

Learning the Landscape through Language

ANGLO-SAXON SHROPSHIRE

This resource pack combines aspects of English (language), History, Geography, Art and Science, using medieval place-names to understand Shropshire's settlement by the Anglo-Saxons. Place-names are one of the earliest pieces of evidence for Anglo-Saxon settlement, and they can tell us a great deal about what they considered to be important. The exercises outlined below will help students to explore who the Anglo-Saxons were, and to visualise Shropshire as the Anglo-Saxons encountered it. This pack will help students to build a rich picture of the Anglo-Saxons in south Shropshire, allowing them to move beyond a view that prioritises a warrior culture, to consider the importance of a range of themes, including religion, security, subsistence, resources, travel and communications.

This pack includes a set of exercises, a map of an unnamed landscape (map one), a PDF file on places and names, a map of south Shropshire (map two), a set of icons to use with map two, and a set of place-name 'snap' cards. These exercises are suitable for the whole class to do together, or for children to work on in groups. You will need a printed copy of map one for each group. You will also need to print the icons for use with map two. You will also need one printed copy of map two.

Exercise one – part one

Begin with everyone together as a group to think about places and their names. On a screen, show the children the 'places and their names' PDF. This provides images of a mountain, a river, a forest, a city and a village. Ask the children if they can think of any examples of these features – what are their names? For example:

- Mountains: Everest, Snowdon, the Wrekin, the Long Mynd
- Rivers: the Severn, the Rio Grande, the Teme, the Thames
- Forests: the Amazon, Sherwood Forest, Wyre Forest
- Cities: New York, London, Shrewsbury, Paris, Cardiff, Worcester
- Villages: Norbury, Highley, Snailbeach

Explain that these names are called place-names. Everyone is going to think about place-names, how they were created, and why they might be useful. Spend some time thinking about the names that the children have called out during this exercise. In particular, think about:

- How old do you think these names are (Quite new? Hundreds of years old? Older?)
- Who decided to use these names? (The people living there/nearby? People in authority, like the government, kings or queens? Explorers? New settlers?)

Exercise one – part two

Now split the children up into at least two groups. Each group will need a copy of map one, which features an unnamed landscape. This map includes:

- A mountain range
- A river

- Woodland/forest
- A bridge
- A church
- Cows
- Settlements

Each group will follow the same instructions up to the end of part two of this exercise. Now ask the children to imagine they have arrived in a new land, so new that it hasn't yet been named – this is going to be their task! Begin by asking the children to look at map one, and describe the features they can see. If they mention 'houses' or 'trees', for example, ask them for the name of the collective noun for each of these features (e.g. What do we call it when there are lots of houses/trees all clustered together?).

Tell the children that this is their map, and ask them to give names to the features they see. Sample questions might include:

1. What words would you use to describe the mountains (e.g. big, tall, green, jagged)? What about the wood/forest, or the river?
2. There are lots of settlements, and they all look the same. How will you be able to tell one settlement from another? How do we do that today? If you give each village a name, will this help you, do you think? Ask the children to name each of the settlements on the map, and allow them to name the features in any way they like, even if their names don't resemble modern place-names.

Once all of the features have been named, ask the children to imagine that Anglo-Saxon travellers are visiting the land on their map – print out the two Anglo-Saxon people (Edith and Athelstan) from the icons sheet. Ask them to think about how it might have felt to be an Anglo-Saxon arriving in Shropshire for the first time. Ask the children to think about what the Anglo-Saxons might have seen (answers might include, for example, rivers, forests/woods, mountains and hills, fields, houses and villages, perhaps even towns like Wroxeter, roads and paths etc.)

Exercise one – part three

Bring the groups back together with their maps. For this part of the exercise, each group will have an opportunity to play the part of the Anglo-Saxon travellers. You will also need another blank copy of map one (this can be printed out, or projected onto the screen). Take the first group's map, and ask another group to be Edith and Athelstan.

Ask all the groups to think about the following questions:

1. How do we find our way to different places today (e.g. maps, sat nav, road signs, asking for directions)
2. Do you think the Anglo-Saxons had maps? Remind them if necessary that this was a time before paper was used in England, and when very few people could read or write.
3. Without a map, what might help them to find their way around? Answers might include landscape features and settlements.

4. Do you think they might be able to find their way around using the names you created on your map?

Edith and Athelstan have never visited this part of Shropshire before, and so the children who created the map that you are using must help them to find their way around. Using the names created by this group, ask Edith and Athelstan to visit different settlements in turn on their map (so, the group representing Edith and Athelstan will need to guess which village they must visit). Is it easy for them to find the right place? Repeat this exercise for as many times as you need to, to ensure that all of the children's maps have been visited by Edith and Athelstan, alternating the children's roles as necessary.

Next, consider how easy or difficult it was for Edith and Athelstan to find the right places on the map(s). If Edith and Athelstan found it difficult, ask the children if they might want to change any of the names to help them to find their way around. Ask them how they might describe the places to them, using the features on the map (e.g. the village by the mountain 'mountain-village'; the village by the bridge 'bridge-town'; the village with the church; the green mountains; the little forest)?

If necessary, now ask the children to rename their maps in a way that might make it easier for Edith and Athelstan to find their way around.

Exercise two – part one

You will need map two, and the icons for part one of this exercise; and the place-name 'snap' cards for part two.

Now look at map two, which features medieval place-names in south Shropshire that describe places that are very much like the ones on map one. These names were created by the Anglo-Saxons. This map includes:

- Chirbury 'church fort or manor'
- Bridgnorth '[settlement at the] north bridge'
- Acton 'oak settlement'
- Barlow 'barley clearing'
- Bitterley 'butter clearing'
- Clunbury 'fortified settlement on the River Clun'
- Myndtown 'mountain settlement'

Ask the children to match the icons with the settlements on the map. What features did the Anglo-Saxons use to name places in Shropshire? Why do you think they chose these features? Why do you think that these features are important? Here are some things to think about:

- They include important resources, such as wood – this would have been important for building all sorts of things including houses, churches, forts, boats and so on. Mountainous, rocky places were a useful source of stone.
- They tell us something about the importance of religion to the Anglo-Saxons.
- They tell us that the Anglo-Saxons were farmers.

- Bridges would have been very important to the Anglo-Saxons, as there were far fewer of them then. They would have been an important part of the communications infrastructure, and helped people to move around quickly and safely.
- They tell us that landscape features, like rivers and mountains were important. The Anglo-Saxons often travelled by boat along rivers.
- They tell us that some settlements were fortified, meaning that they were surrounded by fences, which helped the people living there to feel safe.

Exercise two – part two

For this exercise, you'll need the place-name 'snap' cards. Print them out and put them in two piles, according to their colour code. Those with green flashes in the top left-hand corner will all need to go in the same pile. Once you've printed the sheets out, cut each 'sign' out separately, so that you end up with 65 cards (18 'green' cards – you can print more of the 'green' cards if you are playing with a large group).

Anglo-Saxon place-names are often made up of two Old English words. Old English was the language spoken by the Anglo-Saxons. Some very common endings are:

- '-ton' as in Acton. This is from the Old English word *tūn*, which generally meant 'settlement' or 'farm'.
- '-bury' as in Shrewsbury and Chirbury. This is from the Old English word *burh*, which generally meant (among other things) 'fortified place'.
- '-ley' as in Bitterley. This is from the Old English word *lēah*, which generally meant 'clearing' – a place where trees had been cleared to make room for a settlement.

These place-name words and their meaning can also be found on the last slide / last page of the PDF, so that you can show this to the children on a screen whilst playing Snap.

There are lots of other words that give us the endings to Anglo-Saxon place-names, but these are three very common ones. This is why you will need more than one of each of these words to play place-name 'snap', so print out plenty of them.

Using the place-name 'snap' cards, play a game with the class to create as many Anglo-Saxon place-names as you can. Shuffle each set of cards separately and create two piles. Children (one or two of them) should take turns at turning over one card from each pile, to see what place-names they can make. At the end, see which names have been created, and talk about which features have been used to create these names. Would Edith and Athelstan have found these names helpful, do you think?

Ask the children to make a note of 'their' place-name to use in exercise three.

Once all of the children have created a place-name, you could perhaps use these for further work (e.g. creating your own Anglo-Saxon map using the place-names and asking the children to draw in the features; or perhaps asking the children to write a short description of what their Anglo-Saxon settlement would have looked like, based on the name they created).

Exercise three, part one

Both exercises in this section focus on the Anglo-Saxon place-names created by the children in the last session.

Create a single class map using all the names created by the children. Ask each child to draw (or use other creative means) 'their' settlement onto the map, using just the first word of their place-name. For example, for the name 'Fox-ton', an image representing a fox would be used.

Exercise three, part two

Ask the children to write a short description of what 'their' Anglo-Saxon settlement would have looked like, based on the name they created. This could be a descriptive piece of writing, or something more creative.

Ideas for further work

Following on from this resources pack, you may want to think about mapping human geography further. This can be either group or individual work, and there could be an element of field-work incorporated. Ask the children to create their own 'local' map, based on the way an Anglo-Saxon might have visualised the Shropshire landscape (so, they might label features that wouldn't appear on an OS map, for instance). The maps could relate to:

- The village the child lives in
- The village or town where their school is
- Their journey to school

Ask the children to name all the important features on their map, using their own names for these places.

These exercises support the following aspects of the National Curriculum for Key Stage 2:

Geography

- Developing competence in the skills needed to interpret maps
- Developing competence in the skills needed to communicate geographical information
- Communicating geographical information
- Describing key aspects of human geography
- Use maps to describe key features

History

- Understanding Britain's settlement by the Anglo-Saxons
- Undertaking a local history study
- Understanding how knowledge of the past is constructed from a range of sources (including place-names)

English

- Plan writing by discussing and recording ideas
- Writing (composition): note and develop ideas, drawing on research where necessary
- Draft and write by selecting appropriate grammar and vocabulary, understanding how such choices can change and enhance meaning
- Draft and write by describing settings, characters and atmosphere
- Draft and write by organising paragraphs around a theme

Science

- Developing knowledge of the common names of flora (including trees)
- Use the local environment to explore and answer questions about animals in their habitat

Art and Design

- Produce creative work, including drawing, painting and sculpture
- Develop their techniques, including their control and use of materials

Design and Technology

- Designing and making innovative, functional and appealing products that are fit for purpose, aimed at particular individuals or groups.