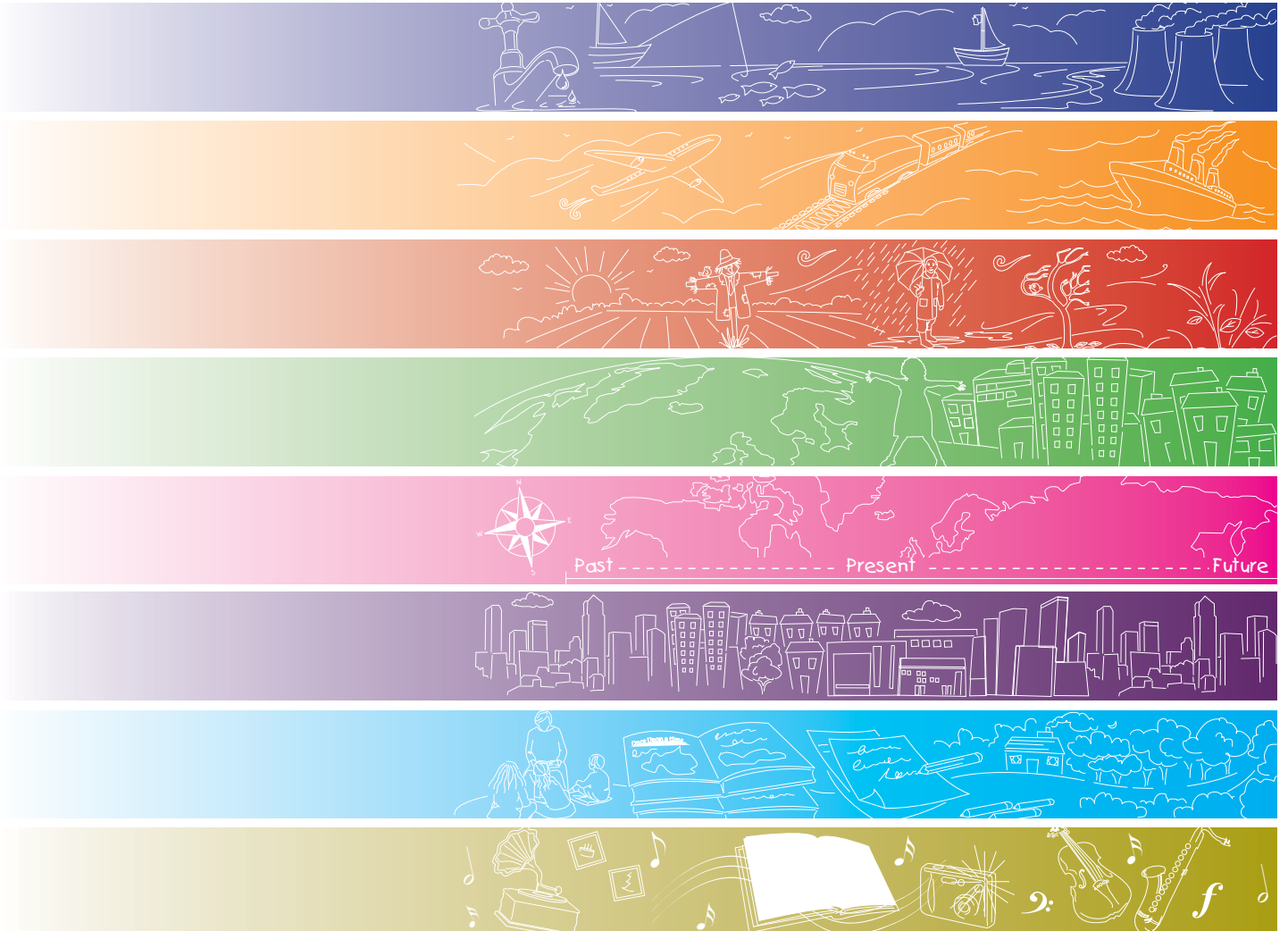




Northern Ireland
Curriculum

An Introduction to the 'Ideas for Connecting Learning' (ICLs)



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As part of its remit the Council for Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment (CCEA) has developed support materials to assist teachers in the implementation of the Revised Curriculum. The Ideas for Connecting Learning (ICLs) form part of these resources.

What are the ICLs?

The ICLs provide a range of active learning experiences that assist teachers in making the Revised Northern Ireland Curriculum come alive. They are a means of developing the overall aim and objectives of the curriculum and the principles that underpin it: Connected Learning, Cross-Curricular Skills Development and Assessment for Learning. A selection of ICLs is available for Years 4/5 and 5/6 and more are on the way for Years 3/4 and 6/7.

In addition, four Thematic Units are being developed for Year 5. These help teachers to implement the ICLs by:

- setting out a topic to cover four to six weeks of learning and teaching;
- focusing on one aspect of the overall revised curriculum objective;
- providing opportunities for assessment;
- provide opportunities for developing children's Thinking Skills and Personal Capabilities;
- setting out a range of active learning activities linked to the curriculum objective;
- connecting learning across the Areas of Learning.

These will be available from September 2007 and Thematic Units for other year groups will follow.

Who developed the ICLs?

The materials were written by practising teachers from across all five Education and Library Boards and officers from a range of educational partners. To enhance and broaden the ideas within the ICLs, a variety of external agencies contributed to their development. Some schools were invited to trial the materials which provided invaluable feedback to CCEA throughout the process.

Why were the ICLs developed?

The ICLs were developed to support teachers with the implementation of a more flexible curriculum. The aim was to highlight how the Areas of Learning within the curriculum can be connected through successful topic work. The ICLs provide a wide range of suggested learning intentions; activities and resources that could help teachers plan topics that

were relevant to the needs, interests and abilities of children. Whilst they provide useful suggestions they also stress the importance of incorporating children's ideas. These can be used as starting points or for pursuing a topic in more depth.

How will the ICLs help me?

They provide a selection of ideas that can be connected across the curriculum. Choice has been built in by offering a variety of potential pathways that you may wish to take when developing a topic. The ICLs identify possible learning intentions and provide active learning experiences and strategies that are all closely linked. The materials illustrate how the skills of Communication, Using Mathematics, Using ICT and Thinking Skills and Personal Capabilities can be incorporated into a topic. In addition, the ICLs list a number of useful resources that can support and enhance learning.

Does our school have to use all of the ICLs?

No, select only appropriate topics and those that are relevant to the needs and interests of the children in your class. The ICLs not only provide suggested contexts, but also illustrate the key principles underpinning the Revised Northern Ireland Curriculum as mentioned above. These can be easily transferred to any topic you choose to explore, for instance, one particular teacher who trialled the ICLs selected ideas from two ICLs and merged them into a new topic generated from the children's interests.

Do I have to cover ALL the content in the ICL?

No, the ICLs should be viewed as a menu of *suggested* learning activities designed to help you connect learning across the curriculum. There is no requirement to cover all the content, in fact you do not have to cover *any* of it if you wish. Indeed, there are so many learning activities within the ICLs, it would be impossible to cover everything!

How do I choose an ICL?

You, the teacher, know best the interests of your class. Use this knowledge to inform your choice of topic. If you or the children are not genuinely interested in the topic, effective learning and teaching will be hindered.

HOW TO USE THE 'Ideas for Connecting Learning' (ICLs)

Step 1: SCAN THE ICLs

When you have read these guidelines, SCAN the ICLs. This will give you an overview of the topics available. Select an ICL that's best suited to the interests and learning needs of your children. The ICL provides a wide range of ideas for investigating each topic across the Areas of Learning. You may at this stage want to select and highlight the aspects that you feel would be appropriate to explore with your class.

Step 2: DECIDE ON YOUR LEARNING INTENTIONS

Learning Intentions are central to the content of each Area of Learning. Identify the learning that you might want to develop through the topic. You may want to adjust these to suit the learning needs of your children.

Step 3: CARRY OUT AN INTRODUCTORY ACTIVITY

This will give you a good insight into what the children already know about the topic and what attracts their attention, helping you decide together which aspects to explore in more detail.

Step 4: EMBRACE THE FLEXIBLE NATURE OF THE ICLs

You can select the aspects that you want to use, delete those that you do not want to use, expand on areas or add alternatives. Remember to involve the children in the planning for the learning. They sometimes have the best ideas!

Step 5: PLAN WHEN, WHAT AND HOW YOU WILL ASSESS

It can really help children to know what is expected of them if you involve them in creating agreed success criteria. This means that you agree together in advance the focus and nature of the assessment, which in turn depends on which of your learning intentions you want to emphasise at any given time. It can also really help children improve on their learning if your feedback tells them where they have succeeded and what they need to focus on in order to improve their work.

Step 6: DECIDE WHAT IS IMPORTANT TO RECORD AND REPORT

To keep your work manageable you may decide to record significant observations in relation to progression in skills and knowledge. Over time this will inform future planning and help you make judgements about what you need to pass on to colleagues, parents and children. Ask yourself – 'What important observations do I record in order to build a holistic picture of the child?'

Below outlines the range of ICLs for Key Stages One and Two.

Year 3/4

School's Cool
Houses and Homes
Safe and Sound
Let's Celebrate
Bugs, Birds and Beasts
Whatever the Weather

Year 4/5

Journeys
Mighty Me
Once Upon A Time
Life in the Recent Past

Year 5/6

World in Motion
The Blue Planet
A Journey Through the Year
Where I Live

Year 6/7

Wonderful World
Eco-Warriors
Needs and Wants
Thinking Through the Past
In the News
Around the World

Case Studies

During 2006 a number of schools from across all of the Education and Library Boards took part in a trial of the Year 4/5 and 5/6 ICLs. One of the intended outcomes of the trial was to ensure that a number of case studies were developed in order to share good practice across Northern Ireland. The case studies shown here were written by the teachers involved in the pilot. They illustrate how the pilot schools adapted the ICLs in order to make best use of existing resources in their school and local area. They show how teachers combined their own ideas with those from the ICLs to create topics that were motivating and which catered for the particular interests, needs and abilities of the children in their class.

Christ the Redeemer Primary School, Belfast



Background

Christ the Redeemer Primary School is located on the outskirts of Belfast. Approximately 25% of our children receive free school meals. We are a new school, established in 1999 and moved into a new build in September 2003. We have currently 524 boys and girls in the school with 2/3 form entry. Over recent years we have tried to take on board new initiatives within the school such as thinking skills and activity based learning.

ICL

We chose 'The Blue Planet' – The main reason we chose this ICL was because the majority of our topics in Year 5 had been history based (Hunters and Gatherers, History of Belfast) therefore the focus on 'The World Around Us' was refreshing. It immediately appealed to us as teachers, which was important to us in trialling new material. The ICL itself provided lots of scope across all areas of the curriculum. It also seemed very relevant and not as abstract as previous topics. We thought the children would really enjoy it.

Planning

To start, we looked through the ICL and chose the learning we wanted to focus on and took time to specify our success criteria. We decided on the initial activities that might appeal to our children most. Within the Learning Areas (The Arts, Personal Development and Mutual Understanding and The World around Us) we added our own ideas and the additional ideas generated by the children from the planning board. We decided to focus on 'Working with Others' from the skills and capabilities framework. We planned the first two weeks of our topic in detail and an outline for the next four weeks. We kept to our timetable of Literacy and Numeracy in the morning and worked on The Blue Planet in the afternoon. Within that, we kept our school focus of having activity based learning groups working throughout the day on The Blue Planet and incorporated our Literacy and Numeracy where appropriate. Although at the time the ICLs did not have ideas for connecting PE to the theme we could see excellent opportunities and so we added in our own PE, based on creative dance to water music.

Starting Points

Our starting point, as normal, was the planning board. We gathered the children around to discuss our topic under the headings 'What we know', 'What we want to find out' and 'What we would like to do'. We used our new interactive white boards to stimulate enthusiasm with PowerPoint presentations, internet research, pictures and videos. As a result of our planning board the children came up with the idea of a trip to a beach. We allowed them to develop this idea and they planned the trip in terms of what we would do, why we would do it and put together a feasibility study to put to the principal. They were delighted when the trip was approved and this gave them ownership of the whole topic. We went to the beach on a glorious day and the children completed all the activities they suggested. We collected water samples, sorted shells and pebbles, took digital

video and pictures using the 'digital blue' camera, made sketches, recorded sounds and carried out a scavenger hunt.

Development

We used the samples we collected in all our work when we got back to school. We created our own sea-scape in the resource area, used the sand in our science experiments and made Power Point presentations with the pictures and videos. All our work came from the trip. Taking the trip at the start of the topic rather than as usual at the end of the topic made it much more relevant for the children as they could relate back to their experience as the topic progressed.

Evaluation:

- The trip at the start of the topic was essential.
- Taking time to come up with success criteria at the planning stage helped us to focus as the topic progressed.
- The planning board helped to give the children ownership of the overall topic especially their idea of the beach trip.
- The children were generally very enthusiastic toward the topic as were the teachers.
- Displaying the success criteria during individual lessons helped focus the children's learning and enabled them to self/peer evaluate. We used the '2 stars and a wish' idea from the ICL training.
- The children dressed up and we held 'Water' events!
- We would make more use of the listed resources within the ICL as we tended to create/find our own.
- We would plan less content next time.

Glenwood Primary School, Belfast



Background

Glenwood Primary School is a large inner city school in Belfast involved a wide variety of curriculum initiatives, including, The Enriched Curriculum, Digital Curriculum, Linguistic Phonics, Comet project, ICT accreditation, Assessment for Learning, Primary Movement and Pupil Profile. Currently Pupil Numbers are 448.

ICL

We chose the ICL 'Once Upon a Time' as we felt that the focus of this ICL would engage children's imagination through the stimulus of stories.

Planning

We created activities based on topics suggested and expanded them to cover all learning areas including RE and PE. We thought about the skills we wanted our children to learn and capabilities we would like them to develop throughout the project. This enabled us to start the planning process for the ICL.

The planning didn't take long. The main learning intentions were already stated within the ICL. Seeing the planning document on one sheet was excellent, as we always knew where we were going. We also created weekly plans to include planning for home learning and differentiation. These plans also enabled us to focus on the skills and capabilities that we wished our children to achieve. This preparation was vital to our success.

Starting Points

Our main starting point with the children was asking them about books. Children were given opportunities

through 'think, pair, share' time to talk to each other about their favourite books and present their findings to the class. We then asked the children to go home and talk to their parents/grandparents about their favourite books as children.

The activity, 'My First Book Memory', was a great success with children bringing in their first books, writing about them and presenting their book reports to the class. We also engaged this enthusiasm by creating art activities. We celebrated World Book Day and this provided the children with opportunities to be creative and take part in role-play activities.

Development

We focused on two main stories: 'Jack and the Beanstalk', a traditional fairy tale and 'Finn Mac Cool', an Irish legend. These giant tales were a great stimulus for communicating ideas through the arts and through ICT.

We looked at the theme of beginnings and endings through both Personal Development and Mutual Understanding and The World Around Us. The ICL had suggested talking about death – this initially daunted us however we decided to try it out using 'Fred' by Posy Simmons to talk about it. We used circle time as a forum to talk about how death made us feel. The emotional maturity that our children displayed really surprised us. The children were able to reflect on poor Fred and talk about their feelings when they lose someone they love.

From this we moved on to look at lifecycles. We encouraged pupils to investigate at home, in the library and through ICT, the lifecycles of frogs, butterflies and humans. We looked at books, created slide shows and even made a large lifecycle of the butterfly for the classroom. We talked about these lifecycles in groups and tried to empathise with the hardships and emotions these animals go through during their lives. The children then reflected this through creative writing (My Life as a Butterfly/My life as a Frog). The standard of writing was exceptional and the use of emotional language was fantastic.

Evaluation

Teachers

- Planning time was of great benefit to digest what we had to do.
- The use of the assessment for learning techniques were fundamental to teaching the skills and capabilities.

Children

- The children loved taking part in the ICL, they learned how to present their work, work collaboratively, be creative and make connections.
- They loved reading to other children and taking part in dramatic performances of Jack and the Beanstalk, Finn Mac Cool and David and Goliath.
- They also enjoyed participating in peer assessment.

Parental involvement

- Children were asked to retell stories that they heard in school to parents. The parents were then asked to comment on how well the storyteller told the story. Both children and parents loved this activity. It gave parents the opportunity to find out what was happening during the school day and take an active role in their child's learning.

Lough View Integrated Primary and Nursery School, Belfast



Background

Lough View Integrated Primary and Nursery School has 400 children from East, South-East and South Belfast and beyond. The current Year 5 classes have been taught through the enriched curriculum since Year 1.

ICL

Having taught Year 5 before, we knew what the curriculum requirements were for the year. In September we were able to decide on broad topics and take a more flexible and creative approach to the ordering of the existing curriculum. We had already planned to do a local study but the ICL, 'Where I Live' shifted our focus away from content to skills,

capabilities and opportunities for children to be part of the assessment process.

Planning

We looked at ideas generated in previous years to see what skills the children were already developing and used a topic web to brainstorm others not previously covered. This web was then broken down into a 6 weekly plan with clear learning intentions for each area of the curriculum. Learning intentions were later shared and discussed with the children. We aimed to work within the existing timetable but used the Literacy and Numeracy hour wherever possible as part of the ICL. Occasionally we abandoned the timetable to accommodate a full day skills-based activity.

Starting Points

We placed the six week ICL, 'Where I Live', at the centre of a wider twelve week local study that included C.S. Lewis and the Titanic. The initial stimulus for the topic was the recently released film 'The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe' which we had read as a class novel the previous term. We discussed with the children the three parts of the study and used a planning board and discovery board with open questions to involve them in the process and create a sense of ownership.

Development

We divided the plan into three areas: the stimulus was a trail of the local area; the preparation work and follow-up activities.

The children worked with local maps and Google Earth to follow a route of the local trail. They handled building materials and identified these in photographs of the local houses and shops. Children discussed the properties of the materials and why they were fit for purpose in our climate. This led to comparisons with building materials and design in other countries. An architect was invited to talk about the skills needed for his job and answer questions prepared by the children. Children could see how the skills he referred to were similar to the skills they were developing, such as, creativity and working with others. He developed the children's creativity and team work skills through a building challenge. This required the children to work together with set criteria including aesthetics, strength and height. The children, through self and peer evaluation (using '2 stars and a wish'), judged the success of their models against the original criteria.

The children studied estate agent brochures, looking

at persuasive language, changing adjectives to see how it affected the meaning, and used the framework to write persuasive brochures for their own houses. We set up an 'estate agents', displaying their brochures and we discussed the communication skills necessary for this role-play scenario.

The children were set the challenge of discovering the history of the street names, commemorating First World War battles and Second World War generals.

During the local study trail the children looked at photographs of road markings as part of road safety and found lines of symmetry in road signs. On the trail the children followed their route map answering questions based on the services and building materials discussed in the classroom. They sketched different house types and shop fronts to be used in a model village back in school. A significant stop was at a green space with a 'No Ball Games' sign. This was used as the stimulus for a writing focus on discursive writing, involving teacher modelling, teacher and children planning and writing together and children planning and writing independently. The final stop of the trail was a recycling yard with a talk with the council's recycling officer.

Back in school, the children painted a large Roamer mat and made a town from photocopying paper boxes. They used their observational drawing skills to translate their field trip sketches and photographs into model shop fronts. Money and time were taught in the Numeracy hour for the next two weeks. The children used these skills in the following fortnight to programme Roamer characters to shop, calculate correct totals and change. Routes had to include the correct Green Cross Code procedure for the zebra crossing. Photographs on the model of the actual shop opening times were used.

The children also set up a Lough View Bus Company kiosk, with timetable and fare information. They dressed up as employees and customers and used the scenario to develop their money and timetable problem solving skills. To accompany the role-play scenes, the children created a long mural where they rolled tyres to print roads, painted symmetrical road signs, explored colour combinations, displayed their street poetry in the shape of vehicles and their 'sound walk' script from their composing sessions.

Evaluation

Both children and teachers were motivated and inspired by the freedom and 'edge of your seat'

creative pace of this first year!

Each element will be included next year but improved by a further focus on the skills and capabilities and more opportunities for assessment for learning.

St Mary's Primary School, Dunsford



Background

St. Mary's Primary school, Dunsford is a small rural school and our current enrollment is 86: 42 boys and 44 girls.

ICL

We chose 'The Blue Planet' mainly because our school is located very close to the coast and I felt that we could utilise areas from our locality.

Planning

I was aware of the process of planning for the ICL as our school was involved in the Year 4 ICL Pilot last year.

As Thinking Skills and Personal Capabilities are central components of the Revised Curriculum, we decided to focus on 'Working with Others' and 'Self Management'. It was important that I encouraged children to develop their skills of collaborating, sharing and co-operating whilst working as part of a group as well as creating opportunities for children to talk about their learning and equip them with the language for suggesting methods of improvement. One of the methods we adopted was 'two stars and a wish' (a strategy of assessment for learning).

Clear learning intentions were outlined using 'We Are Learning To' (W.A.L.T) at the start of each session and children's input was used to derive appropriate success criteria. The ICLs provided helpful learning intentions that we adapted for our own specific needs when planning.

Starting Points

Our first question was, 'What does 'The Blue Planet' mean?' Most children could make the connection between 'The Blue Planet' and water. We devised some key questions, which we could explore over the six-week period:

- Why do we need water?
- How do we use water?
- Do we always appreciate water?

Using the planning board gave the children an opportunity to share their ideas and have an input into their learning. We put the key questions onto large water drops and placed them on to the planning board. ('What do we know?', 'What we want to find out?', 'What we need?', 'How can we find out more?', 'How are we going to arrange our classroom?' and 'How will we show our learning?'). It was important at this stage to guide the children's ideas and make the link between what the teacher wanted from the ICL and what the children wanted to find out.

Development

Within 'The Arts' section of the ICL the book 'Robinson Crusoe', written by Daniel Defoe, is suggested so we ordered the children's version and it proved a great source of inspiration for everyone involved. A writing sack was created with activities for each chapter. The children created a story box and retold the story in their own words. As an extension to this we came up with the idea of building a shack similar to Robinson Crusoe's. The children were very enthusiastic and loved the idea of bringing the classroom outside. Parents helped gather a supply of willow to start the build. The children chose willow because they thought it might grow and become a living structure. The Ecos-Centre in Ballymena supplied the rest of the willow required at a small cost. After the holes were dug, we were ready for action. The children worked in groups to weave the willow through the posts, this provided rich opportunities to discuss and practice sharing, collaborating and working together to achieve their goal. We recorded the development of the shack using the digital camera and reflected on our skills of 'Working with Others'.

Throughout the six week topic the children were able

to refer to the planning board, which allowed them to plan ahead and set targets. It also allowed them to reflect on tasks completed and to celebrate success.

The children were very interested in pollution, so we discussed their ideas on pollution and how it affects the world around us. The 'WWW UK Focus On Coasts' Pack, suggested within the ICLs, a very useful resource. We then concentrated our research on the case study of the Exxon Valdez disaster. Working in groups the children carried out studies and produced a poster displaying interesting facts they discovered.

Continuing on the theme of water we then arranged a visit to Ballyhornan Beach. The children carried out a beach survey, which included sketching the coastline, gathering samples and recording their day using the digital camera. On return to the school the children used the ICT facilities to produce a slideshow presentation of the trip which was premiered to other classes in the school using our Interactive White Board. The children used the digital microscope to look closely at shells, sand and kelp. Working in groups they designed a wall hanging/collage about their visit to the beach.

The children enjoyed having an overall topic that involved so many curriculum areas. Each child brought their own skills and experiences to the project enhancing their sense of belonging with the group while at the same time, increasing confidence and self-esteem. This was evident in the active participation of the children in all aspects of the task and the obvious sense of pride and achievement at the end of the task.

If I were to teach this topic again I would consider inviting external speakers into the classroom to speak on topics such as 'Pollution' and 'Recycling'.

