

Our Fractured Earth

Students' creative use of technology to express their interpretation of the beauty and the terror of our fractured Earth.



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Ben Cotton, a geography teacher from St Katherine's School, an 11–19 school in North Somerset, undertook a project with his Year 9 students in which they created an artefact to reflect and communicate the 'beauty and the terror of our fractured Earth.' He sought to encourage independent learning and develop digital literacy by giving students responsibility for managing the process and choosing from a range of technologies in order to effectively support their work.



The brief was deliberately very open in order to encourage creativity in the use of the digital resources.

- The project objectives were:
- To work collaboratively
 - To explore, analyse and evaluate digital technology
 - To reflect on learning
 - To communicate effectively

The project began with some class discussion about the word 'fractured' during which students began to connect this with the work they had previously been doing around natural disasters, including earthquakes and volcanoes.

Students worked in groups and assigned roles to each member of the team. They were asked to come up with a plan for their project, including defining what information they needed to research and what digital tools they were going to use throughout the project.

They completed internet and book research to gather the resources they needed to create their final piece.

Each lesson ended with a 20 minute session in which students made video learning diaries by asking each other questions such as 'What has worked well today?' 'What could we do differently next time?' The teacher supported this process by asking the class additional questions such as:

"If you've used the internet at all you need to start thinking about how you've used the internet and how you could use it better in the future. Which websites have you used and why did you use them?"
Year 9 teacher

Students were provided with a PC, digital cameras and a video camera as well as arts materials and were allowed to bring in technology from home if they got a permission slip from their parents. They were also encouraged to use any digital technology they might have in their pocket (mobile phones etc) to support them in creating their final piece, to communicate what they had learnt about 'our beautiful and fractured Earth.'

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One group, who called themselves 'World Creative Association' or WCA, chose to apply their existing out-of-school interests to a classroom situation by creating a Lego stop-motion animation representing what it might be like to be in an earthquake. Some groups made models of volcanoes erupting which they then filmed, and others produced short films to music using superimposed text to provide key information about earthquakes.

When one group was asked why they had chosen a particular medium over others, they responded:

"We thought that it's an easier way to get a message across because if you have lots of writing then you're gonna be like 'oh look it's writing I don't really care.' But if it's on a video, you're probably gonna remember it... So you've got something that sticks in your head."

Year 9 student

Students were supported to engage in **critical thinking** both about the relevance of particular information and how to convey their subject knowledge, as well as around the advantages and disadvantages of particular technologies and how they had used them. The teacher supported students to reflect critically on their own learning processes by discussing the way in which the footballer David Beckham improved as a footballer.

"Practice... And then what? Do you know what he used to do? Did he just do a few free kicks and just go 'right that's it?'... He used to, you know, use stats, figures, how many good kicks, how many bad ones, look at his technique, analyse it, try and evaluate himself and try to improve for next time. I think that's what you need to start doing."

Geography teacher



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Successes and next steps

The project involved a strong emphasis on collaboration and creativity. Students reported enjoying the project as well as being able to make connections between different aspects of what they had learnt.

“It’s been good learning how to use new technology you might not have used before and all sorts of stuff. It’s been really good... I really enjoyed the geography thing as well... so learning about volcanoes and then it’s just like putting it all together. And just getting to do this project. We basically just get to do, kind of, anything as long as it’s to do with fractured Earth which is really good.”

Year 9 girl.

The teacher was disappointed that there was not more of a wide variety of technologies used.

“There’s a lot of ‘oh they’re doing that so we’re gonna do that as well.’ So that’s probably one of my disappointments. I wanted them to do blogs and stuff. But they didn’t choose to do that.”

Geography teacher

The teacher could perhaps address this by giving the students a more defined structure in follow-up activities and asking them to use specific technologies to communicate their subject knowledge to defined audiences. They could then consider the advantages and disadvantages of different technologies for this purpose.

