

---

Title	Pictures as teaching tools in geography
Author(s)	Yee, Sze Onn
Source	<i>Teaching and Learning</i> , 4(1)5-13
Published by	Institute of Education (Singapore)

---

This document may be used for private study or research purpose only. This document or any part of it may not be duplicated and/or distributed without permission of the copyright owner. The Singapore Copyright Act applies to the use of this document.

# PICTURES AS TEACHING TOOLS IN GEOGRAPHY

YEE SZE ONN

## Introduction

Pictures thoughtfully selected and skilfully used constitute powerful tools in instruction. They convey stronger and more lasting impressions to pupils than the printed word.

## Value of Pictures in Geographic Instruction

One of the chief values of pictures is the contribution they make to the pupils' geographic vocabulary. Very often our pupils do not acquire an accurate idea of what we are trying to teach them owing to their misinterpretation of the geographic terms and expressions which we use. A verbal description of a geographical feature like a *cirque* or a *polje* unaccompanied by an illustration may lead to a somewhat hazy concept at best or to a completely erroneous idea at worst.

Pictures help to give substance to faraway places and people. When the pupil hears or reads about them, they sometimes seem unreal because they are unfamiliar to him and the conditions about which he reads are beyond his experience.

Well-chosen pictures help to clarify ideas and provide pupils with the images we want them to have. They also help to correct any misconceptions they may have acquired.

Pictures form an essential and vital link between outdoor and indoor study. To take pupils to the places which they study would certainly be ideal but apart from the occasional field trip in the vicinity of the school or further afield, such excursions are usually difficult to arrange. Pictures therefore constitute the most effective substitute for actual geographical fieldwork. Through them the outside world can be brought into the classroom.

However, not all pictures which are available have

geographic value. Many are simply of decorative value. Hence great care must be taken in the selection of pictures for study in geography. Both instructional and mechanical aspects must be considered in selecting pictures for instruction.

The following questions may serve as guidelines:

- Is the picture clear?
- Is it large enough for group study or should it be used by one pupil at a time?
- Does it have a definite centre of interest?
- Is the picture authentic?
- Is it typical of the region or the phenomenon being studied?

The picture should not depict the unusual or bizarre. It should not be selected simply because it shows a scenic or cultural view of the region under study. Each picture must contribute to the solution of the problems being studied, the development of a concept, or the building of relationships and vocabulary. The rule to be followed is that a picture is good from the geographical point of view only if it can be made to illustrate what the geographer, Max Sorre, calls the substance of the lesson.

To use pictures effectively as teaching aids, it is important to bear in mind two basic points:

- Pictures do not speak for themselves. Most of the information contained in any picture has to be deliberately and patiently extracted from it.
- Secondly, the amount of information which can be extracted from a picture depends upon how much the viewer already knows about the subject.

The use of pictures requires a certain amount of training. As in reading, the child needs to have his attention directed to the things he can expect to find. It cannot be assumed that pupils will study pictures of their own accord or that they are able to understand and interpret them in the right way. Thus the teacher must train the child to observe and examine the picture to see what is presented and to draw information from it.

There is a variety of ways in which illustrations can be used effectively. Basically three different procedures are used in the

classroom:

1. Viewing by the whole class,
2. Viewing by groups,
3. Viewing by individuals.

Pictures which the whole class can see at once can be incorporated into the normal lesson. These may be projected pictures, textbook illustrations, or large poster-size pictures which can be pinned up.

Projected on a wall or screen, slides form large clear images that pupils can scrutinize closely. Pupils can be asked questions and be encouraged to comment freely on what they see in the picture.

In a class which has no projector or projection facilities of any kind, the most effective way of studying the picture is to work in groups. The teacher should select pictures representing different aspects of the problem or topic he wishes to discuss and put them up in sets under appropriate titles in different parts of the classroom. To each set of pictures should be attached a short list of questions. The class should be made aware of the purpose of the lesson and should then be divided into groups and directed from one set of pictures to the next. They should be allowed to discuss the pictures quietly amongst themselves and write down their answers to the questions given. Finally, when the children are back at their seats, the teacher can help the children to organise their knowledge and to arrive at a conclusion.

Where a single picture is too small to be seen by the whole class, it may be passed round either before the lesson begins or when the pupils have started individual work afterwards. Individual pictures in textbooks can be used as the basis for inquiry activities or a springboard for a lesson.

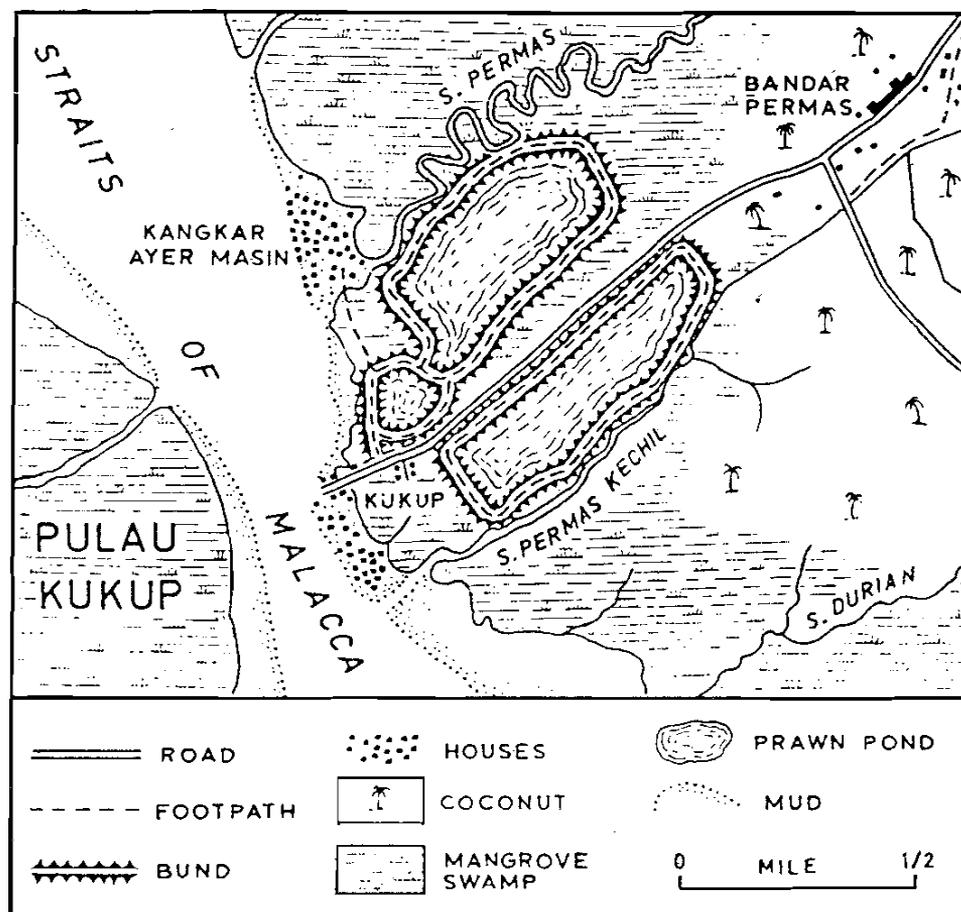
### **Pictures and Questions for Student Analysis**

The following maps and pictures (see Plates 1 and 2) show two fishing villages in Peninsular Malaysia. The forms which these villages take depend largely on the *morphology* of the coast. Along the east coast where the beaches are sandy and may stretch uninterruptedly for miles, fishing villages are generally linear in pattern. Along western Peninsular Malaysia, the coast is usually

muddy and mangrove-fringed so that suitable sites for settlement are difficult to find. In such circumstances, the village may be located on the landward side of the mangrove fringe.



Plate 1: Kukup – A Chinese Fishing Village in Southwest Johore

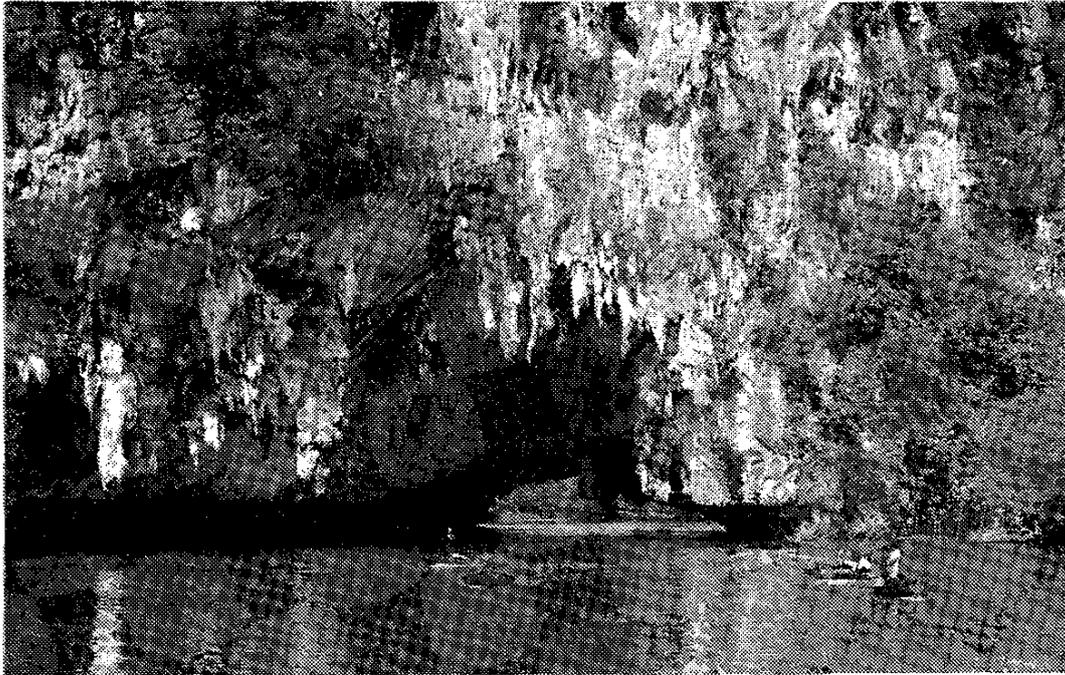


Chinese Fishing Settlements in Southwest Johore



**Plate 2: Kampong Kemaman – A Malay Fishing Village in Trengganu.**

- a. The Malay fishing village (Plate 1) is sited on a \_\_\_\_\_.
- b. The Chinese fishing village (Plate 2) is sited on a \_\_\_\_\_.
- c. What difference is there in form between the two fishing villages?
- d. What factors have influenced the location of these two settlements?



**Plate 3: Karst Scenery**

In parts of southern Thailand, limestone hills rise abruptly from the sea to heights of over 600 m (see Plate 3). The steep sides of these hills are often honey-combed with caves from the ceilings of which hang numerous stalactites of diverse shapes and forms.

- a. How are stalactites formed?
- b. What other solutional feature in the picture can you identify?
- c. Under what conditions do these hills weather most rapidly?



**Plate 4: Oblique Aerial View of the Singapore River**

- a.
  - i. Locate the site (in Plate 4) where Sir Stamford Raffles landed when he first came to Singapore and mark it with an 'x'.
  - ii. Why was this a suitable landing site?
- b. Why are there so many bumboats along the river?
- c. What do you think is the function of the buildings along the south bank of the river?

The profile or cross-section of a beach at any time is determined largely by wave conditions (see Plates 5 and 6). In calm weather low waves form "spilling" breakers with a constructive swash which moves sand or shingle onto a beach to build up a ridge or "berm" parallel to the shoreline. In rough weather, higher and steeper waves form "plunging" breakers with collapsing crests which produce less swash and a more destructive backwash which scours sediment away from the beach. The alteration of scour by storm waves and berm building in calm weather is known as "cut and fill". Many sandy beaches such as Telok Chempadak show an eroded profile after storms.



**Plate 5: Beach Profile-Telok Chempedak, Kuantan  
(November, 1976)**



**Plate 6: Beach Profile-Telok Chempedak, Kuantan  
(June 1982)**

1. In what way has the beach changed since November 1976?
2. What processes do you think have caused these changes?
3. Do you think further changes are likely?

#### 4. Which picture shows evidence of accretion?

It must be remembered that the study of pictures should not be a passive activity. The pupils should be encouraged to study the picture and find answers for themselves as this will help them to increase their powers of observation and interpretation.

Every school should have a collection of pictures to illustrate the various topics of Geography. This is especially important in the lower secondary classes where the foundations of geographical studies are first laid and initial geographic concepts developed.

Textbooks today have many excellent pictures. There are numerous supplementary sources including newspapers, magazines, postcards and advertising materials which the teacher can exploit. Over time, a collection can be built up.

### Conclusion

Of all the subjects in the school curriculum, geography is probably the most visual apart from art. In many ways, this is an advantage to the teacher as his task is made easier. With the help of pictures, lessons can be made more interesting and enjoyable. They can be used to give pupils practice in critical thinking and analysis. Learning in this way becomes a pleasant and stimulating experience. Geography need not be a boring subject after all.

*(Acknowledgement: Map is taken from **Peninsular Malaysia** by Ooi Jin-Bee, Longman, 1976, with permission).*