you see, hear, feel, smell, taste in this place?
- How does this place make you feel?
- What are the human features of this place?
- What are the physical features of this place?
- How did this place get like this?
- How is this place connected to other places?
- How is this place changing?
- What will this place be like in the future?
- How could this place be improved?

A photo pack could be created for children in the Early Years, posing the question, 'Where is Pigeon today?' This could encourage the children to use prepositional and geographical vocabulary, for example, 'Pigeon Steve is by the river', 'Pigeon Steve is next to the statue'.



**Figure 3 Where is Pigeon?**



**Figure 4 Where is Pigeon?**

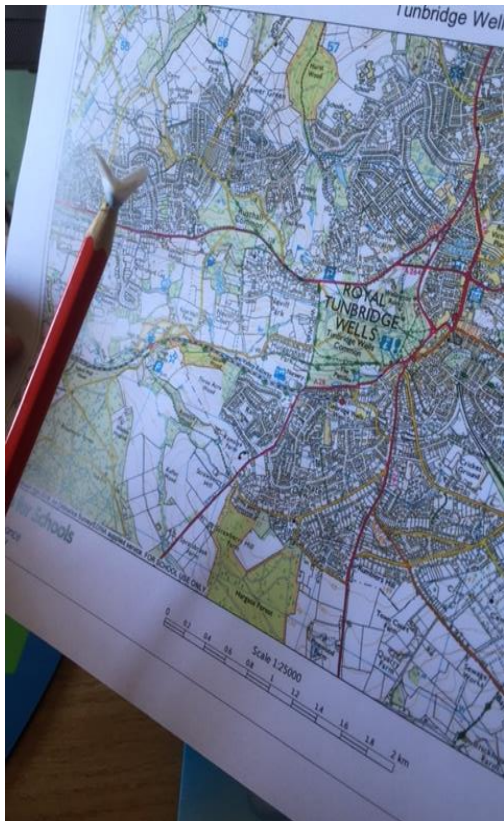
Below, are a series of ideas to illustrate how this activity can be personalised to your place and practice:

- Take a local walk around your place; become a pigeon spotter. Where do pigeons 'hang out'?
- Create your own trail in the company of a pigeon. Identify significant places and key features around the local area.
- Use the photographs to make a mini journal of a pigeon's journey around your place – record colours, textures, sights, routes etc.
- Encourage the children to take photographs of pigeons in their back garden, in the town, on holiday etc.- you will soon build a flock of photographs. Locate on a map where these photographs were taken.
- You may wish to provide an audience for your work by posting on Twitter to #pigeongeography and tag @Attention2place.

### **Activity 2: A pigeon's eye view**

Top your pencil with a pigeon. This could be a paper cut-out or small model. 'Fly' over the map and talk about the human and physical features of the landscape below.

- What would pigeons see if they flew over this map?
- What are the significant features of this place?
- Where might a pigeon like to stop to interact with humans, to feed, roost, nest, and visit?



**Figure 5** A pigeon's eye view

**Activity 3: Travelling the globe in the company of pigeon puppets**

This activity promotes place knowledge. Make a pigeon finger puppet (template available on GA website). It would be advisable to model this yourself with a large globe. Ask your children to imagine they are 'holding' the Earth in their outstretched arms. Model 'flying' the finger puppet around the world. Use your pigeon puppet to explore the globe and introduce geographical terminology. An initial script for the teacher is shown as Figure 6. This is an opportunity to share key National Curriculum knowledge. This activity is valuable for all children and could be repeated throughout the primary phase to aid progression. It is particularly helpful to support Key Stage 2 children and check their understanding of terms such as Equator, Northern Hemisphere, Southern Hemisphere, the Tropics of Cancer and Capricorn, the Arctic and Antarctic Circles.

**Figure 6:** A suggested script for Activity 3

You might also create flights over a floor map or atlas, as in Figure 7. The children may wish to personalise their journeys by writing their own scripts.





**Figure 7: Activity 3**

#### **Activity 4: Asking geographical questions**

This activity helps children to view the world from a different perspective. The children might like to consider aspects of life where a pigeon would have local expertise. Encourage the children to devise questions they might pose to their pigeon companions about their neighbourhood. They might consider:

- What local knowledge might pigeons possess?
- Where do people snack?
- What's the best place for picnic scraps?
- Where are the flat, open spots, good for ball games?
- Where are the warm spots, windy spots etc.?
- Where are the sheltered spots?
- Where do people play?
- Where are the best ledges and vantage points?
- What places should be avoided?

#### **Pigeons in Practice: Pigeon Search and Rescue**

A Camden school engaged in Pigeon Geography through a geographical enquiry. They urged their children to help lost pigeons in a story scenario. A teacher suggested that several pigeons were missing and had not been home for tea. Their parents were getting desperate, particularly about Patience as she had never been away from home for more than one night in her life. The mother was so worried her feathers were falling out. The Pigeon Police asked the children for help finding these cheeky chirpers! They set about their investigations.

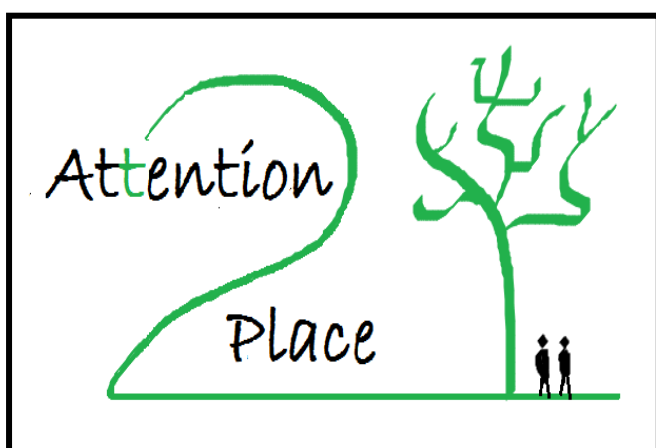


### **Taking flight with Pigeon Geography**

Pigeons are extraordinarily knowledgeable problem solvers. And so are children. So what have you been waiting for? Dive in, take off, explore with a different view. You will be amazed how often you are in the company of pigeons, whether in a town or in the countryside. You might spot a feathered friend, watching from a wall, viewing from a tree, gazing from a rooftop or strolling along a pavement. You might spot a sign, or calling card, a feather, or the chaos of a nest. So, join in the new phenomenon that is #pigeongeography. Next time you meet a pigeon, ask them to share their wisdom with you. Ruffle a few feathers ... there's wisdom in pigeon geography!

*Sharon and Helen are Senior Lecturers in Teacher Education at the University of Winchester. They research place attention and responsiveness, sharing ideas for learning, teaching and connecting children to environments. They thank all the participants of Workshop 41 and Trisha Kernan and the children of Netley Primary, Camden, London.*

Add LOGO @Attention2place.



### **References and further resources**

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- DigiMaps for Schools  
<https://www.ordnancesurvey.co.uk/education-research/maps-for-schools/digimap-for-schools.html>
- Pigeon Air Patrol  
<http://pigeonairpatrol.com/>



INSERT at some point Figure x Pigeon Fact File

- *There are over 300 different species of pigeon*
- *Pigeons offer great variety in plumage patterns*
- *Pigeons can fly very fast, some at 50 miles per hour*
- *Pigeons are renowned for their amazing navigational abilities*
- *Pigeons also have very strong 'homing instincts'*
- *Pigeons are very clean in their habits*
- *Pigeons are highly sociable*
- *Pigeons have charismatic personalities and won medals as war heroes*
- *Pigeons have spiritual significance for many religions*
- *Pigeons are mysterious, complex and highly intelligent creatures.*

*Figure 6*

**Travelling the globe in the company of pigeons**

Pick up the Earth.

Feel the spherical shape.

Let's go on a journey and make our pigeons take flight.

Fly North to the North Pole – hesitate a while – see the ice / feel the cold / what do you see?

Fly South to the South Pole – hesitate, visit the penguins.

Fly back to the middle / girth/ to the Equator – fly round – take this line of latitude, x1000s of miles

What countries do you fly over?

What might you see?

Fly north, along 0 longitude – through London – the Greenwich Meridian.

What season is it?

**Talk about what you've seen so far.**

Fly to a favourite place – somewhere you've visited or heard about. Pause.

Explore your geographical imaginations – maybe you'll find a place yet to be discovered.

What did you see on the way? What countries did you travel over? Did your pigeon get tired? Did you stop on the way? What did you see? Perhaps there are places you'd like to go back to another day?

**Tell someone about your journey.**

You've had the chance to fly the Earth, to take your pigeon on journeys.

Take a new flight – listen to where the pigeon wishes to go. What does he notice? What does he hear? What does he think about when he sees what's happening on the Earth's surface?

Write a message / whisper a message to your pigeon – what's your message to the Earth?

**Fly your message around the world.**