



Core units: Inquiry and skills

Field and photo sketching – Years 1–4

Field sketching: Teacher notes

In geography, we use field sketches to record information when studying places outside the classroom. They allow students to highlight and annotate the key features of the place being observed. Field and photo sketches can also be used to illustrate students' stories and reports. Older students can scan their images and use them in PowerPoint presentations.

When drawing field sketches, students should not seek to reproduce every element of the place (landscape) being observed. Rather, they should highlight the principal geographical features they observe. Remember also that the sketches are judged on their ability to communicate information rather than their artistic merit.

Drawing field sketches

Field sketches are an effective way of recording observations made during fieldwork – the outside-the-classroom learning experiences that have a geographical focus or intent. Fieldwork may involve a study in the school grounds, in the area immediately surrounding the school, or further afield.

The construction of field sketches involves the following steps:

1. Ask your students to study the place being observed, and select the features to be sketched. It may be helpful to use a viewing frame (a rectangular frame approximately the same shape as the sheet of paper on which the sketch is to be drawn).
2. Using a soft pencil and a blank sheet of paper, students draw a frame the same shape as the scene being sketched.
3. Instruct your students to divide the scene they are going to sketch into three parts:
 - a foreground
 - b middle distance
 - c background.
4. Students sketch in the main features or lines of the scene they are observing. This may include the horizon and other prominent landform features.
5. The students then mark in other prominent features or lines (such as roads, railway lines and rivers). These provide reference points for the addition of more detailed features.
6. Students then add detail if appropriate. The details might include buildings, trees and fences.
7. Shading and colour can be used to highlight the key features of the field sketch. Students should avoid making their sketch too cluttered.
8. Ask students to label the main features shown in their sketch.
9. Students should be encouraged to give their field sketch a heading and annotate the work with the date of observation.
10. To finish the work, the students could frame their sketch with a black felt-tipped pen.

The above process can be modified to take into account the developmental stage of the students.