What's in a name?
Teacher introduction and guidance

Introduction

Place names are often a thousand years old or more and can tell us a lot about our heritage – where we came from, who were our ancestors, and how did they influence the place we live in today? However, although they form a big part of our lives, we often take them for granted and never stop to think about how they came to be. Many are strange and curious, and can take on a life of their own when you start to break them down to find their origin and meaning.

Place names were originally given by the people who lived there at the time, and often made reference to the people themselves, the landscape or natural features, or the nature of the settlement. Waves of new inhabitants took over these names, mutated and added to them according to their own language. Some are straightforward examples, e.g. Torpenhow in Cumbria (pronounced 'tra-PEN-ner') – it's name has grown as each wave of new settlers added to it, and the three syllables; tor, pen and how each mean ' hill' in a different language.

Often, names are more complex than this however, and have been changed to suit the spellings and pronunciations of the new inhabitants. This makes tracing their actual origin and meaning tricky.

The activity

This activity should be presented so as to engage students and encourage their natural curiosity (see starter ideas below). The main body of the activity **aims** to;

1. Practice **geographical** map skills, using OS maps of the local area
2. Research the origin and meaning of place names using **ICT**
3. Develop an understanding of how **history** has influenced our cultural heritage

As you can see, **cross-curricular** links are promoted through this activity. Students also develop and practice investigative, research, thinking, group and independent work skills.

Starter ideas

It is important to engage students at the start of this activity. A good way to do this might be to present them with some of our more 'weird and wonderful' place names, e.g. 'Farewell' (Staffs), 'Giggleswick' (North Yorkshire), 'Foulness' (Essex), Little Snoring (Norfolk), Barton in the Beans (near Leicester), or 'High Ham' (Somerset). Perhaps ask them if they know of any curious place names.

Discuss with the class where they think place names came from – who do they think gave places their names, and why / how did they decide what to name them?

Ask students to think about what they have learnt in History and whether they can think of any invasions / peoples who might have named some of the places.

Introduce the lesson by going through the student information sheet as a class, and then the activity sheet.

Main activity

Guidance has been provided for the students on the activity sheet. They should use OS maps of their local area, and will need internet access for research. A comprehensive list of internet sites to use for their research has been given.

Variations / differentiation

The activity given here can be varied according to availability of resources, and student ability. Here are some ideas;

- Rather than students using a whole OS map, provide them, with an extract. This can be photocopied or obtained from www.ordnancesurvey.co.uk/**getamap**
- Students could be organised into groups and each group could be given an extract of a different area (either locally or around the Country) to investigate. Regional and / or national patterns in the origin of words could then be investigated.
- Less able pupils could work in pairs or small groups. They could also be given a printed 'dictionary' of the most common parts of place names, with their origin and meaning.
- Students could produce a visual display of their findings by labelling their map extract and colour coding it to show the different origins of the place names (e.g. Anglo-Saxon = red, Celtic = blue, etc.)

Plenary

Teacher to coordinate feedback and discussion session. Students should be encouraged to contribute at least one place name and give its origin and meaning. A nice way to do this might be to project / stick a map extract of the area they've been looking at onto the board and for students to come to the front, place post-it-note labels onto it and tell the class about that place.

If students have been looking at different areas, each could present their findings to the class, and the overall trends could be annotated on a map of the Country / region and displayed.

Resources required

- Maps or map extracts
- Student activity and information sheets
- Internet access for research (or simplified printed 'dictionaries' for less able)
- Colouring pencils / display maps