

Cap-a-Pie's Deltas Project

Cap-a-Pie's Deltas project is engaging hundreds of Key Stage 2 young people in learning about Asian mega-deltas and thinking about their relationship to nature and the planet.

Cap-a-Pie worked with the Living Deltas Hub to create the project which uses theatre and creativity to explore the latest findings from Living Deltas researchers.

The project has been very successful in engaging young people in learning about deltas and developing new understandings around their relationship to nature.

One young person said the project had made them realise, *"How much we need water and how life depends on it"*.

Participants

To date (December 2022) Cap-a-Pie has engaged 203 Key Stage 2 young people in Newcastle and North Tyneside in the Deltas project. Cap-a-Pie works in partnership with primary schools across the city to connect with diverse groups of young people.

Background to the Project

In January 2022, Cap-a-Pie spoke to local teachers to find out what topics their students might be interested in learning about.

Teachers said their students were very concerned about the environment and thought that a project around water might be a good fit to extend learning from the Key Stage 2 curriculum.

Through Cap-a-Pie's ongoing partnership with Newcastle University, the charity was introduced to the Living Deltas Hub who were keen to work on the project. A series of workshops was created covering Asian river mega-deltas and the specific research areas of ponds, sand mining, hydro-activity and the social practices of communities living in the Sundarbans mangrove forest.



Aims and Objectives

The project aims to develop new insights and understandings about deltas for young people in the UK.

You people who take part in the project,

- learn what a delta is,
- have an appreciation of what a delta is like,
- think about their own relationship to water and food,
- see the deltas as an area both valuable and vulnerable,
- learn about specific research related to deltas that they may never have known or thought about before.

Cap-a-Pie also seek to develop young people's core skills including,

- creativity,
- critical thinking,
- speaking and listening,
- ability to work with others and
- confidence.

The Workshops

Each class who takes part in the Deltas project receives between 3-5 workshops with Cap-a-Pie.

All classes complete a lesson introducing the deltas. The following workshops cover specific research areas including ponds, sand mining, hydro-activity and honey gathering in the Sundarbans.

The workshops are a combination of creative exercises including writing, drawing, physical and devising theatre; Philosophy 4 Children; and some traditional teaching techniques, such as short quizzes.

Examples of exercises

A selection of activities and how previous participants have responded to them are included below to give an insight into what happens during the workshops.

Introducing Deltas

The first workshop introduces the Deltas. At the end of the workshop, when asked what they had learnt, some students responded:

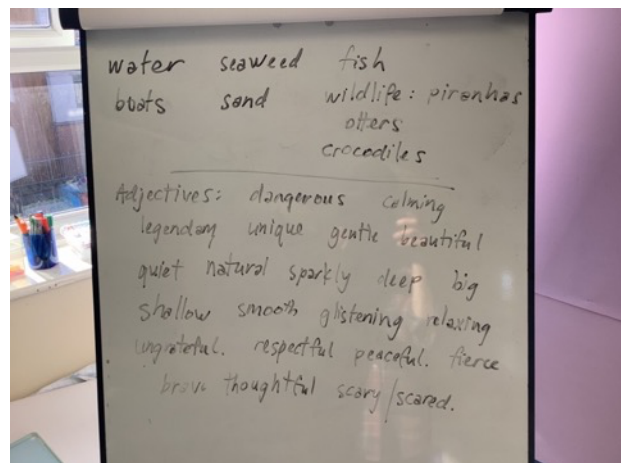
- *"A delta is where the river and the ocean meet, and land is made"*
- *"Good for growing crops"*
- *"Lots of people depend on it"*
- *"How useful deltas are"*

The River Character

In one workshop the students work together to create a human representation of a river. Students are asked what rivers contain and what adjectives could be used to describe a river. The text below is some responses from students.

Rivers have: fish, flora, sand, dirt, fauna, plastic, pollution, fresh water, flowing water.

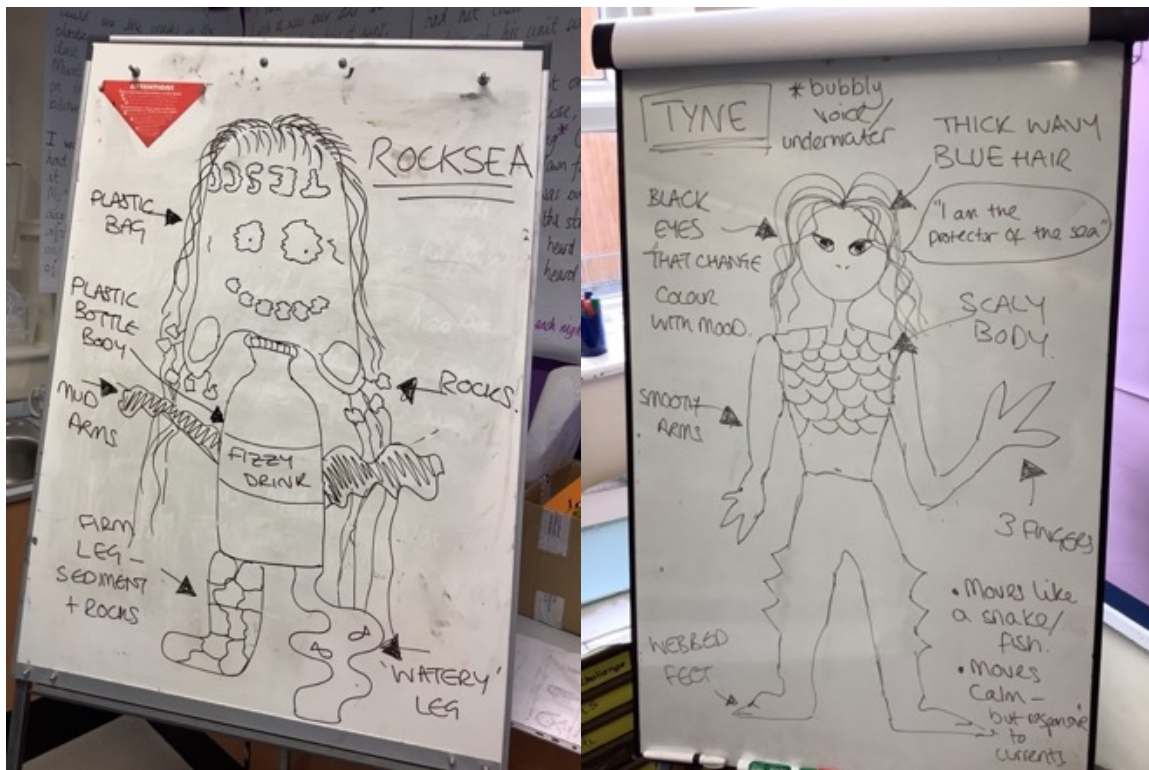
Words to describe a river: flowing, blue, bright, dirty, cool, fast, nice, shiny, wave, thin, curvy, colourful, extraordinary life-giving, mysterious, wiggly, gentle, speedy.



Cap-a-Pie's Artistic Director Brad McCormick said,

"Using these words, I asked the students to draw a human version of a river, annotating their drawing and giving their character a name. Together we then created an amalgamation of what they had drawn to put together one 'river person'."

Here are two examples from Christ Church CE Primary School, characters named 'Rocksea' and 'Tyne'.



Everyone in the class then creates a statue and, based on the make-up of the character and what we knew about rivers, movement is created.

Brad said:

"Soon the whole classroom was filled with 20 or so river-people, their arms flowing, their legs moving up and down placing their seaweed laced feet carefully on the ground, occasionally pausing to flick their long wavy hair from their face."

During a recent workshop several students came up to recite a line of dialogue the class felt was a something the river person would say:

"In the water I feel fish are near me."

Several willing volunteers (most of the class were up for this) then came up in front of the class to answer questions by improvising the answers in character.

Q: How do you feel in the water?

I feel safe.

Q: How old are you?

I'm as old as the ocean.

Q: If a shark bit you, would you die?

No. I'd pet it and it's go away. I'm magic.

Q: How does it feel to have fish in your belly?

It's like butterflies all the time.

Q: How much plastic do you have around you and how does it make you feel?

Feel bad for my fish. Feel mad because people throw plastic at me.

Q: Do you mind if humans use you for bathing, fishing etc?

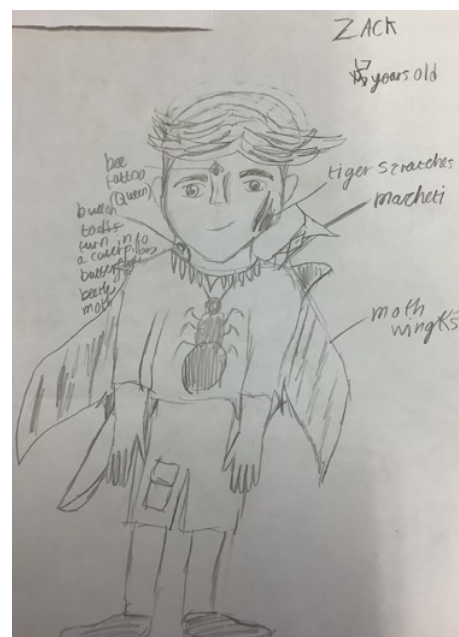
It's not fair that people fish.

The Honey Gatherers

The Honey gatherers activity sees us explore the idea of bravery. Honey gatherers forage for honey because it is part of their livelihood, despite the risks (such as tiger attacks) that they face.

When asked if the honey gatherers were brave, some responses included:

- *"Reckless because they could be killed"*
- *"Brave because they still did it."*
- *"They are brave to even set foot in the forest"*
- *"Braver to fight as you fight for your life."*



We then talk about the forest mother, Bon Bibi, who protects the honey gatherers. The students are told of her origin story involving the half-man half-demon tiger Dakshin Rai.

The exercise then sees the students create a character of a honey gatherer and use that character in a story.

Many of the characters tended towards the fantastical with magical powers and animal-like qualities.

The Big Question: Should nature be given the same rights as humans?

Connected to all this work on deltas is the theme of our relationship to nature. Giving the example of the Ganges River as something that, in theory, has legally the same rights as humans, we have a philosophical discussion about whether those rights should be extended to all of nature.

During one discussion, the class defined what they felt 'nature' was and what they felt were the rights humans have.

The discussion was wide ranging:

- *"If we don't respect nature, there will be consequences for humans"*
- *"What if animals started killing humans for food? The human race would stop"*
- *"Shouldn't we treat plants the way we treat each other?"*
- *They put themselves in nature's shoes:*
- *"If you were the river, how would you feel if you people were throwing things (litter) at you?"*
- *"If I was a tree, I wouldn't want to be cut down"*
- *"Does nature have a personality?"*



And had a conversation about nature and whether it is 'beautiful':

- *"Looks don't matter. Just because it is beautiful, doesn't mean we have to protect it"*
- *"Applying for a job... Just because a person goes for a job and they're beautiful, doesn't mean they will get it"*

When asked at the end of the discussion whether nature should be given "more rights" the class was overwhelmingly in favour.

What went well

Deltas is a very rich subject area that complements the national curriculum but also reveals new information for the young people. Very few students know what a delta is at the start of the lessons.

It is also age-appropriate – Key Stage 2 students are able to understand the science but are also open to exploring it creatively.

Students are interested and engaged. Some students even asked Cap-a-Pie if they were coming back again once the project had finished.

By the end of the workshops, students seem very aware of the threats against the deltas, especially around pollution of the waterways.

Students who have taken part in the project said they had learnt,

- *“When we get water everyday it's easy but for others it's not.”*
- *“People can die going to get water.”*
- *“It made me realise millions and millions of people depend on it [the delta].”*
- *“I learnt how vital water is.”*
- *“How rivers are getting destroyed and sand is being taken away.”*
- *“How much we need water and how life depends on it.”*

What it made Cap-a-Pie think about

Cap-a-Pie's Artistic Director Brad McCormick reflected,

I think one of the biggest challenges to working with this material is how to get the students to fully appreciate the vastness of the Living Deltas research areas, what deltas look and feel like and how different life is like there for delta residents. The Living Deltas team have mentioned the possibility of linking with schools in the deltas to involve children from other parts of the world which could be an excellent way of achieving these aims.

What is also interesting is the conflict between the students' general thoughts and principles and 'real world' actions.

For example, students are very vocal about the need to protect nature and were particularly concerned about the pollution of waterways. However, when faced with the idea that a tiger might attack and kill them were they to forage for honey in the Sundarbans, their response was generally very black and white and mostly punitive, i.e. that the tiger should die.

We have come across this many times in our work and this is not meant to criticise the young people in any way. But it's interesting that they are tapping into their own instinct for survival, that it is okay to eliminate something if it is a threat to you. I think this relates to the wider issues around climate change as humans struggle to grapple with something that is bigger than themselves. We'll continue to think about how we can, rather than 'correct' this thinking, challenge it, unpick it and ask 'why?'"

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