



NCCA

An Chomhairle Náisiúnta
Curaclaim agus Measúnachta
National Council for
Curriculum and Assessment

Redeveloping the Primary School Curriculum

Consultation with children on the future of Geography
and History as part of the curriculum area of Social and
Environmental Education

Developed in partnership with Hub na nÓg and the Department of Children, Equality,
Disability, Integration and Youth

May 2024

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Introduction

Redeveloping the primary school curriculum

The National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) is currently redeveloping the Primary School Curriculum. The vision and principles for the redeveloped curriculum are laid out in the *Primary Curriculum Framework (PCF)* (Department of Education, 2023).

The Framework sets out five broad curriculum areas:

1. Language
2. Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) Education
3. Wellbeing
4. Arts Education
5. Social and Environmental Education.

Public consultation on the proposals within the PCF took place from February 2020 to March 2022 and data from that consultation was analysed and used to inform the *Primary Curriculum Framework*, published in Spring 2023. In addition to the consultation with education stakeholders, parents and the general public, the NCCA also commissioned a research project to consult children on their views of the *Draft Primary Curriculum Framework*. This aspect of the consultation began in March 2020 and was undertaken by Marino Institute of Education. NCCA strives to ensure that its curriculum development processes recognise children's right to a voice in such development since it concerns them and their lives (Article 12, UNCRC).

This report

This report recounts further consultation with children which took place to help shape NCCA's development of the new curriculum specification for Social and Environmental Education with children from Stages 3 and 4 (Third to Sixth Classes) in three primary schools between October and November 2023. The schools were of different types, all members of the NCCA's [Schools Forum](#), and were located in counties Wicklow, Cork and Westmeath. As set out in the Framework, the Social and Environmental Education curriculum area with these class stages encompasses history and geography.

Audience and influence

Work is currently underway to develop curriculum specifications for the five curriculum areas outlined above. Each specification will provide the rationale, aims, strands and learning outcomes of the curriculum area. While consultation with children is a strong feature of our work during the consultation phase of curriculum specification development, it is the aim of the NCCA to include children's voices more centrally earlier in our development processes. To achieve this, the NCCA worked in partnership with Hub na nÓg and the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth (DCEDIY) to establish an additional engagement with children during the development of the curriculum specifications that would inform the work of the Council, the Board for Early Childhood and Primary Education, and the Social and Environmental Education Development Group.

To provide a strong, representative and responsive basis for its curriculum development work the NCCA has established Development Groups to undertake specific tasks in curriculum areas or

subjects. NCCA has established five Development Groups to support the development of the five-curriculum specifications outlined earlier. A common set of overarching guiding principles (aligned with NCCA’s Strategic Plan 2022 – 2025) (outlined in Table 1 below) underpin the work, with the principle pertaining to child voice holding particular relevance to this document.

Table 1. Principles underpinning the development of advice

Principles	How the principles will be reflected in the work of the Development Groups
Inclusion and diversity	The work of the Development Group will recognise the uniqueness and rights of every child and the importance of supporting all children to reach their potential.
Partnership and collaboration	Members of the Development Group work in a spirit of collaboration and partnership, and with classrooms, schools and the wider education sector to shape curriculum and assessment developments.
Consultation	The Development Group will support consultation processes and take account of the rich diversity of voices, perspectives and views that make up Irish society.
Child/student voice	The work of the Development Group will be underpinned by the rights of children to have their voices heard and included in shaping the curriculum and assessment advice developed.
Research-informed	The Development Group will draw heavily on a wide range of research, national and international, to inform its thinking on curriculum and assessment.
Innovation and responsiveness	The Development Group will explore new ideas and thinking as they build on the strengths of the education system and develop advice that is responsive, while being appropriately innovative and ambitious.
Coherence, continuity and progression	The Development Group will pay attention to coherence within and across sectors to support appropriate continuity and progression for all children in their educational journeys while respecting the distinct nature and identity of each stage and sector.
Learning organisation	The Development Group will support a culture of learning during its work together in support of the enhancement of educational experience for all children.

The National Framework for Children and Young People's Participation in Decision-Making

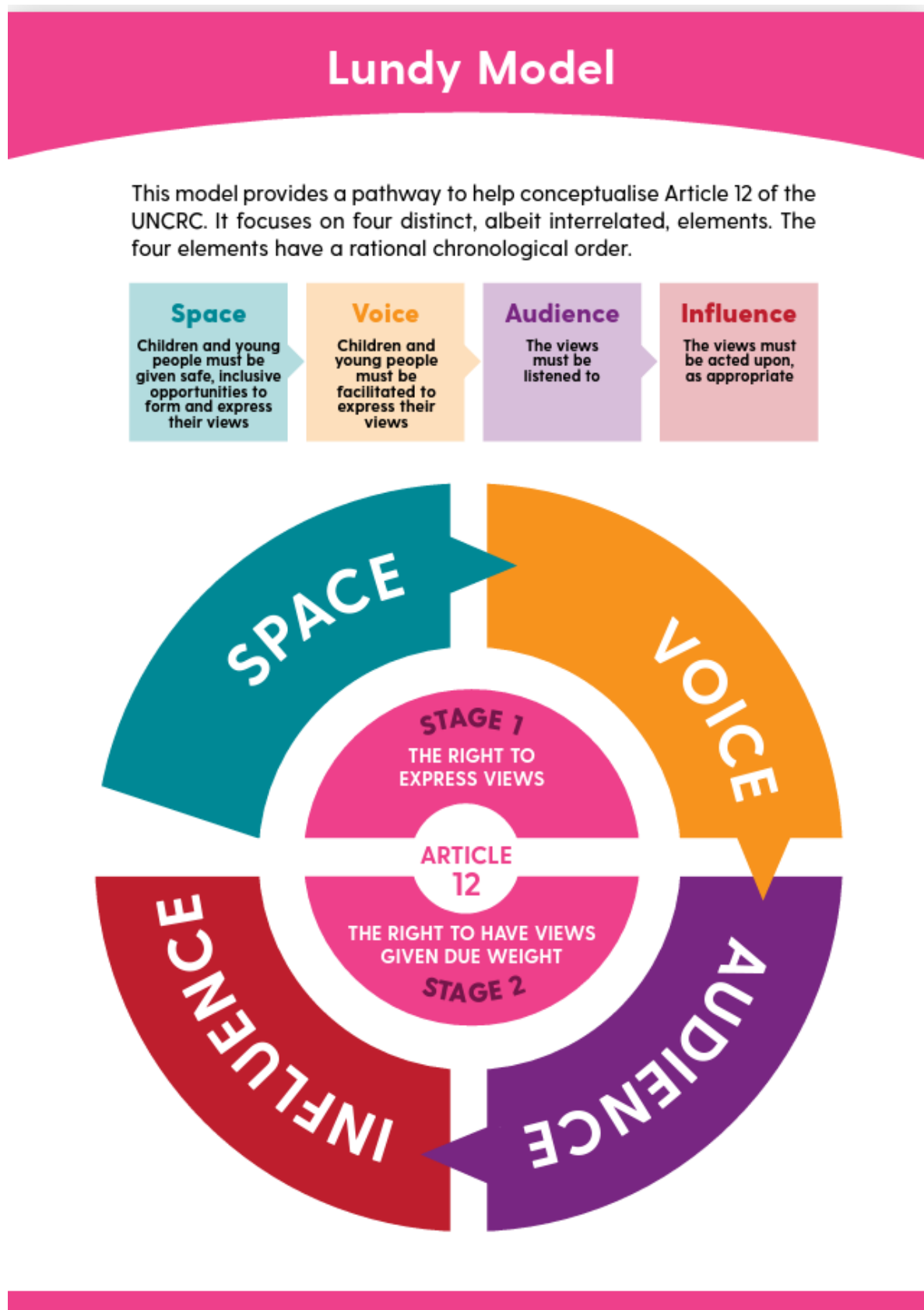
For this consultation, the sessions in schools were designed and facilitated by personnel from Hub na nÓg (<https://hubnanog.ie/>). Their work is guided by [the National Framework for Children and Young People's Participation in Decision-Making](#). The framework is built around a rights-based model of participation, developed by Professor Laura Lundy, comprising four elements: Space, Voice, Audience and Influence. An explanation of each of these can be seen in Figure 1.

The aim of the model employed is to provide children with the opportunity to express their views in decision-making on matters that concern them and their lives. This means:

- providing them with age-appropriate and accessible information and a suitable location and setting in which they feel safe and free to express their views, opinions and ideas
- facilitating their expression of ideas, using methodologies that are age-appropriate and accessible so they can fully express their views
- making them aware of who will hear and consider their views and taking their views seriously and giving their opinions due weight within decision making processes
- informing them of the scope they have (including the limitations) to influence decision-making and giving the children feedback on what impact their views and opinions have had on decisions taken.

Arising from this approach, the present report is guided by the views of the children in the consultation. It reports what they said in response to a number of key questions. All sessions were conducted in rooms and halls in the participating schools, and a staff member from the school was in attendance at all sessions.

Figure 1: Lundy Model



Methodology

This section outlines the methodology employed for the consultation with children on geography and history.

Developing the methodology

The NCCA designed the question areas based on the opportunity for children to influence decision making within the subject areas of geography and history. Hub na nÓg led on the design of age-appropriate and child friendly methods based on the question areas designed by the NCCA. The team from DCEDIY and Hub na nÓg follow best practice principles in consulting with young people and are guided by the principles of Lundy's Model and the Participation Framework. At all stages of the design of methods, measures were taken to ensure children had accessible and inclusive opportunities to share their views and opinions on geography and history within the decision-making process. Children were provided with age-appropriate information on the reasons for consultation and on the topic. A range of methods were used to provide the children with varied ways to respond to the key questions posed and each method is explained in detail in the later sections of this report.

Appointing an independent report writer

To ensure the views of the children participating in the consultation were accurately recorded and presented, an independent report writer was commissioned to record the consultation process and to prepare a report describing the children's views, ideas and opinions on geography and history.

Child Safeguarding

As outlined in the [Child Safeguarding Statement](#), NCCA is committed through its engagement with children, to ensuring their safety, welfare and development as a core objective and priority. The independent report writer, the Hub na nÓg facilitators and NCCA staff present at consultations were all Garda vetted in advance of the consultation.

Sampling

As previously mentioned, all the schools in this consultation were members of NCCA's [Schools Forum](#). Due consideration was given to ensure the schools selected were of different types. Factors including: location – urban and rural; size; single grade and multigrade; and a Gaelscoil were all considered when inviting schools to participate.

As outlined in the [NCCA Strategic Plan 2022 – 2025](#), Inclusion and diversity is one of eight principles underpinning the work of the NCCA, enabling the development of curriculum and assessment that recognises the uniqueness and rights of each child and the importance of supporting all children to reach their potential. Schools were respectfully asked to be mindful of this principle when providing children with the opportunity to participate in the consultation.

Piloting the methodology with a Youth Advisory Group

For this consultation a Youth Advisory Group (YAG) was established to help plan and pilot the consultation. Advisory groups provide a way of directly involving a small number of children in

advising on the development of a consultation. Working with an advisory group is a particularly valuable way to plan and pilot a consultation with a broader cohort of children. Advisory groups are also a very useful way of ensuring the direct involvement of children and young people in decision-making in situations where it is not possible to involve all children in a school.

The YAG was based in a large urban school with special classes. The children invited to participate represented a broad and diverse range of backgrounds. The pilot took place over two days, the first day focused on geography, the second on history.

The methodology was piloted with the YAG and they provided feedback on how the questions were asked and what they thought about the methods used to ask the questions. The children's input and feedback was used to design the final methodology and format of the consultations. The children's responses to the questions during the pilot were included in the analysis of the report. This emphasises the importance of listening to the voices of the children and including their views, thoughts and ideas on geography and history with the two other schools in the consultation.

On foot of feedback from the YAG, changes were made to the format of the pilot days' questions. These changes are set out in the following tables:

Table 2: Changes to questions/activities from geography pilot day to subsequent days

Questions asked on geography pilot day	Questions asked on subsequent geography sessions
Q.1. 'What things do you learn about in geography?'	<i>Questions 1, 2 and 3 were asked as on the pilot day</i>
Q.2. 'What do you like about geography?'	
Q.3. 'What do you not like about geography?'	
Q.4 'The best geography lesson ever' Frozen Picture exercise <i>Children in the pilot expressed a preference to speak and move during the exercise</i> After the exercise the children were asked: What are the children doing in the class? What is the teacher doing in the class? How are the children learning in this class?	<i>The exercise was replaced for subsequent days with a drama activity that included actions and speaking.</i>
Additional activity	
Your wishes for geography	This activity was conducted in all geography sessions.

Table 3: Changes to questions/activities from history pilot day to subsequent days

Questions asked on history pilot day	Questions asked on subsequent history sessions
Q.1. 'What do you learn about in history lessons?'	<i>All three questions were asked as on the pilot day</i>
Q.2. 'What do you like about history?'	
Q.3. 'What do you not like about history?'	

Q.4. 'Your best history class ever' (Comic strip activity)	<i>The limited time available for the activity meant that only a few children managed to complete their comic strip. The expectation to complete a specific number of comic strip boxes was reduced from 8 to 4 based on the children's feedback after the pilot was complete.</i>
Additional activities	
Your wishes for history	This activity was conducted in all history sessions.
Moving/walking debate on geography and history	This activity was conducted only on the history pilot day. This was due to time constraints

Data analysis

Data from the consultation sessions comprised of the children's oral responses, their drawings and illustrations, and their written remarks on charts and templates used for both geography and history sessions. Their responses and contributions for each question were thematically analysed within each subject and are accordingly presented in this report. Common themes and concerns emerging across the two subjects, which may be relevant to the audience for this report, are considered in the report's conclusion.

Introducing the consultation

In the pilot school, the first day was given to the geography consultation, the second day to the history consultation. In each of the other two schools, geography was the subject of discussion in the first part of the day; the second session was devoted to history. Following an initial overview of the four elements underpinning the consultation, each session was structured around a small number of key questions based on children's thoughts and experiences of the subject being explored. Their responses were received and recorded in writing, and in the content of charts and other verbal and illustrated materials completed and populated by the children during the sessions.

The children were from Third to Sixth Classes. Children engaged in plenary or group activities on the day, as well as in individual tasks. Groups were multi-level including children from Third to Sixth. To facilitate inclusion, play items were available to any child who wished to use them.

Introductions were made, with orientation and a clear setting out of the purposes of the day:

- the children were informed that their involvement in the session was voluntary, that it was their choice to speak or not, and their right to withdraw at any point. The children were informed that there were no right and no wrong answers and they could choose to express their views and opinions in the way they felt most comfortable, through drawing, writing or speaking or through participation in group activities.
- the children were made aware that their views would be recorded in written form and would be published in a report in due course, but with their words anonymised
- they were informed of the audiences who would read the report, and it was explained that while their views would be taken seriously not everything that they suggested may be possible. Children were informed that if something was not possible that the reasons why not would be explained to them.
- a copy of Hub na nÓg's Child Protection Statement was displayed during the sessions, and the children were advised that if any child made the team aware of any situation where they were in danger or at risk, the team was obliged to let the responsible authorities know about this. Bearing this in mind, the children were asked not to relate or discuss personal situations in the groups, but that if they had concerns about a personal issue, they should report it privately to a team member during the day.

This report begins with an account of the consultation sessions conducted with the children on geography followed by an account of sessions on history. All of the children's responses, comments and contributions are aggregated across the three participating schools.

Consultation on geography

Each session commenced with an icebreaker game. (A variety of games were used across the three schools). Games were selected based on the group dynamic and space available.

Question 1: What things do you learn about in geography? / Cad a fhoghlaimíonn tú sa tíreolaíocht?

The methodology used here was to request the children to think about what they learn in geography and to write and/or draw this information on the 'Lifeline sheet'. This sheet was a large card sheet on which was represented a wide, winding lifeline. On the lifeline itself, they could write or draw their responses to this first question. In one school, just one sheet sufficed; in a second, two sheets were used, while three were employed in the third school to allow access to the number of children participating.

An extensive array of topics was listed by the children across all schools. These encompassed:

Physical geography

- rivers; mountains/sléibhte; sléibhte san Ioruaidh [Norway]; rivers/aibhneacha mar an Volga sa Rúis; lakes; bogs (*reference made to a visit made to a local bog*); deserts; rocks' origins; volcanoes; water cycle; earthquakes; tectonic plates; cliffs; caves; Giant's Causeway; soil

Aspects of the natural world

- animals; nocturnal animals; vertebrates and invertebrates; origin of species; how animals evolved into humans; reptiles; sea creatures; 1,500 species of bats; the outside and inside of the body; flora and fauna; biodiversity; 'foraoisí [forests] mar an Amazon'

Physical sciences

- heat conduction; temperatures; solar panels; reusable energy; energy; eco towns; magnets – magnetic field around the earth; heat; pollution; Beaufort scale

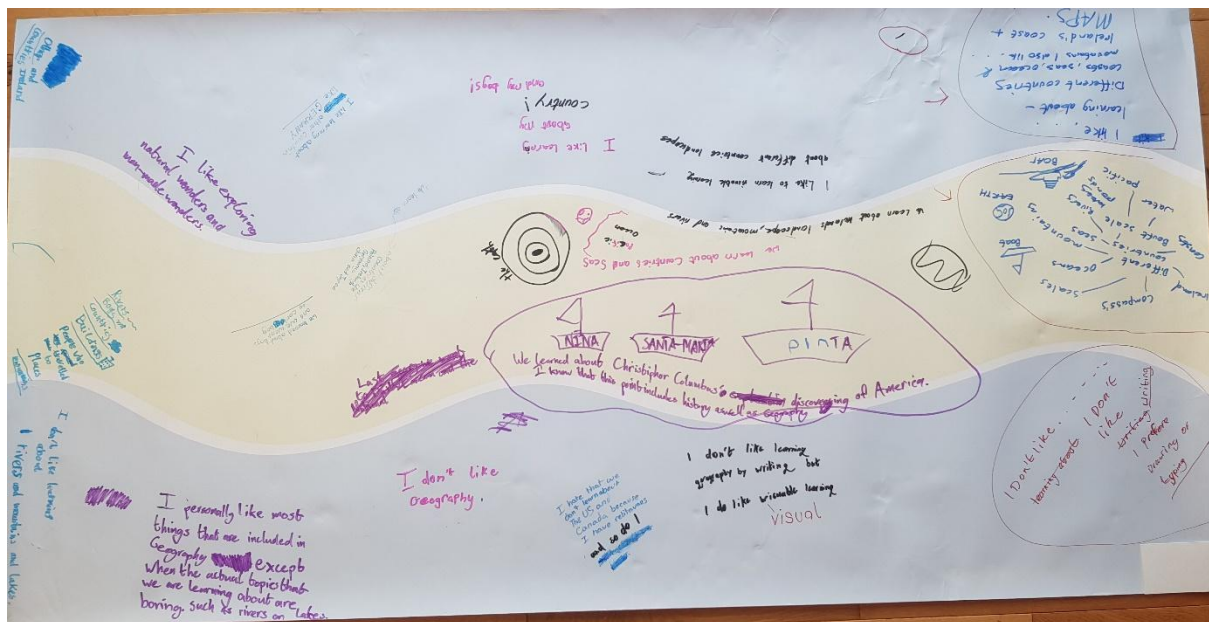
Political geography

- contaetha; other countries/tíortha eile; capital cities and population; bratacha [flags]; spóirt i dtíortha eile [other countries' sports]; the EU; Tribes and their cultures (North American, Māori); different buildings (Taj Mahal); ancient Egyptians; reports about islands of Greece; Crete; World maps and globes

A number of children listed items from their history lessons - Irish culture, myths and legends, the Cattle Raid of Cooley, an Gorta Mór; banshees, púca, leprechauns. In the mention of Christopher Columbus, children identified a connection with history in their learning about voyages.

Having the children list their geography activities in school and outside it (e.g. field trips or foreign travel with their families) provided children with the opportunity to speak of what they know based on their personal experience. It also served to make the whole group aware of the wide variety of geography activities they and others engaged in. In addition, it brought the range of such activities into focus for questions the children would be asked subsequently. Later questions expanded further the menu of activities children had engaged in.

Figure 2: An example of the Lifeline recording sheets used in the geography consultation



Question 2: What do you like about geography? / Cad a thaitníonn leat sa tíreolaíocht?

The methodology employed for this question was to continue the use of the 'Lifeline' sheet as for Question 1. Instructions were given on the use of the template for this question and the following one, i.e., responses to the 'likes' question were to be written on the lifeline, with responses to the subsequent question inquiring about 'dislikes' to be written outside of the lifeline. All the Lifeline sheets generated by the children can be viewed in Appendices 1-4.

Responses to Question 2 included the following, grouped by content and methodologies

What children said they liked to learn about:

I like . . . learning about Ireland ('My Country'); tíortha eile [other countries] and their languages; foghlaim faoin Eoraip [learning about Europe]; the Wonders of the World; natural and built "features that we are not exposed to in Ireland" (*children enjoy exploring other countries/distant places*); tribes; flags; learning about animals/living things; imirce ó Eire [emigration from Ireland]; 'different parts of the body, outside and inside'; Eco towns; biodiversity; different cultures; learning about Ancient Egypt; food.

How children said they liked to learn:

I like . . . going on field trips; walking the Greenway; 'Visual' learning (*when asked to clarify, children explained that 'visual learning' includes interactive learning, the use of online resources, videos, PowerPoint presentations and documentaries*); 'working on reports with friends'; using Chromebooks for research; watching videos; drawing; discussion topics.

Children's written comments included:

- 'Ba mhaith liom níos mó tionscnamh a dhéanamh, e.g. ullchabhán' [I'd like to do more projects, e.g., on the owl]
- 'I like reading geography books'; 'I like answering questions about geography'
- 'I personally like most things in geography except when the topics are boring, like rivers and lakes'
- 'Is maith liom foghlaim faoi cén sort aimsir a bhíonn in Eirinn' [I like learning about the kind of weather we have in Ireland]
- 'Bhain mé taitneamh as tionscnamh a rinne mé ar Chontae Loch Garman' [I enjoyed a project I did on County Wexford]
- 'Na deacrachtaí i tíortha eile e.g. emigration'. [the difficulties in other]

Question 3: What do you not like about geography? / Cad é nach dtaitníonn leat i bhfhoghlaim sa tíreolaíocht?

Children in all the participating schools expressed dislikes about their geography learning. The main points of children's dissatisfaction – written and drawn on the Lifeline sheets - are summarised here, quoting many of their remarks:

- 'Rocks were boring'; 'I don't like learning about bogs because it's a bit boring'
- 'learning about spiders'; 'the human body and yucky minibeasts'
- 'B'fhéarr liom foghlaim faoin Aifric agus an Áis níos mó ná an Eoraip; an easpa bia san Aifric' [I'd prefer to learn about Africa and Asia more than Europe; food scarcity in Africa]
- 'I don't like Part B' [*referring to written textbook exercises requiring comprehension*]; 'When they ask 'what do you think?'; 'I don't like factfinding if you have to write – I prefer to answer orally'
- 'Looking for the answers in the story'; 'I don't like doing it in our copies'
- 'An scríbhneoireacht' [writing]; an iomad ama ar obair bhaile [too much time on homework]
- 'Ní maith liom an méid obair a dheanann tú ar tionscnamh' [I dislike the amount of work you do on projects]
- 'Ní maith liom [bheith] ag scríobh, b'fhéarr liom [bheith] ag caint'. [I'd prefer discussion to writing]
- 'I don't like it if I already know about it'; 'topics I already know about'; 'going over it again'; One pupil remarking "*learning about rivers and mountains can be boring as we're only learning their names and how long they are.*"

Question 4. Your best geography lesson ever / An ceacht tíreolaíochta is fearr riamh, dar leat

After a break, the session resumed with an icebreaker.

Then the next activity was explained: The children were asked to imagine the best geography lesson they could have, what it would be like. No topic or content was suggested. The process of creating a *frozen picture* was explained. While some children grasped the concept easily, others who were new to such an activity required some further explanation and support. Two groups were formed, each group comprising children from the different class levels. They were given ten minutes to work on this in their group and then to display/act their 'picture' to the whole group.

Group 1: Their lesson was on volcanoes. The children stood or crouched in various poses. The facilitator asked each of the children in turn what their action/position/pose was showing. In this group, children said:

- 'I'm hiding in case the volcano explodes' [*three children said similar*]
- 'I'm dropping something in, but standing well back'
- The children were also asked 'what is the teacher doing?' – they said 'teacher was at the top of the class'
- and when asked 'How are the children learning in this class?' – one responded 'it was good to work on it together'
- Another replied that he had other ideas but went along with the group; yet another said 'We'd like to go out and see a natural wonder, but mostly we just read and write about it'.

Group 2: Here, the children's poses were all as sitting positions, most reading, two at a computer keyboard. They said:

- 'I'm doing a report on animals, using Chromebook'
- 'I'm looking at videos'
- 'I'm the teacher and reading with them'
- 'We're researching in our books'

Preferred means of learning differed. A child said:

- 'We would like to go somewhere and see things in real life. You'd remember it better than just seeing it in the book and it would be more enjoyable'

Others said:

- 'It's like schools in the past using old books'
- 'I enjoy learning in the Chromebooks'

Sa chéad scoil eile, rinneadh leasú ar an ngníomhaíocht seo: in ionad an 'pictiúr reoite' in úsáid roimhe seo, iarradh ar na daltaí dráma gearr a chumadh a léireodh an ceacht tíreolaíochta is fearr riamh – ceacht a bhí acu tráth, nó ceacht a shamhlóidís. Bheadh labhairt agus gníomha ceadaithe. [B'éigean don éascaitheoir an tasc a mhíniú cúpla uair go dtuigfeadh na daltaí cad a bhí i gceist anseo] Léirigh siad ceacht tíreolaíochta ina raibh na daltaí míshásta leis an oide toisc nár thaitin leo ábhar an cheachta a roghnaigh sé. Dúirt cailín gur fearr léi dá mbeadh físeán ar siúl. Dúirt daltaí

eile gur mhaith leo rogha a bheith acu maidir leis an ábhar. Níor tháinig siad ar réiteach ar an gceist.

[In another school, this activity was amended – instead of the ‘frozen picture’ used previously, the children were asked to create a short drama to show their ideal geography lesson in speech and actions. They were told it could be one they had experienced or they could imagine a completely new one. (Although the children initially found the proposed task challenging to grasp, they proceeded with it after receiving an explanation). Their drama represented a classroom where the children were arguing with the teacher about the topic/content of the lesson. One girl said that she’d prefer if they could watch a video for it. Other children stated that they wanted to have a choice in what topic they would be learning. The drama ended without resolution].

In the next school, the children were divided into two groups for this drama activity, the instructions being similar to those at the previous school

Group 1: Their ‘dream lesson’ involved a trip to Paris, France.

During the first activity children had identified ‘learning about language and food’ as aspects of learning in geography and this was evident in their mini-drama as the ‘teacher’ was encouraging children to use French words (*Bonjour, Oui, Baguette*) and the pupils were sampling French cuisine (*croissant*), and naming the Eiffel Tower.

Group 2: Their ‘dream lesson’ involved a trip to Costa Rica.

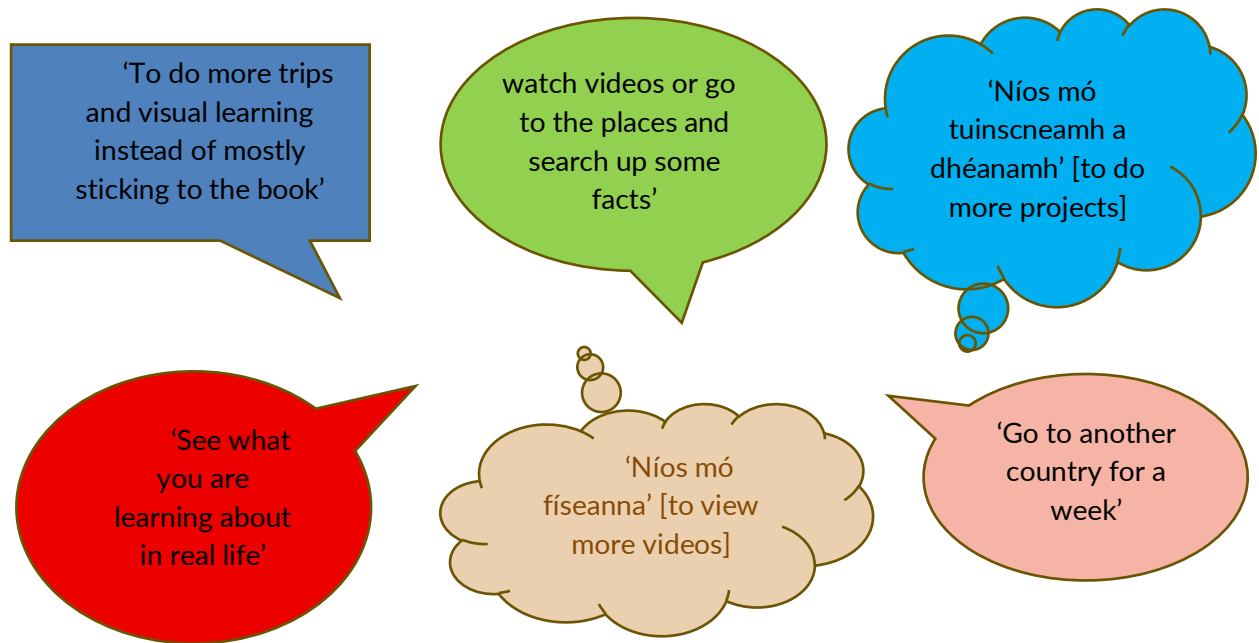
The mini-drama began with the organisation of a trip to the bog and children then imagined that they were travelling abroad (to Costa Rica). The children expressed an interest in going on trips outside of the school.

Children’s wishes for geography / Mianta na bpáistí maidir leis an tíreolaíocht

The final activity in the geography consultation asked the children to write their wishes for geography. In the words of the facilitator ‘If we gave you one wish to change something about geography class, what would that be?’ / *Dá dtabharfaí mian amháin duit chun rud amháin faoi rang tíreolaíochta a athrú, céard a dhéanfá?*

The methodology here was that children wrote their wishes on blue pieces of card and placed them in envelopes which were collected at the end of the activity.

Figure 3: Children's wishes for geography



More of the children's written 'wishes'/comments:

- 'I would like geography to become a more interactive experience and I would also like to see things that occur in geography that are not in our locality'
- 'Geography games'
- 'To learn more from boards or Chromebooks or search for ourselves'
- 'Ní bhíonn aon obair a scríobhann tú' [not to have written work]
- 'I wish that we could go to the rivers we are learning about, like [on] field trips and picnics'
- '... chun dul go dtí alán countries' [to travel to many countries]
- 'To talk to every animal in the world'
- 'For geography to be a little more interesting' 'Níl sé co leadránach' [that it not be so boring]
- 'To learn more about flags and have trips to other geographical places'
- 'Níos mó a dhéanamh faoi sléibhte agus aibhneacha' [to learn more about mountains and rivers]
- 'Not just reading a book, and no Part B' (many children expressed their dislike for 'Part B', a textbook exercise that requires them to respond to comprehension questions)

Consultation on history

This section of the report provides an account of the consultation sessions conducted with children in the three schools on history. All of the children's responses, comments and contributions are aggregated across the three schools.

As in the consultation sessions on geography, introductions were made, with orientation and a clear setting out of the purposes of the day. (See details in preceding report on the geography consultation). For the two schools after the pilot days, those introductions were only required at the beginning of the day.

All the sessions commenced with an icebreaker game. (A variety of games was used across the four days/three schools).

Question 1. What do you learn about in history? / Céard atá á fhoghlaim agat i gceachtanna staire?

The first question posed to the children was 'What do you learn about in history?' The methodology here was to have the children seated in a circle, and they volunteered their responses as they recalled their lessons. The following range of topics and lesson content were recalled:

- Different cultures; the Mali Empire; Egypt; Life near the Nile; Nigeria and its currency
- Romans; Romulus and Remus
- Na Lochlannaigh [the Vikings]; na hAistéicigh (Aztecs); The Normans
- the Stone Age; the Renaissance
- Celtic Gods and symbols
- An Gorta Mór [the Great Famine]; Revolution of 1798
- Daniel O'Connell, The Liberator; Catholic Emancipation
- War of Independence; Micheál O Coileáin; Cogadh na Saoirse [the Civil War]
- 'Things that happened in Ireland in past times'
- What life was like long ago; Old Irish schools
- Medieval towns and cities (example given was Kilkenny)
- Northern Ireland, Britain
- An Dara Cogadh Domhanda [WW2]
- Cúchulainn, The Children of Lir; Tir na nÓg; Salmon of Knowledge; banshees
- St Kevin and Glendalough
- the Industrial Age and pollution
- How the telephone was made; making electricity from a lake; Inventing the lightbulb
- Rosa Parks
- Tom Crean

Question 2: What do you like about history? / Céard a thaitníonn leat faoi stair?

In the methodology for this question 'What do you like about history?' children were divided into two groups. They wrote their responses on jigsaw pieces.

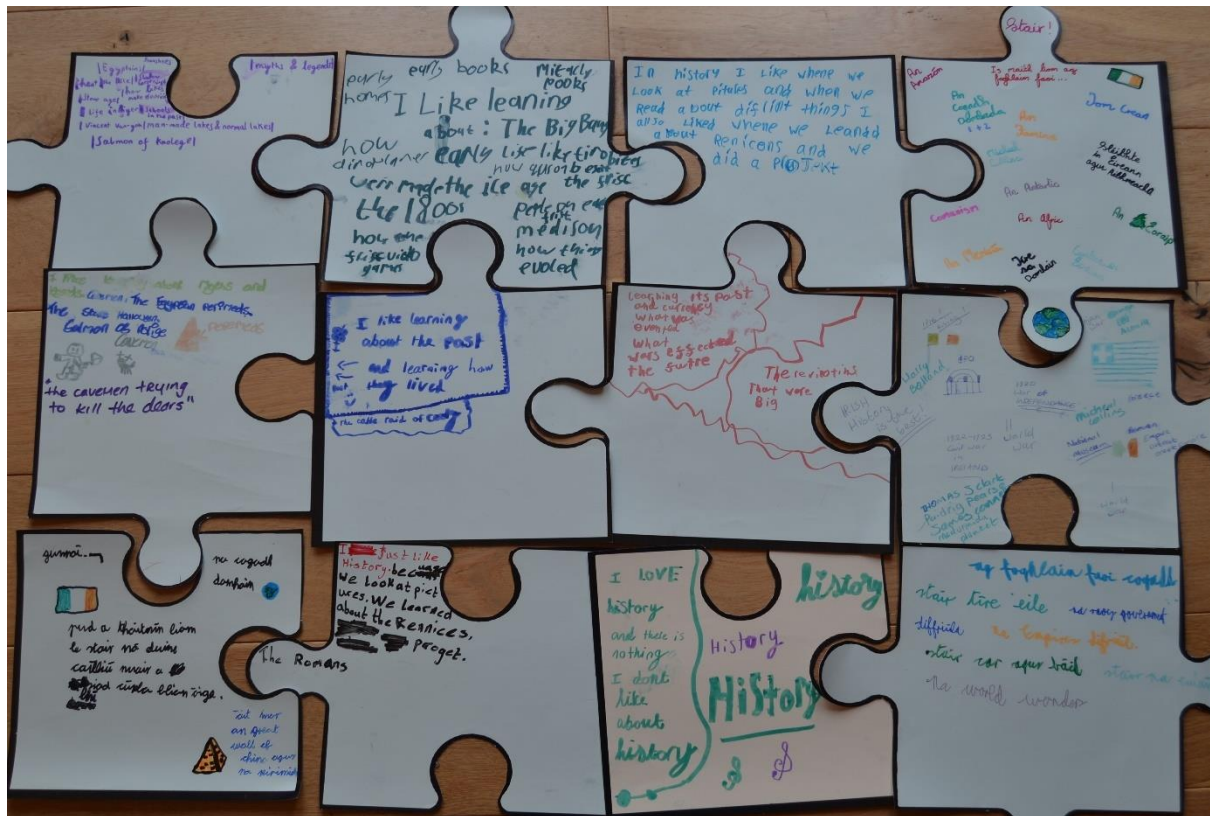


Table 4: Responses to question 2

'I like learning about the past and how they lived'	'World War 1 because I find it interesting'	'Ba mhaith liom an Famine' [I'd like the Famine]	'the Irish Revolution' [clarified it was that of 1798]
in history, I like when we look at pictures and when we read about different things'		Rud a thaitníonn liom le stair ná duine cáiliúil nuair a bhí siad cúpla bliain óige' [Something I like in history is to learn about someone famous when they were young]	
'Greek gods'	'the Egyptians and peromeds' [pyramids]	'Salmon of Knowledge'	'Na impirí difriúla' [different emperors/(empires?)]
'I like learning about the Big Bang'	'na cogáí domhanda' [the World Wars]	'the revolutions that were big'	'what was invented'
'myths and legends'	'schools in the past'	'the great Irish Elk'	'Great Wall of China'
'I liked when we learned about the Renicons [Renaissance] and we did a project'		'cavemen trying to kill the deers'	'I like to learn about myths and legends'
'Is maith liom foghlaim ar daoine cáiliúla' [I like learning about famous people]		'the Ice age'	'stair na healaíne' [history of art]

Other comments from the children:

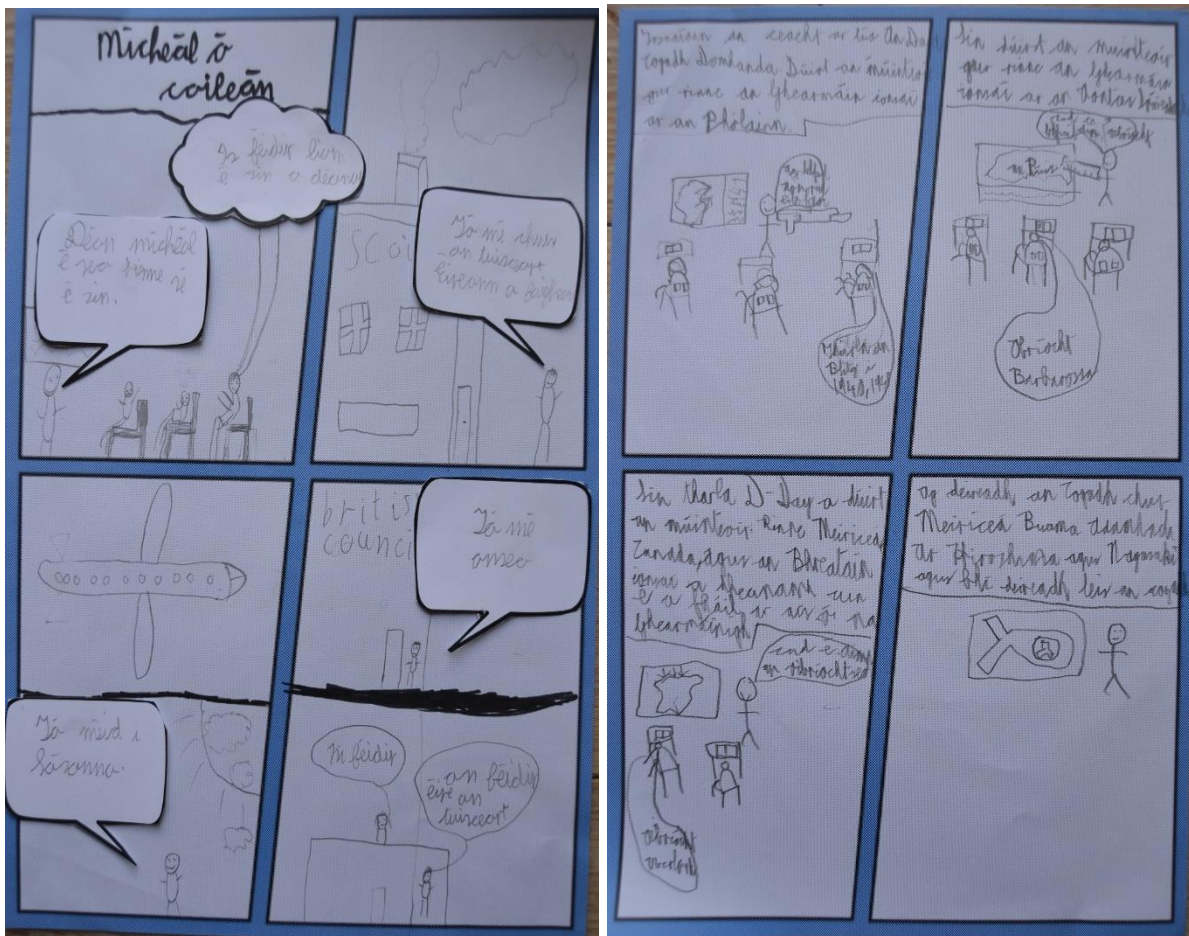
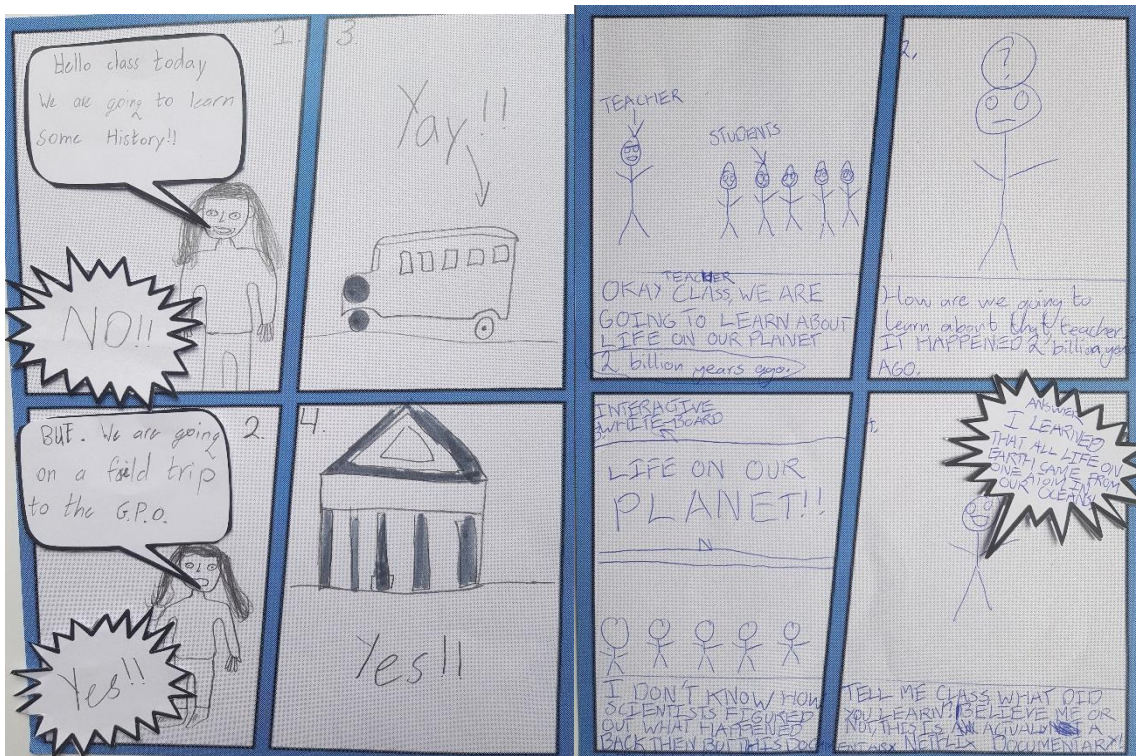
- 'The only thing I don't like is this – writing for a long time'
- 'Sitting down and doing paper work'
- 'Learning the same thing over and over again'; 'I don't like repetitive learning'
- 'I simply don't like modern Irish history but I'm interested in old Irish history, like the Celts'
- 'I love learning about ancient civilisations'; 'I would like to learn more about world history'
- 'I don't like learning about politicians'
- '[I don't like] learning really old Irish history'
- 'I love history and everything about it' [included a drawing of Countess Markevicz]
- 'I like mostly everything about history except for the modern history, like the creation of modern cars and buildings'
- 'War and conflict in the past. Wars are happening now every single day and we can see it around us'

Question 4: Comic book exercise –your 'best history lesson ever' / Stialghreannán a tharraingt a léireodh 'an ceacht staire is fearr riamh'

In the methodology here, children were provided with a comic strip template and were asked to draw a history lesson depicting 'the best history lesson ever' on the template. They were also provided with speech bubble templates to use if they wished to represent characters speaking in their illustrations. Topics the children chose and illustrated included:

- The Cattle Raid of Cooley; A visit to the Giant's Causeway; A Visit to the National Library; Going to a library to research with Chromebooks
- Learning about the Stone Age (x2); Learning about Lakes and Rivers; World War II;
- The 1798 Rebellion; An Dara Cogadh Domhanda [the Second World War]
- Micheál O Coileáin (3); An Gorta Mór (2);

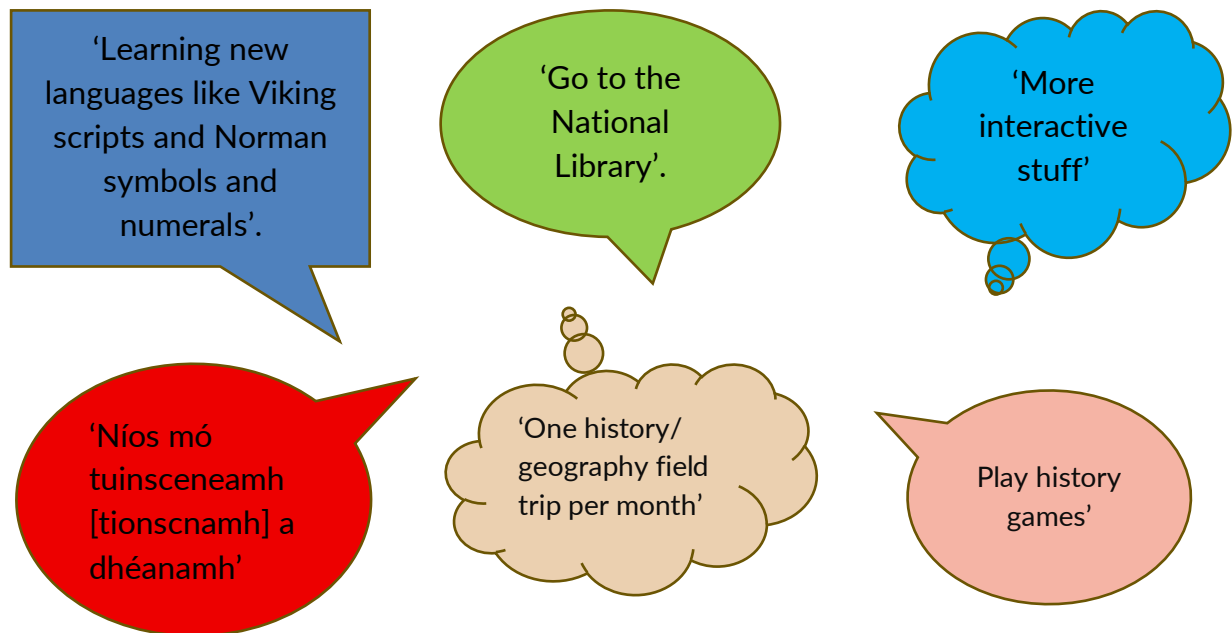
Figure 4: Examples of children's comic strips to illustrate their 'best history lessons ever'



Children's wishes for history /Mianta na bpáistí maidir leis an stair

As in the geography consultation, children were asked 'Think about your wish for history - one thing you would change' / Dá dtabharfaí mian amháin duit chun rud amháin faoi rang staire a athrú, céard a dhéanfá? Children wrote their wishes/their suggestions in response to that on yellow pieces of card and placed them in envelopes which were collected at the end of the activity.

Figure 5: Some wishes for history



More of the children's 'wishes for history':

- 'Go to countries to learn the history of that country'
- 'My wish for history is that we learn history from all over the world not just Irish history and to have more engaging hands-on lessons with fun activities to help children learn. Also we could do small historical trips in our area and to do more visual learning'
- 'Watching films instead of writing'
- 'More learning about it out of books, not novels . . . and maybe more pictures with the books'
- 'What we currently learn in history consists of things that happened 100-10,000 years ago but I would like to learn about things that happened 2 million to 2 billion years ago. I find earth's early history more fascinating than any other topic'
- 'Maybe write stuff on our copies and search for it on our Chromebooks'
- 'I would love to include more stuff in the 1900s and longer time for each topic, more visual work and more reading'
- 'that we went to more places like to Corla Bog like we did . . . or to learn more from tech'
- 'More interactive stuff'

- 'I would like Countess Markevicz to be known'
- 'Níos mó a dhéanamh faoi empire difriúla' [to do more about different empires]
- 'I wish that I could learn how my family was here before me and to act out old legends'
- 'is to have more global history'
- 'is to do more visual learning instead of mostly sticking to the book'
- 'They would have a soundtrack about the lesson'
- 'Níor mhaith liom aon rud a athrú' [I don't wish to change anything]

'Moving debate' on the two subjects / 'Díospóireacht ghluaiste' ar an dá abhar

On the history pilot day, a moving/walking debate was conducted with the children. This activity was concerned with both history and geography and it sought the children's views on a number of statements about the subjects in their classrooms. The children were asked to stand at one of three positions marked AGREE, UNSURE, or DISAGREE in response to statements made by the facilitator. The following table sets out those statements and the children's spoken responses, where these were made.

Table 5: Children's responses in the moving debate

Facilitator's statements	Children's responses
History is my favourite subject (<i>More agreed than disagreed</i>)	'History is my favourite subject' '[I like] learning about things in the past' 'If the past didn't exist, neither would we' 'My mum worked in a museum'
Geography is the best subject (<i>More disagreed than agreed</i>)	'I love learning about things in geography' 'Can't decide between history and geography' '[We do] too many Part Bs'
I spend more time learning about history than geography in my class (<i>Most were unsure</i>)	'Agree, I think we do' 'I think they're even' 'Not sure' 'I think they're the same' 'We use our geography books a lot more'
My teacher decides what we learn about in geography lessons (<i>All agreed</i>)	'We do projects from the book, so teacher decides' 'Teacher tells us what page to open in the book' 'You have to do it all that teacher says even if we know it'
The children decide what we learn about in history class (<i>All disagreed</i>)	'No, teacher decides always'

Discussion of the consultation findings

The following summary presents some interpretation of the data by the report writer which is based on the report writers observations from attending the consultations and the analysis of the data.

The *Primary Curriculum Framework* points out that 'Social and Environmental Education contributes to children's understanding and development of the interconnected historical, geographical, and societal dimensions and processes of life'. The 1999 Primary School Curriculum noted that history and geography (along with science, in that iteration of the curriculum) have 'a distinctive role to play in enabling the child to explore and understand the natural, human, social and cultural environments in which he/she lives' (p.2).

The children in this report provided abundant detail on what they learn in both geography and history, referencing many aspects of 'the natural, human, social and cultural environments' in which they live. While the consultation sessions on each subject were conducted separately within the one day in each school, it is clear that there were many commonalities between their learning experiences and indeed their expressed views regarding the two subjects. For example, the children regularly linked geographical and historical facts and events, recognising their intersecting and overlapping features, and when talking about how they learn in the two subjects, their preferences for active learning methodologies applied to both. The children's ability to blend many topics across the two subjects suggests that in planning for curriculum integration, teachers have a head start, in those two subjects at least.

The following account records a summary of the children's views on the subjects, separately at first, but also noting features of learning common to both, particularly from the wider perspective of Social and Environmental Education.

The children's voices on geography

The consultation session on geography began with the question to the children **'What things do you learn about in geography?'** A wide range of topics and interests emerged from the children's responses. These encompassed aspects of physical geography, such as mountains, lakes, rivers and bogs, features of the natural world's flora and fauna, including reptiles, bats and nocturnal creatures, physical sciences such as energy, pollution and magnetic fields, and political geography, as in the study of maps, globes and counties of Ireland. Contemporary environmental concerns also arose from responses, for example, eco towns, solar panels, biodiversity, the Amazonian forests. The geography and cultures of other countries was frequently mentioned.

In forming their responses, it was noticeable that initially, some children seemed uncertain about what qualified as 'geography', referencing topics in history among their geographical responses. One child made the interesting observation 'I don't really know what geography is, like I know what science is'. Indeed, this cross-subject thinking was a feature of the consultations all through, with the two subjects' disciplinary boundaries being frequently criss-crossed and blurred. That said, there were occasions when children consciously and deliberately straddled those boundaries, making explicit reference to topics that integrated the two subjects (the story of Christopher Columbus' voyages was an example). However, as the consultation progressed, the identification of lessons the children had experienced as more specifically geographical became more focused. Responses from some children regarding particular lessons appeared to prompt recall in others. It's relevant too that the majority of the children participating in these consultations, from Third Class to Sixth, were from different schools and classrooms and had their individual experiences of geography learning.

The initial question was followed by a more focused one **'What do you like about geography?'** It was interesting to note that, in their spontaneous responses here, the children referred to both the content of their geography lessons and also the ways in which they learned. Naming content, children's responses likely identified topics and areas they had themselves encountered, but influenced too by their own particular interests - personal work on projects was mentioned, as were named creatures, such as the owl or bats. Questions about geography helped to highlight the children's curiosity about things, places and people, at home and abroad. They expressed strong interest in the differences between countries, in particular the cultural features of different peoples. In one of the schools, there was a notably strong emphasis on *Environmental Awareness and Care* in the school's involvement in the Green Schools Programme.

Regarding *how* they learned geography, most children expressed strong approval for active and collaborative methodologies. 'Working on reports with friends' was favoured, as were discussion, field trips and visual learning. Children specified 'visual learning' as being the use of online resources, viewing videos, PowerPoint presentations, and using Chromebooks. Learning activities outside of school also appealed to children. There was favour for being tasked with doing their own research. However, traditional desk-based learning also received approval, with some children liking to 'read geography books', 'draw in their copies', and 'answer questions' in their lessons.

When next asked **'What do you not like about geography?'**, there was a pattern similar to the 'like' responses earlier, in that both content and pedagogical aspects featured. Once again, individual topics were mentioned - bogs, rocks, and 'learning about rivers and mountains' - as

they were considered 'boring'. Other topics were disliked because they were in some way distasteful – spiders, 'yucky minibeasts', the human body. Finding repetition and insufficient challenge in their learning, some children objected to 'topics I already know about', 'going over it again' and 'I don't like it if I already know about it'.

The majority of responses here referred to *how* they learned geography. Textbook learning was disliked. 'Too much writing' was a common response, with 'writing in our copies' a definite dislike. Also 'I don't like factfinding if you have to write'. A child said they would prefer discussion to writing (Ní maith liom [bheith] ag scríobh, b'fhearr liom [bheith] ag caint). Another view was 'Ní maith liom an méid obair a dhéanann tú ar tionscnamh' [I don't like the amount of work you have to do on a project]. A dislike of learning facts was also expressed: 'learning about rivers and mountains can be boring as we're only learning their names and how long they are'. A number of children stressed their preference for tasks requiring the use of digital technology such as Chromebooks.

The next activity invited the children to imagine their '**best geography lesson ever**'. Children on the geography pilot day represented two lessons by means of 'frozen pictures'. In one, they were studying volcanoes on a volcanic site visit. In the other, the children were using varied ways to research animals, but all within a classroom. In the latter situation, the children were happy enough to carry out their research, though one child wasn't – 'We'd like to go somewhere and see things in real life. You'd remember it better than just seeing it in the book and it would be more enjoyable'. The method for subsequent days was for the children to represent their learning in short dramas. In one school, that drama had the children argue with the teacher that they should have a choice in the topic they had to study. The final school had two groups, one organising a trip to France, the other planning a trip to Costa Rica.

A few conclusions could be drawn from observing these representations and hearing the children's comments, in particular, the qualities and characteristics that children would associate with their ideal lesson: it would be interactive and experiential, would include hands-on activities and active exploration, but 'no writing'. It would allow children to use their senses, involve group-work/collaboration and provide opportunities for field work and going outside the classroom.

The geography consultation ended with one final activity. Here, the children were asked to say/write/draw **one wish they would have for their learning in geography**. The responses here reflected and echoed the views and suggestions the children had made earlier in the consultation. Thus, their emphasis was largely on how they wished to learn: that it be a more interactive experience; that trips could be made outside of their locality; that they could go to actually see the things they read about in their textbooks - 'see what you are learning in real life'; that the subject wouldn't be 'leadránach' [boring], but would be 'a little more interesting'. Also, that more technology would be used – níos mó físeanna [more videos], and the opportunity to engage in more project work - 'Níos mó tionscnamh a dhéanamh'.

The children's voices on history

For the history consultation, the series of questions and activities employed for the geography consultation was used again here. Thus, the first question posed to the children was '**What do you learn about in history?**'

The broad spread of topics that was compiled from the children's responses here is likely due in part to the flexibility that the 1999 Primary Curriculum allowed to teachers in selecting topics from a broad menu. Over 40 separate lesson topics were reported by the children, a number of these the subject of multiple mentions. The diverse topics (listed in detail earlier in the history section of this report) illustrated the scope of the areas of interest available to children and their teachers. Issues and topics in Irish history figured prominently, such as those in the Revolutionary Period 1916 to 1923, but materials from earlier times also appeared on the list. Studies on the Vikings and the Normans were noted, as were more modern personalities such as Daniel O'Connell and Tom Crean. A number of children referred to An Gorta Mór/the Great Famine. Irish myths and legends such as Cúchulainn and the Children of Lir were popular topics for many children.

The Renaissance was a topic mentioned by a few, while some children had studied earlier cultures such as those of Egypt, Mali and Rome, and further afield, the Aztec civilisation. It was noted that there was little or no mention of other non-European civilisations that appear on the history menus of the 1999 Curriculum, such as China or Japan, particularly for senior classes. The children's history listings here frequently linked to geographical topics, blurring subject boundaries, as had been noted in the geography consultation.

Next asked to say what they '**liked about history**', the children's responses had many commonalities with the actual topics they said they had learned. Many of those topics and areas of interest appear again in their 'like' responses, with a span of chronology from ancient to modern. Aspects of Irish and international history were mentioned, but with Irish history featuring more frequently. Children's interests link history with geography, art, science and mythology. There are references to projects, to artwork, and to PowerPoint presentations, one to model-making, and one to drama, but few references to field trips or visits to museums or historical sites.

Children's views on learning history came across as predominantly positive. When the question '**What do you not like about history?**' was asked, most children said that there wasn't anything they didn't like about it. 'I love history' and 'Is breá liom gach rud faoi stair' were typical responses. Dislikes that were stated mainly concerned classroom methodologies they experienced, with written work and comprehension questions in particular coming in for criticism. Also viewed negatively was work with little challenge, or involving repetition. In respect of content, the main dislike was learning about politicians or politics.

Providing variety in the consultation's activities, a **comic-strip exercise** was undertaken in the history sessions. It provided the children with an opportunity to illustrate their concept of 'the best history lesson ever'. However, a few children showed geography lessons too. While the topics chosen were mainly of classroom-based lessons, a few children represented trips outside schools – to the National Library, and to the Giant's Causeway, and within the school, to their library to research with Chromebooks. Among the learning points that were illustrated in the children's pictures, it was clear that they enjoy listening and responding to stories in history, they

enjoy watching documentaries to help them to develop an awareness and understanding of life for people in the past, and the use of digital tools enriches the learning experience for children, with many pupils incorporating their Chromebooks, PowerPoint presentations and other apps into their illustrations.

In the final part of the history consultation, the children were asked to express '**one wish for history**' – one thing they would change about their learning in the subject. While some children nominated particular areas or topics of personal interest that they would like to study, most made reference to the ways in which they would like to learn. Echoing many earlier responses, there was a strong favouring/desire for alternative ways to learn besides books and classroom reading and writing; they would like more 'visual' learning (including use of digital technologies); they would like 'less writing', and 'more trips and fieldwork'. A number of the children's responses here were notable for their considered and reflective quality (see detailed history report earlier). Also noted was children expressing wishes to direct their own learning – through travel, tech research, and reading, to discover and understand more about history.

A few interesting if not surprising points emerged from **the 'moving debate' exercise** conducted just once, on the history pilot day. The first point, which all the children agreed on, was that the content of lessons in both history and geography was almost always decided by the classroom teacher. Commenting on this, children again said that they would like some degree of choice in what they would study – they wanted content that was interesting and also challenging. They were asked to compare the time allowed for the two subjects but were unable to do so, as they wouldn't be in a sufficiently informed position to make that comparison over time. It was interesting to note that overall, among the children in that one school, history as a subject was more popular than geography. Perhaps the storied and often dramatic nature of history and its personalities appeal more to the primary school child's age and stage.

Conclusion and next steps

Responses of the children who participated in these consultations show that they have a keen interest in geography and history and enjoy much of the learning they do in those subjects. Their natural curiosity about people, places and events around them and further afield is apparent in the way they talked about these subjects in the consultation's events and activities. They enjoy stories, whether tales of mythical characters in Ireland's rich folktales, the dramatic adventures of Tom Crean, or the people in Pompeii as Vesuvius erupted. They are interested in how past events have shaped the present, perhaps studying the visible remains of ancient empires or understanding the inventions and discoveries that have enabled our present-day lives.

Yet running through these consultations is a strong sense among children that they could be learning in more varied, more enjoyable and ultimately more successful ways. In their own way, children expressed a desire to be more proactive in their learning, having more choice in its content, and greater agency in pursuing their interests; they strongly desire active engagement and hands-on participation, 'not just reading a book'. In an age of rapidly evolving digital technologies, they see and approve of many ways in which those technologies already facilitate their learning and are likely to do so in ever more novel ways as they progress in their learning journeys.

While the children display an understanding that their learning can occur within the classroom or in places outside of the school, they perceive the limitations inherent in being asked to learn, analyse and understand ideas and materials they haven't actually encountered or experienced but have only read about.

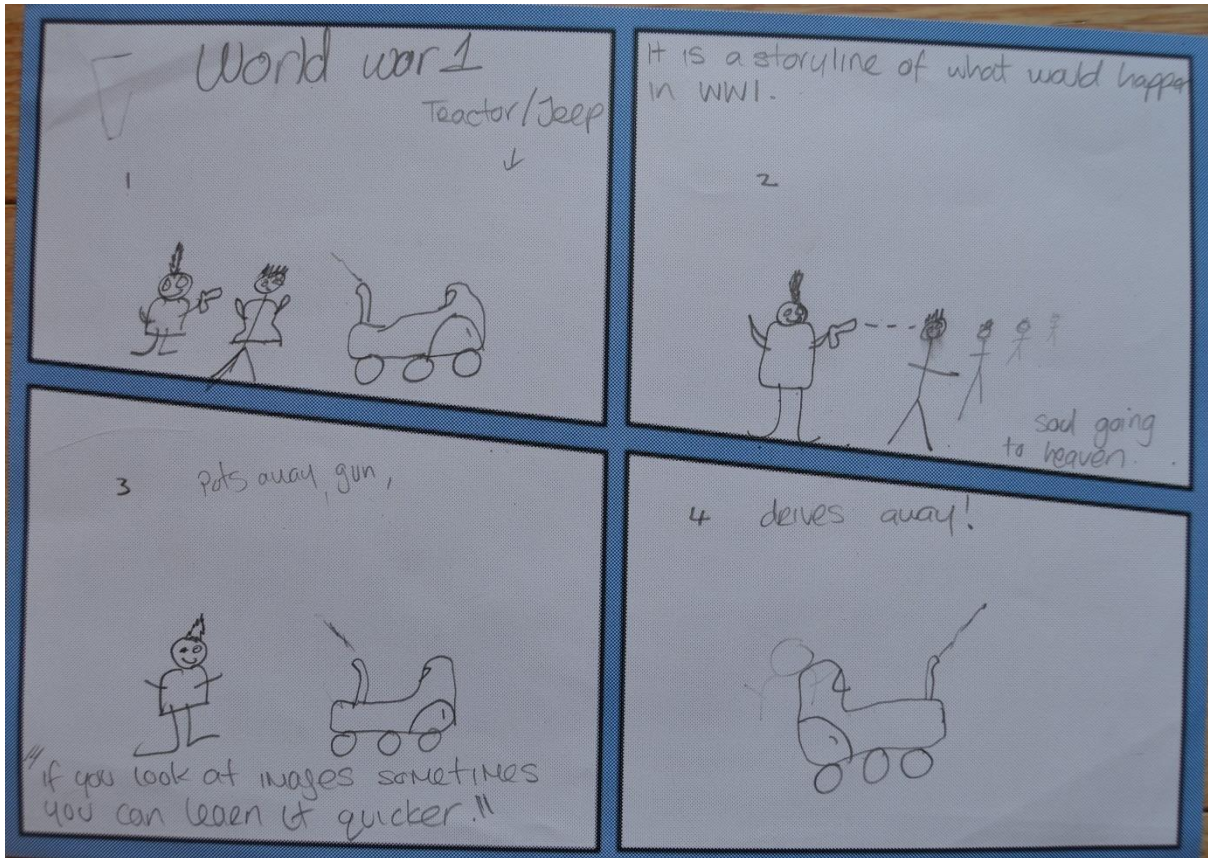
In the coming months, this report will be shared with the Social and Environmental Education Development Group, the Early Childhood and Primary Board and the Council. In doing so, it will form a part of the ongoing deliberations about the future of the primary school curriculum. A child-friendly version of this report will be shared with the children who participated in this consultation and that report will include a section that informs the children of the influence that their voices will have in NCCA's development processes.

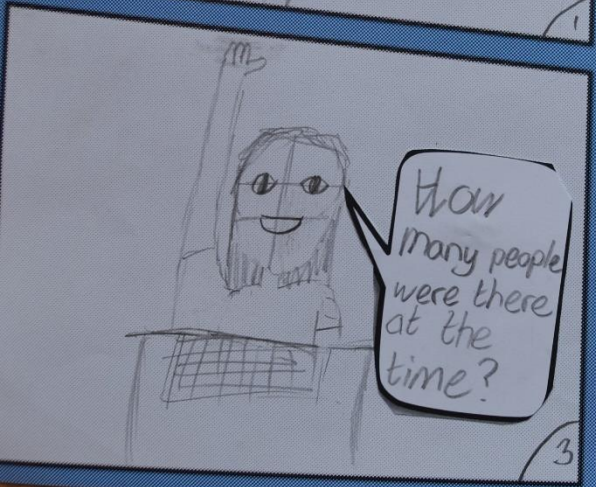
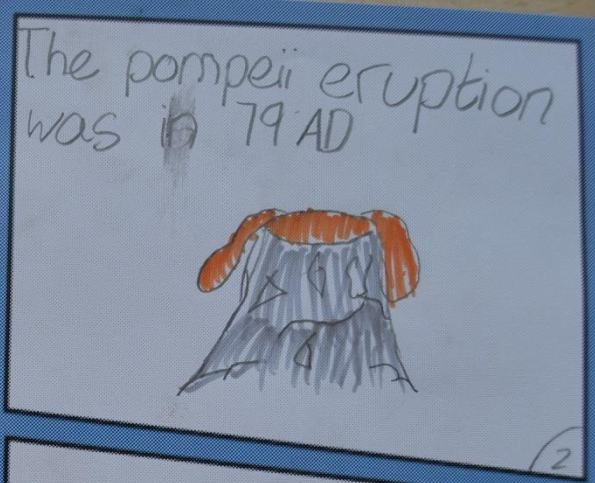
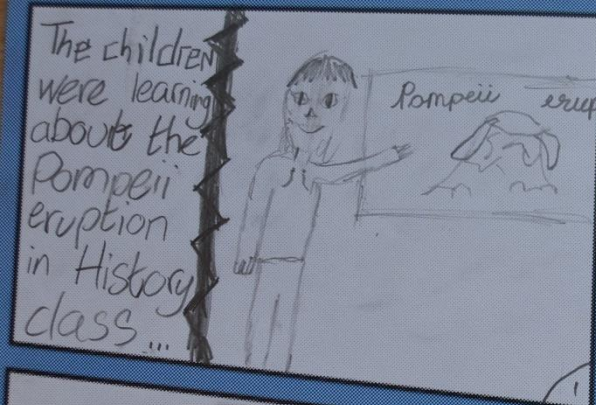
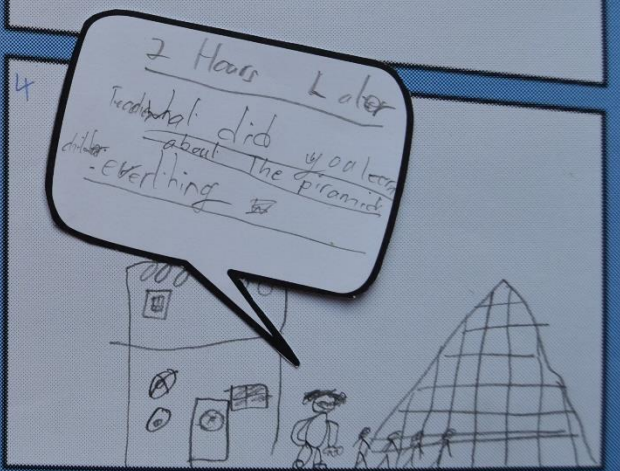
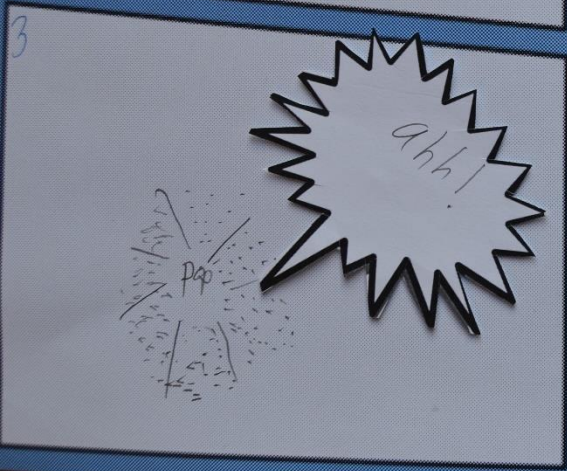
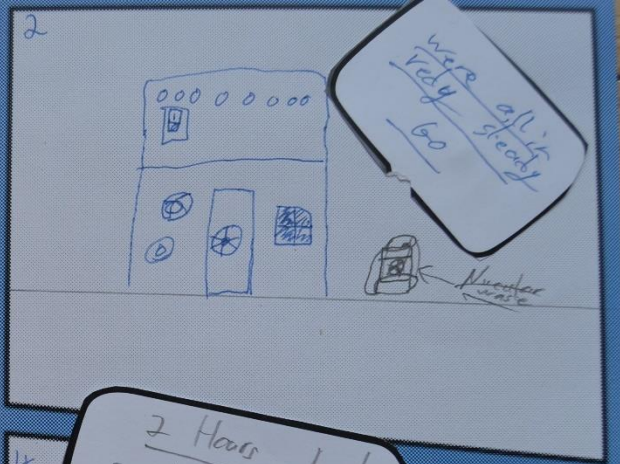
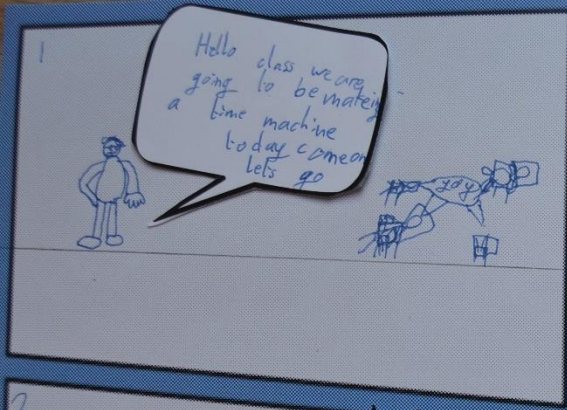
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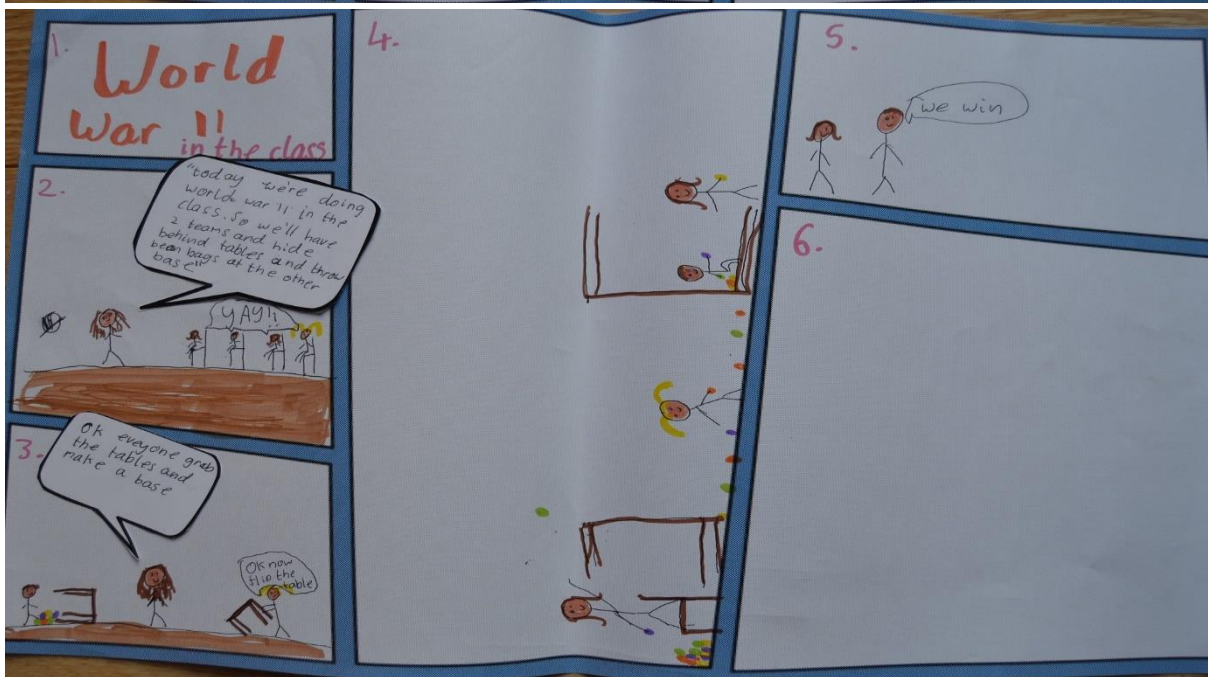
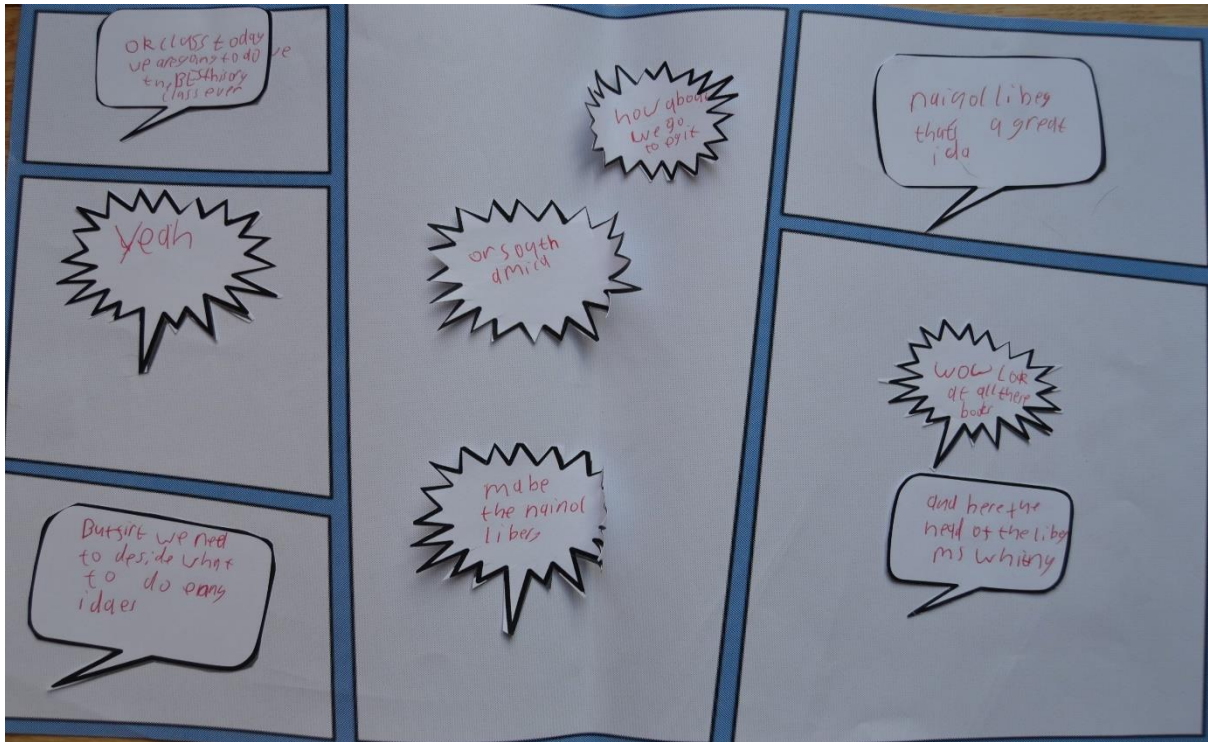
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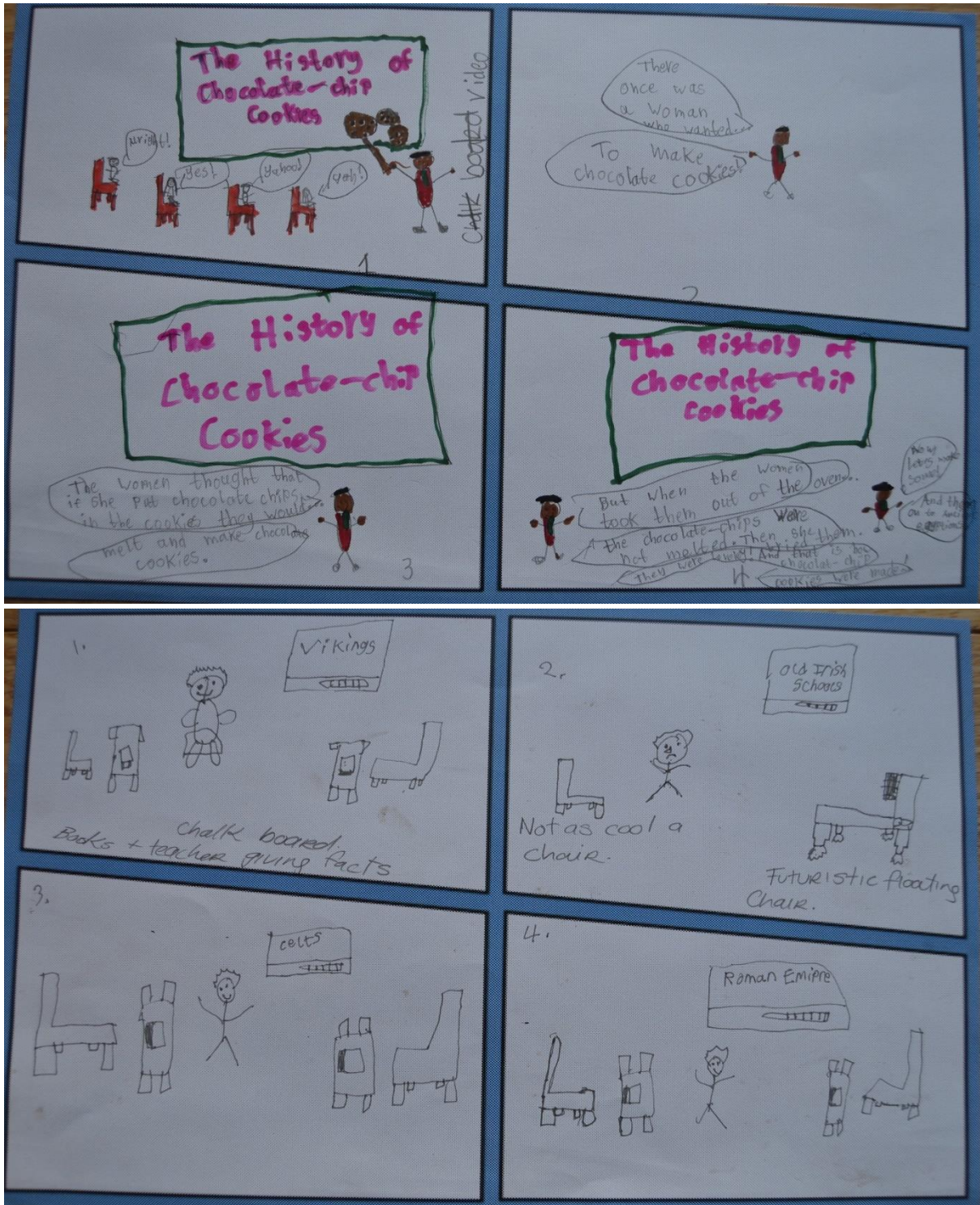
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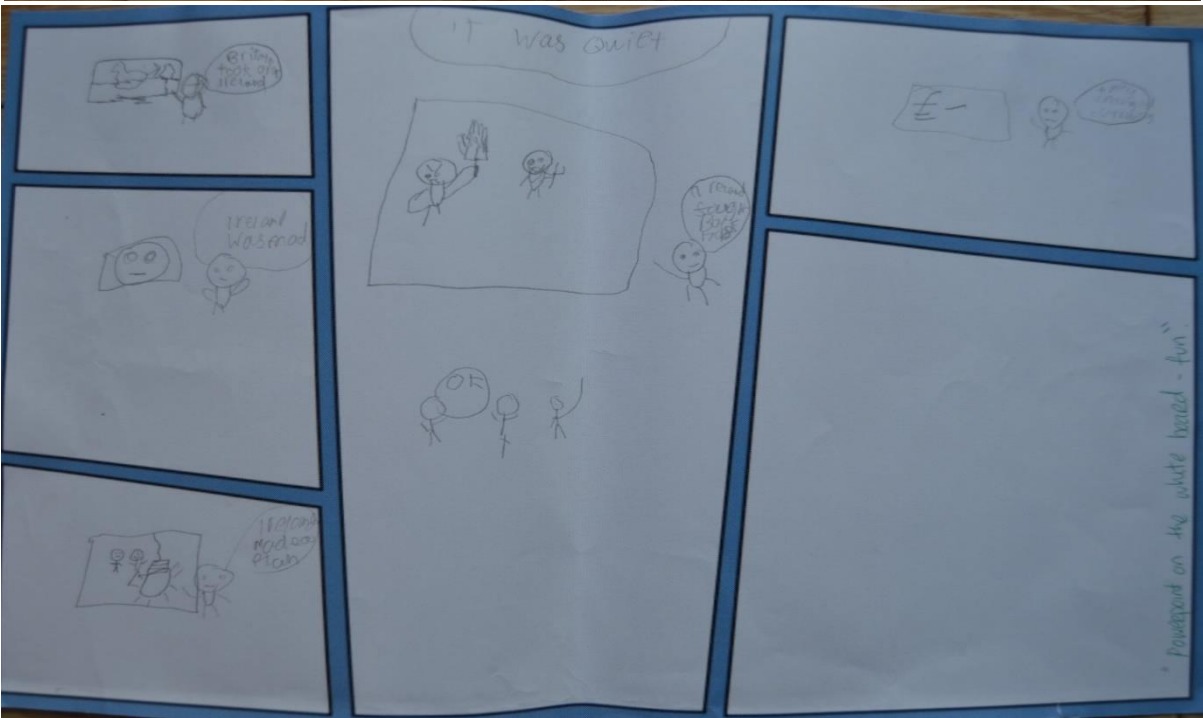
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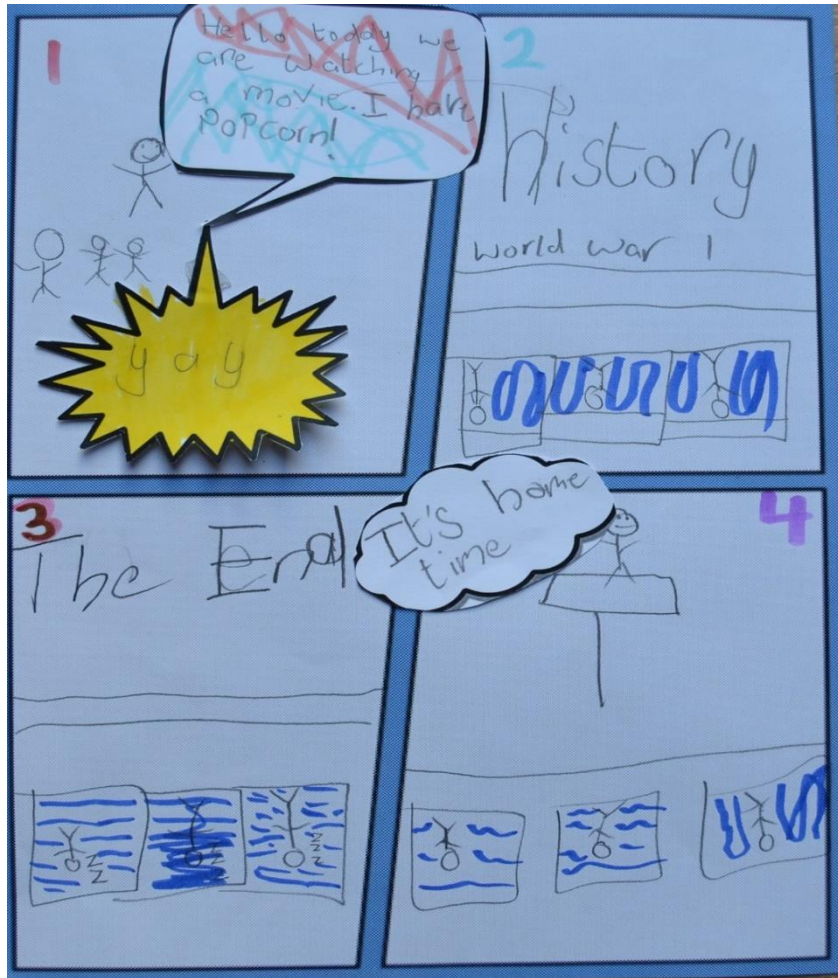


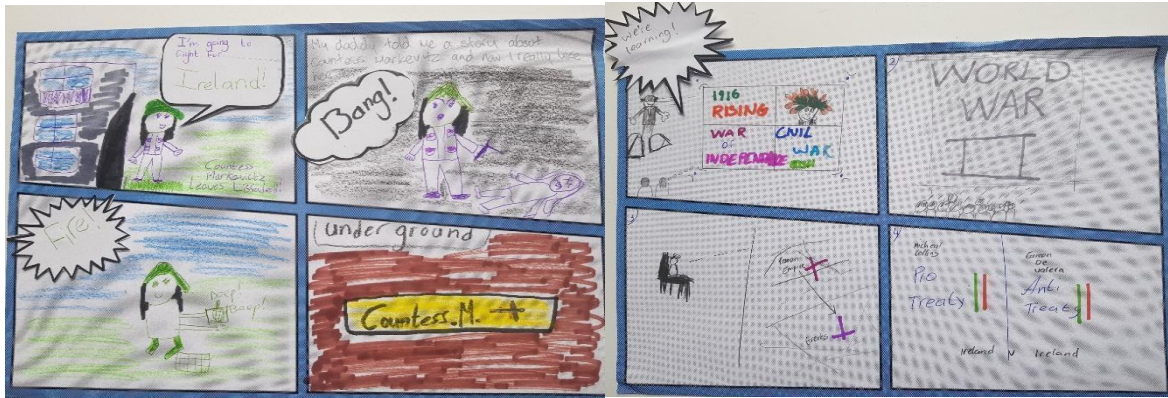


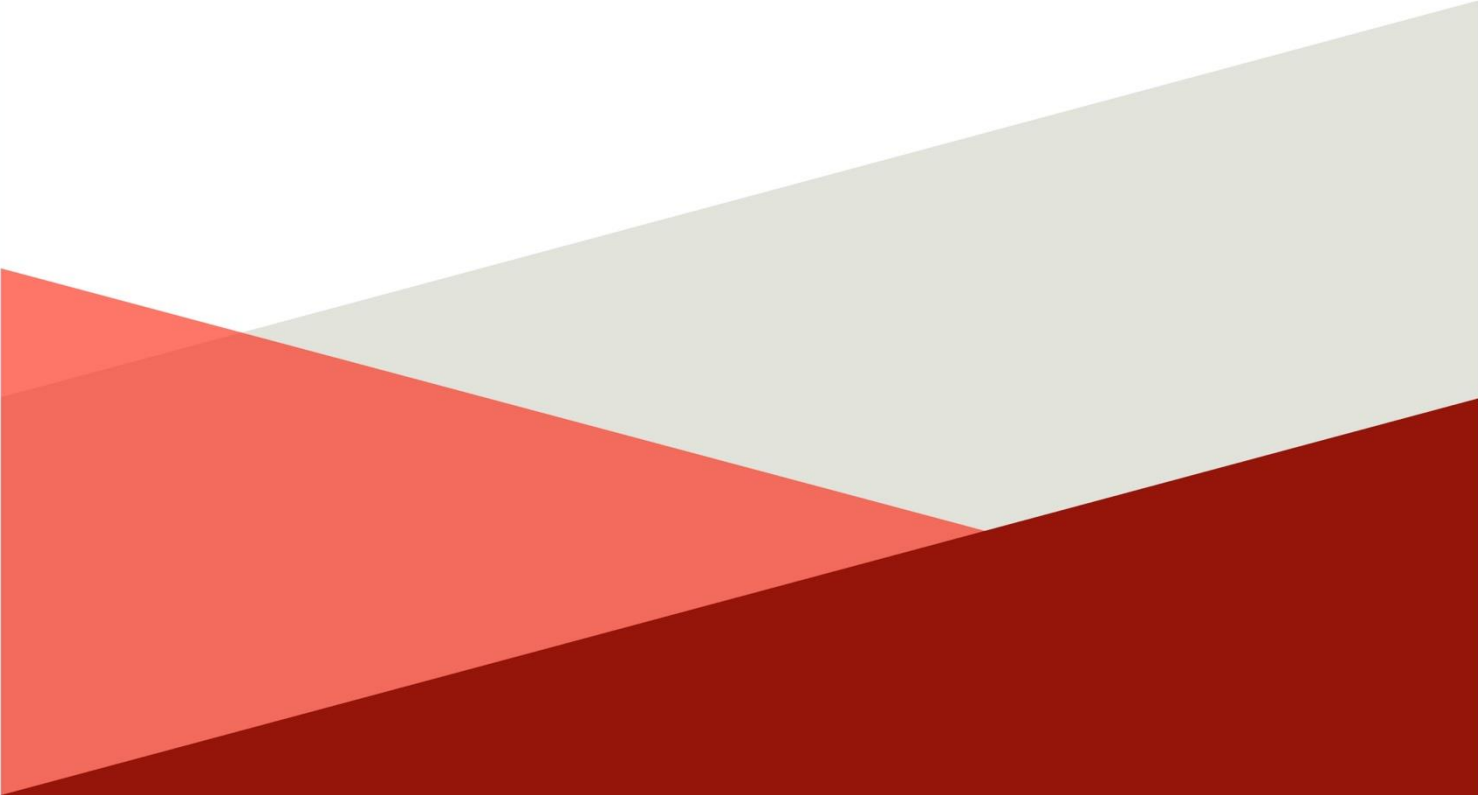












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