

Fantastic places

The purpose of this module is to stimulate an interest in, and a sense of wonder about, places. As the module name suggests, the main emphasis is the key concept of **place**, developing students' 'geographical imaginations' of places at a variety of scales and understanding the physical and human characteristics of them. The key concept of **space**, knowing where places and landscapes studied are located and why they are there - in terms of the **physical and human processes** that have created, changed and sustained them - is a concomitant to any study of place.

Most of the places featured in this module are in extreme environments, places where human impact has been limited so far. The module begins in the Arctic. Svalbard is a place with an awesome landscape and unique geography that includes issues and themes of global, regional and local importance. Svalbard exemplifies the distinctive physical and human characteristics of the Arctic which have been represented many ways, including in art and literature which may have influenced students' own 'geographical imaginations' of this place. One such influence may be the novel 'Northern Lights' (known as the film 'The Golden Compass') and this is a hook into to the second lesson which focuses on glacial features of the region.

Moving extremes, from one of the coldest to one of the hottest places in the world – Death Valley - students are asked to solve the mystery of the sliding rocks of the Racetrack Playa, a unique and bizarre phenomenon, thought to be caused by Aeolian processes.

The next 'fantastic' place students visit is one of the most famous prehistoric sites in the world. The focus is on the sustainable management of Stonehenge, a major international tourist attraction in need of environmental quality improvements.

Off the beaten track for tourists but a magnet for the ultimate extreme climber is the 'Totem Pole', a stunning sea stack teetering on the coast of Tasmania and the next place on the 'tour'. Students understand why the 'Totem Pole' is considered a 'fantastic place' by climbers and explain the formation of sea stacks.

The module ends with a gratuitous 'awe and wonder' lesson to show that places can be fantastic when viewed at other scales, particularly from space. This lesson could also be linked to the rest of the physical geography in the module. For example, rivers, coasts, glaciers or deserts when viewed by satellites can not only be visually spectacular but also geographically informative, helping students to create new interpretations of place, space and process.

Focus on Key Concepts:

Place

Space

Physical and human processes