

# Unforgettable lessons

An introduction  
to Engaging Places

9/10

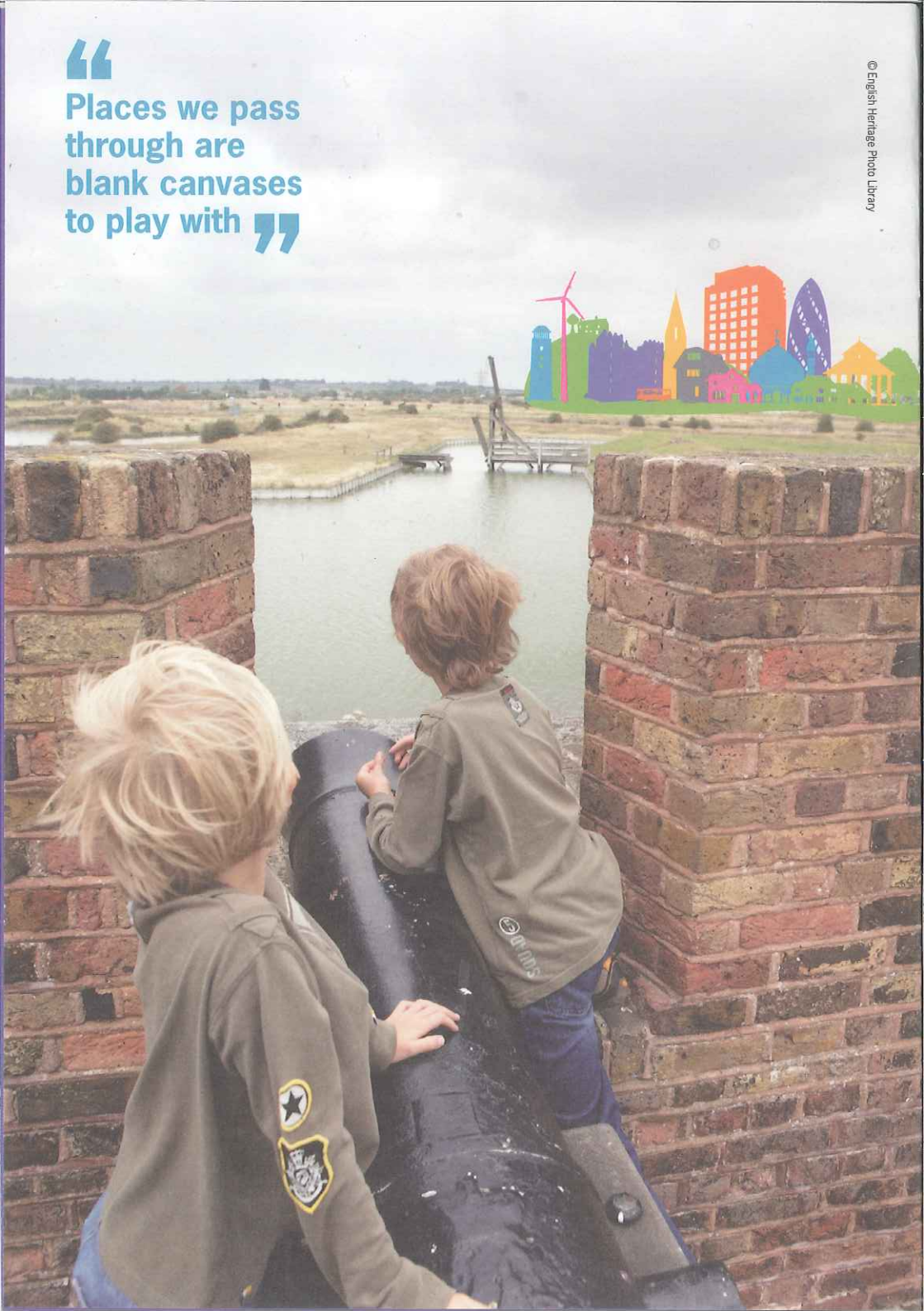
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Engaging Places

“

Places we pass  
through are  
blank canvases  
to play with ”



# A place for learning

by Ian McMillan, writer and poet

© AAM Photography



“  
A school that  
revolved around  
the engine of  
imagination”

In the far-away 1960s I went to Low Valley school in Darfield in Yorkshire; it was a small place with a big field at the back that led to a river and some swampy ground, and there were some old World War Two air raid shelters at the edge of the yard that we weren't allowed to play near. And, because this was a school that revolved around the engine of imagination, we used that river and that swamp and those air raid shelters (standing at respectful distance, of course, with Mrs Hudson keeping a beady eye on us) as places for learning. We wrote poems about the air raid shelters. We drew maps of the swamp. We painted the river and speculated on its history and its future.

Engaging Places is about using places and buildings as centres of learning. We live in buildings, we walk through spaces, we interact with places as we queue up to walk into school after morning break. And we have learning resources that can't be ignored and that can be celebrated; these places we pass through and sit in and think in and talk in are encyclopaedias and libraries and memory banks and blank canvases for us to play with. So let's do it.

As long as you don't go too near the air raid shelters!



## The largest teaching resource ever made

The built environment is our largest teaching resource – but often we forget to exploit it. So CABE and English Heritage have joined forces to create a powerful new resource for teachers: Engaging Places.

We want to see buildings, streets, parks, squares, grand historic locations, local neighbourhoods – in other words, the whole built environment – become a standard part of the way every student learns.

### Breaking out

Engaging Places is about breaking out. Sometimes this is literal – [www.engagingplaces.org.uk](http://www.engagingplaces.org.uk) describes some of the most exciting places for school visits all over England. It lists the details of nearly 500 venues.

But it also means breaking out mentally, from the usual ways to teach and learn. The website provides hundreds of different teaching resources: face-to-face, such as guided tours or storytelling sessions; paper-based and downloadable; or digital and online, such as games and material for interactive whiteboards. Schools and learning providers are adding to this bank of resources on a daily basis.

Engaging Places has met with an enthusiastic response. We think that's because it celebrates a characteristic shared by teachers and pupils alike – creativity.

“

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### What young people think

CABE surveyed almost 2,000 young people aged 11-14 to see whether they thought that learning about the built environment has an impact.

Four out of five told us that knowing more about the buildings and places around them makes them and their peers behave better.

Nine out of ten – an even higher proportion – said that they remembered more from a school outing than from a classroom lesson.

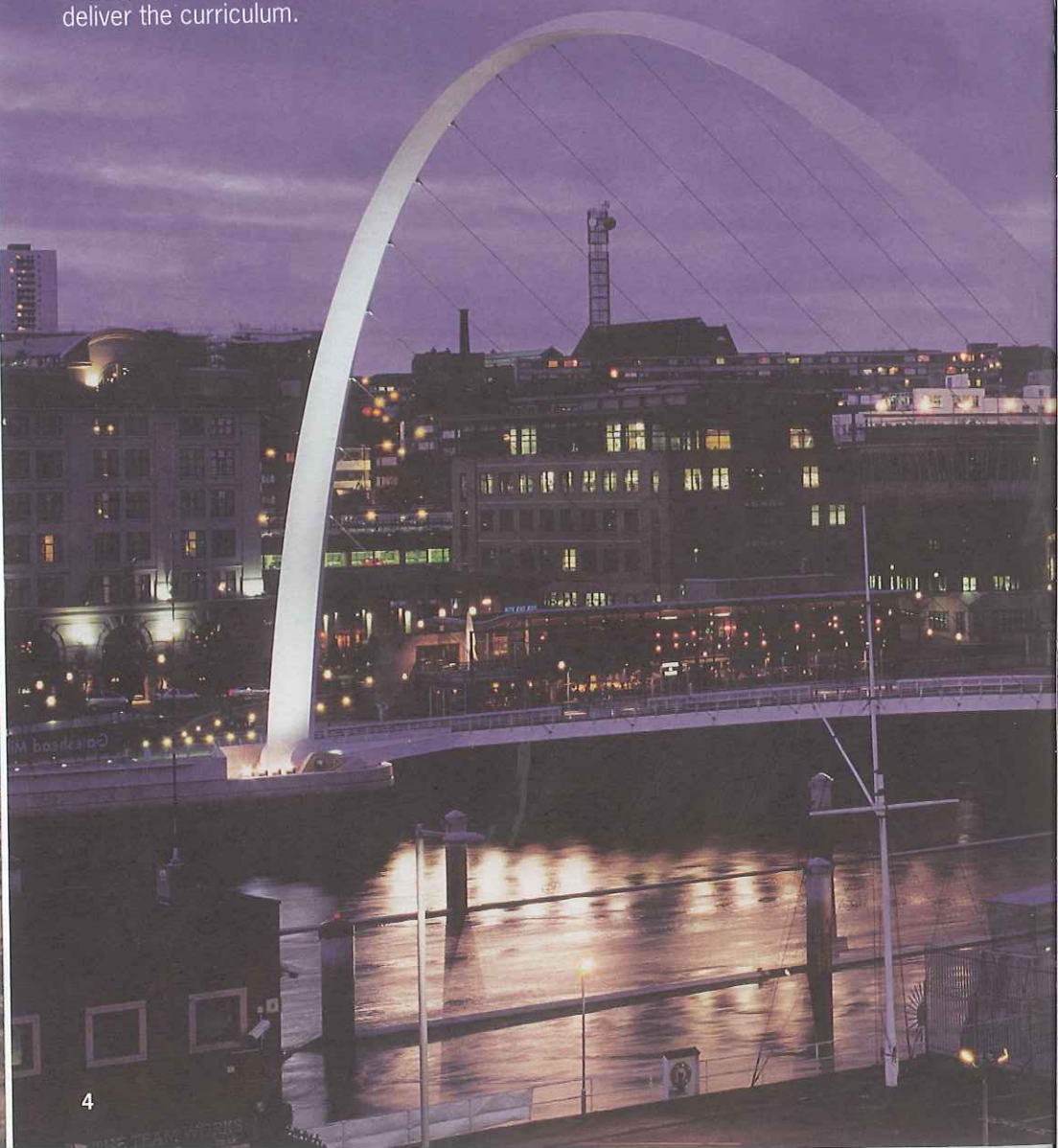




## Inspiring learning about any subject at any age

Looking for a new angle on STEM? Use the world's only tilting bridge as a starting point. Wanting a lesson starter for maths? Look at geometry with Harry Potter and Gloucester Cathedral. Biological science? Mini eco-systems of plant covered buildings.

Engaging Places provides a fresh way to deliver the curriculum.



**“  
The more young  
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## Looking at the world differently

Ofsted recommends that curriculum planning includes well structured learning outside the classroom as a key, integrated element of the experience of every learner.

Engaging Places also complements any school building programme, with a wealth of ways to tap into the rich learning experience of going through a rebuild or refurbishment project.

We also think schools have a responsibility to ensure that young people are visually literate. Engaging Places helps to develop this ability. It shows how the best teaching can use both subjects and themes to challenge young people to look at the world around them differently.

The more young people know about the built environment, the more easily they can shape it for the better, both now and in the future.

## A network of support

Engaging Places also provides practical support, advising a network of teachers who have partnered with local learning providers to develop best practice school-based projects. The projects all follow the Qualifications and Curriculum Development Agency's co-development framework.

Overleaf are two stories which illustrate the varied ways in which teachers are using buildings and places. In Canterbury, a school's street proved a good way to explore the meaning of community, and in Guildford, pupils grasped the concepts of space by imagining life in Las Vegas. Both case studies come from the Engaging Places network and more can be found on [www.engagingplaces.org.uk/network](http://www.engagingplaces.org.uk/network)

# Case study

## Street investigation

### Key stage 2

English, citizenship, geography, history, music, design and technology, art



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**Working with Canterbury Christchurch University, Lucy Hardy, year 4 teacher at Ospringe CE Primary School, designed a project to harness children's natural curiosity about the world and open their eyes, ears and minds to the community.**

Before venturing out of the classroom, the class discussed the meaning of community. Why do we all have a responsibility to look after our community and environment? How is the school's street a community? And what could the students do to make it a better place?

### The teacher wanted to increase student:

- awareness of where they live
- participation in the local community
- control over their own learning.

### Up and down Water Lane

Working in groups, the students walked up and down the road looking at familiar surroundings in new ways. The students photographed sights they felt illustrated words such as sad, lonely and awesome. Many saw traffic as a concern, choosing parked cars to frame 'sad'. Adult experts, including a town planner, brought their own perspectives to the work of each group.



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### **The students learned by:**

- exploring the meaning of 'community'
- spending time looking at the school's street from different perspectives
- developing a project they thought would improve the local environment.

### **The students are now:**

- more aware of their place in the community
- able to believe they can change things for the better
- able to work more independently.

### **Buses, bumps and bins**

In school, the students discussed their ideas to make the street a better place.

One highlighted the hazard created by cars and built scale models showing solutions. Another reduced congestion by designing and modelling a bus powered by hydrogen and solar panels.

Noise pollution inspired some students to compose a piece of music reflecting the way the sounds of the street change from the village at one end to the major road at the other.

Concern about litter prompted another group to create a company, 'Bonkers Bins', to market bins people would enjoy using. They created a logo, an advertisement, and developed ideas for products.

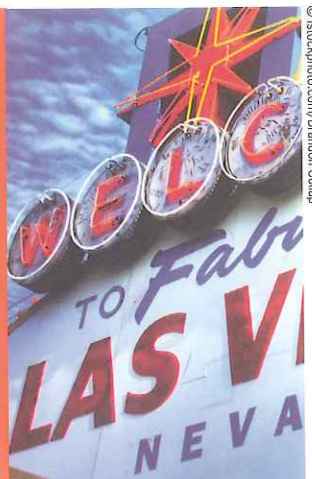
### **Engagement and independence**

At the start of this project, the students had little understanding of their place in the Water Lane community. By the end, they showed great awareness of the street, its problems and how they could make an impact as individuals. In Jack's words, 'I learned that small things can make a really big difference'.

# Case study

## Groundbreaking geography

Key stage 5  
Geography



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**As a recently qualified teacher, Richard Bustin was surprised at how far the study of urban geography in schools lags behind the subject as a university discipline.**

'I wanted students to engage with urban space in new and innovative ways,' he explains. 'With support from Dr Judy Hemingway at the Institute of Education, University of London, I developed a project based on the idea of "third space" and post-modernist developments in human geography.'

### Perception and reality

As a starting point, Richard created a series of lessons exploring the concepts of space.

- First space is the built environment itself – architecture, lighting, the road network, urban form and its growth. It can be mapped and measured.
- Second space is the representational space – how the area is marketed, perceived in people's minds and represented in art and media. It is conceptual.
- Third space is the 'lived space' – the experience of living in the first space with the expectations of the second space.

As students discussed the three spaces and how they relate to each other, they began to think in new depth

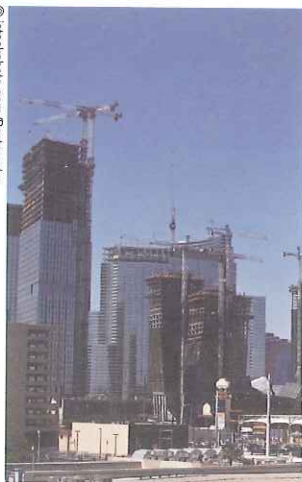
**The teacher wanted to increase student:**

- awareness of the interaction between people and the built environment
- understanding of the latest geographical thinking.



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### **The students now:**

- understand that the way we perceive places does not always match the reality of living there
- are more critical and creative geographers.

### **The students learned by:**

- studying Las Vegas
- being taught about first space, second space and third space.



about the interaction between human beings and the built environment.

The students' own home town of Guildford, with its cobbled streets, gabled roofs and hilltop cathedral, has a strong physical and conceptual presence. How do these influence the experience of being a young person growing up there?

### **From Surrey to Nevada**

To broaden students' thinking, Richard turned their focus to a city that could scarcely be further removed from Guildford – Las Vegas. When asked their perceptions of the place, the class responded with words such as 'glamour', 'wealth' and 'gambling'. Watching the video for ZZ Top's Viva Las Vegas reinforced their vision of the city as a post-modern fantasy world.

Students were then shown three pictures of Las Vegas. In the first they identified the first space, buildings and streets. In the second they recognised the second space created by the bright lights, luxury hotels, casinos and showgirls. Finally, they were shown a more surprising image, a homeless man on the streets of the city. What did this say about the third space, the lived experience, in Las Vegas?

People are drawn to Las Vegas in the hope that they will be able to share in its good fortune. In reality, the city's second space, people's perceptions of riches and glamour, makes the experience of homelessness much worse than elsewhere. Homeless people do not fit into the desired or widely perceived image of the city. As a result they are pushed away from the main area and not given help or support. Their poverty and hardship is thrown into stark relief by the opulent veneer of Las Vegas.

### **City beneath the skin**

As Richard explains, the impact of this small-scale project has been far-reaching. 'The students are much more aware of the complex layers that make up our urban geography. They can see beneath the skin of places – beyond the marketing to the reality of life for people living there. I'm thrilled to have been able to bring university and classroom geography closer together with such success.'



This is an introduction to Engaging Places, a project from CAFE and English Heritage to encourage the use of buildings and places in teaching and learning.

[www.engagingplaces.org.uk](http://www.engagingplaces.org.uk) is packed with free teaching resources, provides information on hundreds of venues for school visits, lists events and the latest news, and is of interest to teachers, the wider school community, local education authorities and learning providers.

1 Kemble Street  
London WC2B 4AN  
T 020 7070 6700  
F 020 7070 6777  
E [enquiries@cabes.org.uk](mailto:enquiries@cabes.org.uk)  
[www.cabe.org.uk](http://www.cabe.org.uk)

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