

# Keeping the Learning Going @ Home: A focus on science and geography



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In this series, specially written for Independent.ie, the Professional Development Service for Teachers (PDST), offers some valuable pointers to parents across a range of different learning areas. PDST is a Department of Education and Skills support service.

This article, about encouraging children to explore the everyday places and spaces where they live, is the eighth in the series.

## **Science & Geography: Exploring and observing our place and space**

The idea of place and space has taken on a very different meaning in recent times. Being at home can give us an opportunity to look at familiar places and spaces with inquiring eyes. Here, we present some simple family-friendly ideas to spark your child's curiosity and creativity, while also helping your child to develop fundamental inquiry skills of observation, recording and investigating as they explore the everyday places and spaces where they live.

### **Map it out**

Children can be asked to make their own map of their space, it could be indoors or outdoors. They could add details of some important item and create a key with symbols to represent particular features. Imaginary maps or a map from a favourite story or poem can be created too. Many stories have journeys in them for instance that can be represented in a map like this one below.

Image: An imaginary map by Aoibha Loughran (Age 8)  
Scoilnet Maps on Scoilnet.ie feature a great collection of online mapping resources including heritage and biodiversity maps which can be found



at <https://heritagemaps.biodiversityireland.ie/>. These wonderfully detailed maps are free to access and allow for exploration of a wide range of built and natural heritage points of interest.

### **Human environment: Man-made structures in our place and space**

The built environment presents further opportunities to facilitate the development of your child's inquiry skills without having to venture too far from home. Explore with your child, asking what man-made structures can be observed around your place and space.

Try sketching some of these. What are these structures used for? What different materials were used to make them? How can we tell if these structures are old or modern? Children can create a model of a building or structure in your local area using Lego, empty cardboard containers or other play materials or maybe even natural materials. Consider using digital tools as mentioned in our previous Digital Storytelling article to capture the process of creating their model.

### **Natural environment: Flora and fauna that share our place and space**

With long bright evenings, there is no better time of year to get out for a traditional nature walk. Encourage your child to keep their eyes peeled for living things that can be found in and around our place and space. Create a summer-themed "Colour palette" with leaves or petals, using double sided or sticky tape and a plain sheet of recycled card.

Example of a summer-themed “colour palette” created using materials sourced during a recent nature walk

Further develop your child’s recording and data handling skills by helping them to conduct a survey of native birds, trees and plants. There are lots of free downloadable guides and apps to help with identification.



### **Our place in space**

Space is a topic which holds great fascination for children and adults alike. During their current COVID-closure, the innovative team of astronomers in Blackrock Castle Observatory in Cork continue to broadcast free weekly episodes of their “Planetarium at Home” series every Friday evening. Each family-friendly show is around 10 minutes long and gives some lovely suggestions for what to look out for over our night skies. Episodes can be accessed via their website <https://www.bco.ie/events/planetarium-at-home/>

Be sure to check out <https://www.pdst.ie/PrimarySTEM> where you will find a variety of STEM resources and learning activities developed by the PDST Primary STEM team to support home learning.

In previous weeks, the PDST shared tips on how to make the most out of reading time, how to support children in developing digital storytelling, how to keep happy, healthy and learning movement skills , how to measure a minute, how to make the best use of digital libraries, how to support wellbeing and how to support children’s Irish language skills in an enjoyable way.