Forty Minute Fieldwork: Landscape definitions

Key topic areas	Equipment and resources required
• Settlements	Device that can take digital photos
• Sense of place	Compass
• Ecosystems	Map of the survey area
• Regeneration	

Context

The concept of place is central to how geographers work, and being able to define places by understanding their core economic, social and environmental functions and characteristics is a key skill that students can develop during fieldwork. The economic, social and environmental elements that students identify can be compared with each other and woven together to form a narrative where interconnectedness between them defines what is unique about a place.

A definition, or narrative of place has a further role to play. That deeper understanding of a place allows geographers to make better informed decisions about its management. It also means that models and impact assessments can be more accurately used to gauge the effects that changes will have on the characteristics of a place.

Place is often defined primarily through written discourse but this fieldwork exercise uses imagery instead. This can make the process more accessible to younger pupils who may not have yet gained a full geographical vocabulary.

Classroom set up

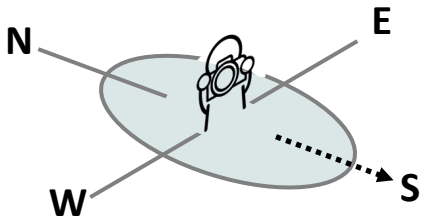
Teachers can introduce the concept of defining a place by first asking students to think about the way that geographers categorise features and characteristics. Students may begin with the physical/human dichotomy before, with teacher support, they may also be able to note the positive/negative categorisation as well as those for economic, social and environmental.

Using a die, students can then carry out an exercise in imaginary landscape definitions. Students roll the die three times and make a note of their landscape prompts as in the table (right). Students then describe a landscape based on the combination of the three prompts. For example, 1-3 -6 could be used to describe a series of undisturbed rock pools that is a habitat to marine biodiversity.

Throw # 1			
1	Coastal area	4	Village / farm
2	River area	5	High street / retail area
3	Housing area	6	Upland area
Throw # 2			
1, 2, 3	Positive	4, 5, 6	Negative
Throw # 3			
1, 2	Economic	3, 4	Social
5, 6	Environmental		

In the field

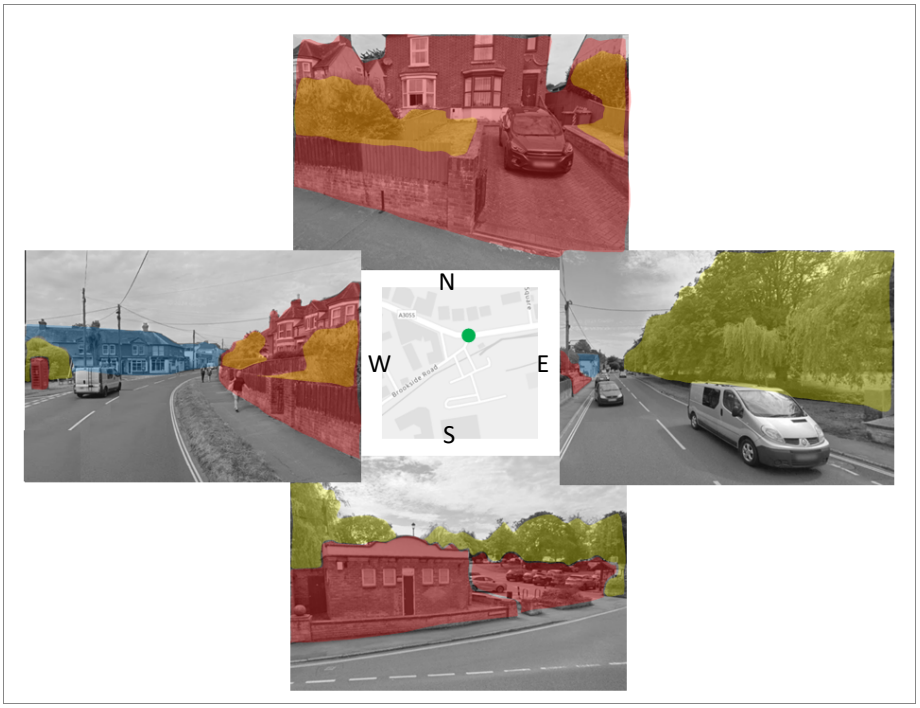
Students are split into small groups and each group stands at a different survey location within the immediate local area of the school. Using a compass, students take for photographs on a digital device, facing north, east, south and west in turn. Students should be careful not to align their photo with the features around them like roads or hedgerows but instead align with the cardinal directions. The group should note on a map of the local area where they stood to take their photographs.



Suggested data presentation

Each photograph can be digitally manipulated to show how the view is defined. One could change the photograph to be in grayscale before adding shaded layers of different primary colours over the top (digitally) to represent features with economic (blue), social (red) and environmental (yellow) significance.

Any crossover between the categories is then represented by secondary colours e.g. a feature of social and environmental significance would be shaded orange.



These manipulated photos can then be placed on each side of a map of the survey site with them aligned with the correct cardinal direction.

A whole class wall display could be made to show the wider area on a larger map.

Key questions for reflection and analysis

- Which colour/category has the most and least significance at your survey site?
- What does this tell us about the definitions and narratives of this landscape?
- Which aspect of this landscape is most likely to change in the near future and why?
- How might we explain the balance we see between the economic, social and environmental features?
- Why was it important to use the cardinal directions to align our photographs?
- If we had taken the photographs at a different time of day or year, would our results have been the same?
- How else could we have categorised the features we see in our photographs?
- Do our photographs tell us everything about our place? What parts of the definition are missing?

Taking it further

Students could try to find old photographs of their local area that align with the ones that they have taken in the field. They could carry out a similar exercise by shading a photocopy of the photograph. This can open up a discussion about how the landscape definition has or has not changed over time and why that might be.