

6. CONNECTING TO PLACE: CREATING WEB STORIES TO ILLUSTRATE THEN, NOW AND NEXT

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Abstract

Today's learners are often described as the 'connected' or 'digital' generation, however it has been reported that these learners are harder to engage in classroom learning due to the disconnected learning approaches still being used in our schools. A key educational goal for young Australians is that of becoming active and informed citizens, as such, this requires connection to place. If our learners are to become active and informed citizens they will be required to investigate, inquire and create solutions for our present and future world by engaging in authentic learning. Learning about history does not always occur through authentic approaches, however history which connects to place through the use of digital resources, has the potential to engage our learners in local and global learning. This paper explores the use of a 'web-story' to connect 21st century learners to place and engage them in investigating the then, now and next. As a digital tool, a web-story can act as an engaging resource made by the teacher or be generated by the learner as a learning task. The web-story provides the opportunity to construct a story about the past, make links to and offer solutions for the present and identify issues for the future. As such, web based digital resources and links would be embedded within the web-story to provide perspective, inquiry and debate. This paper will firstly explore the concept of a web-story and will examine ways in which history can be explored through a web-story. Examples of web stories will be provided along with contextual factors that should be considered when designing a web-story.

Keywords: Place, pedagogy, web-story, learning, history, digital learners

Introduction

Every ten years key education policy makers meet to discuss and decide upon the future educational goals for young Australians. One of two goals identified in the Melbourne Declaration in 2008 focused on learners: "that all young Australians become successful learners, confident and creative individuals and active and informed citizens" (MCEETYA, 2008, p.8) This paper focuses on one component of the above goal, that of our young Australians becoming 'active and informed citizens'. There are many components to becoming an active and informed citizen. Some of these components include becoming responsible local and global citizens, acting with moral and ethical integrity, relating to and communicating with others from different cultures, participating in civic life and to "work for the common good, in particular sustaining and improving natural and social environments" (MCEETYA, 2008, p.9). Thus the relationship in which we develop with our environment and the world becomes a driving force in the type of citizen we become. According to Clarke (2012), it is the awareness of the interconnections between natural and human systems that will stimulate the way we live and act in our future world. This paper examines a teaching and learning approach that embeds the notion of active and informed citizenship through the use of a web-story. The approach provides opportunities for learners to make connections between natural and human systems in order to adapt our actions to those that reflect care for our environment. Within this paper, it is proposed that in order to become active and informed citizens, a connection to place must first be achieved.

'Place' can be broadly defined as a location, residence, habitat, zone, region or area. This paper focuses on how learners can connect to 'place', thus we are investigating the attachment and association people have to a habitat, an area or location. Place comprises of animate forms, some of which are human, along with inanimate forms (Everett, Noone, Brooks & Littledyke, 2009). There is a relationship between all forms and all forms exist in relation with each other. According to Everett et

al. (2009), in order to understand and build our relationships with place, we firstly need to understand the effects we have on our place. This applies directly to learners, and accordingly the past and present experiences we have had of different places provides learners with a sense of place and enables them to make connections to it (Everett et al., 2009). Clarke (2012, p.124) states that to be connected, the learners need to identify “relational patterns that inform change, from local to global, from individual to group, from living being to planet, from past to present to future, from micro to macro, from collective to self, from real to virtual”. Hence we need to learn about place, be aware of the features that create a place and make it unique, as well as the relationship between those features (Everett et al., 2009). Developing explicit connections with place involves firstly the acquisition of factual knowledge, secondly the transformation of knowledge and finally the application of knowledge in order to know a place. An approach traditionally used in environmental education achieves a similar outcome in learning about place and sustainability: about, for and in. Within the context of this paper, this equates to learning *about* the environment, learning *for* the environment and learning *in* the environment (National Curriculum Council, 1990).

In order to outline how we can develop our young Australians into active and informed citizens who connect to place and care for place, this paper firstly explores the current state of the curriculum in Australia and how this impacts upon the focus of connecting to place. The paper then investigates who the ‘young Australians’ are that the curriculum is catering for, their characteristics and how we should be engaging them in learning. The concept of a web-story is then explored and an example of a teacher developed web-story is described and presented. The paper concludes with final thoughts, which summarize the key messages from the paper.

Active and informed citizens in the curriculum

Much change has occurred in education in Australia in the past few years, particularly in the area of curriculum. The 2008 Melbourne Declaration on Educational Goals for Young Australians was the starting point for some of this curriculum change. In 2013, we are in the midst of implementation of implementing a new national curriculum. The move from seven individual state curriculums to one national curriculum is a revolutionary change in Australia’s education system. Traditionally, the creation of active and informed citizens who sustain and improve natural and social environments would have been left to the humanities disciplines in schools. Prior to the national curriculum, the key learning area of social studies in the primary school and the subject of geography (among others) in the secondary school contained elements that promoted development of such citizens. However, the introduction of an Australian curriculum provides further opportunity for the development of active and informed citizens as shown in Figure 1. In particular the Australian curriculum has separated the humanities disciplines into specific subjects areas in both the primary and secondary school years and has introduced ‘cross curricular priorities’.

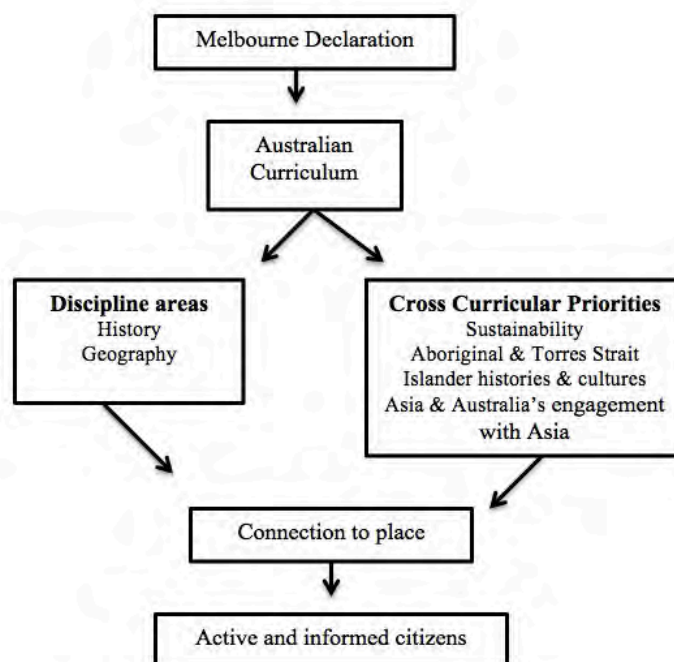


Figure 1. Curriculum links to active and informed citizens

As shown in Figure 1, history and geography are now individual subjects in the primary school rather than being combined as social studies. Both history and geography will be studied by every learner from foundation year until year 8. The addition of three cross-curricular priorities provides an emphasis of specific contemporary learnings embedded within the curriculum that young Australians should learn (ACARA, 2012). The cross-curricular priorities are sustainability, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures, and Asia and Australia's engagement with Asia. Each of the three cross-curricular priorities have specific links to place. The concept of 'place', as it was defined earlier is traditionally studied in geography. However, history also considers place as a key concept when exploring characteristics of society, events, movements, and development. As geography and history are to some degree specifically linked to 'place', each of these disciplines will now be examined according to what they focus on and teaching approaches utilized.

The discipline area of geography can be described as the 'why of where' (ACARA, 2011). Geography focuses on places and the people who inhabit those places. In particular geography focuses on features of places, how places change, how places are different and what the impact of the people within those places is (ACARA, 2011). Thus, geography encompasses the local and the global. According to Kriewaldt (2012, p. 21), education in the discipline of geography is as important as any other discipline area in that it "makes a lifelong contribution to the individual understanding of the Earth's natural and built features and the environmental, social and economic processes that change them". Teaching approaches in geography have moved from a teacher-centered chalk and talk approach to a more student-centered approach that encompasses inquiry learning (Taylor, 2012). Inquiry based learning in geography is described as an active approach to learning that embeds questioning at all stages of the learning cycle (Kriewaldt & Boon, 2012). An inquiry in geography would pose a question (which may be problem or issue based) and provide opportunities for the learners to explore the focus of the question, collect and analyse data, explain their findings and make connection to their own understandings. An inquiry would then finish with an action of some sort that may be as simple as communicating their understandings or developing a solution to the issue.

History, as a discipline area, develops our knowledge and understanding of the past in order to move into the future. History according to ACARA (2013, p.1) is:

...a disciplined inquiry into the past that develops the students' curiosity and imagination. Awareness of history is an essential characteristic of any society, and historical knowledge is fundamental to

understanding ourselves and others. It promotes the understanding of societies, events, movements and developments that have shaped humanity from earliest times. It helps students appreciate how the world and its people have changed, as well as the significant continuities that exist to the present day.

The teaching of history in the school setting sees one of three ‘conceptions of history’ being utilized, namely grand narrative, new history and critical history (Hart, 2011). Grand narrative history was the accepted method of teaching history in the nineteenth and twentieth century. It presented history as accepted and unquestioned stories about the past. Grand narrative history was a one sided version of the past which was often taken as the truth about an event or people (Hart, 2011). A prime example of grand narrative history was that of the discovery of Australia. The nineteen eighties however saw the introduction of ‘new history’ which looks at the past, but examines the different versions and perspectives of the past. It was during the uptake of new history that the inquiry approach was introduced as a teaching method. The final conception, critical history focuses on the examination of various perspectives of the past in order to reconstruct these for the future. It also assists teachers in communicating the relevance and importance of history for young people (Hart, 2011). According to Reynolds (2009, p.98), “history stories help develop the historical imagination – a necessity if students are to work with events and ideas that happened in the past”.

It can be seen that teaching approaches in both history and geography promote the use of inquiry. Inquiry, in any discipline area is primarily used as a way to engage learners in exploration and investigation into an issue or problem. Specifically an inquiry is authentic in context, relevant and guides the learners towards finding a solution (Ambrosetti, 2010). The disciplines of geography and history also lend themselves particularly well to the embedding of the cross curricular priorities, as many of the topics studied within these disciplines have specific links to sustainability, which in turn have specific connections to place. Issues that have links to sustainability are often considered as pertinent topics for learners to inquire about. Thus it can be seen from the following description from ACARA (2012, p.23), as to why sustainability was included as a cross-curricular priority:

Sustainability will allow all young Australians to develop the knowledge, skills, values and world views necessary for them to act in ways that contribute to more sustainable patterns of living. It will enable individuals and communities to reflect on ways of interpreting and engaging with the world. The Sustainability priority is futures-oriented, focusing on protecting environments and creating a more ecologically and socially just world through informed action. Actions that support more sustainable patterns of living require consideration of environmental, social, cultural and economic systems and their interdependence.

According to Tilbury (1995), relevance needs to be a central principle when investigating a concept such as sustainability. Specifically, she argues that if we are to interest and involve our learners in caring for place, whether this be local or global, then the learners must have opportunities to explore the connection between themselves, environmental issues and the progressive development of the world around us (Tilbury, 1995). Thus when studying sustainability through a geographical and historic lens two phenomena occur. Firstly, a distinct connection between the environment and its people can be developed followed by a connection about environmental patterns which can be shown between then, now and into the future. It is this phenomena that provides the basis for informed action to occur.

21st century learners

The learners in school today are often referred to as generation Z, the connected generation or the dotcom kids. Dotcom kids, as the name might suggest, are children who are digitally aware and technically able and have not known a world without technology. They are also visually oriented, globally conscious and are growing up in a world radically different from twenty years ago (Ambrosetti, 2010). This current generation who inhabit our schools are also described as over-stimulated and this can lead to difficulty when attempting to engage them in learning (McCrindle, 2012). However, this dis-engagement in learning can be linked to some of the 20th century teaching

methods and tools often used in the 21st century classroom. The learners of today are not the ones the education system was originally created for (Prensky, 2001).

Generation Z are often characterized by the ease of which they interact with the digital world (McCrindle, 2012). However there is more to a dotcom kid than just the way in which they engage with digital technology. Generation Z learners like a student-centered approach and like the opportunity to be 'hands on' in learning (McCrindle, 2012). Although they enjoy using digital technology in the classroom, they also like a multi-modal approach whereby more traditional resources and teaching methods are used. Many Generation Z learners like the opportunity to interact with their classmates during learning episodes; that is, they enjoy collaborative work where a group works together towards the achievement of a task. This generation has also been described as taking an interest in both global and local issues, and these include issues about the environment. According to McCrindle (2012), Generation Z are particularly concerned about issues of water, climate change and protection of environments.

When engaging Generation Z learners in both general learning and learning within the disciplines of geography and history, Tilbury (1995) identifies that the use of active learning strategies is key in ensuring a connected experience with sustainability issues with school-aged learners. In a context of a classroom, active learning strategies would include the use of games and role plays, as well as discussions that respond to stimuli such as artifacts, photos, media or personal experiences (Tilbury, 1995). Research undertaken by (Davis 2010) found that engaging learners with the environment through digital technologies provided a platform in which learning could occur and connections could be made. However Burke and Cutter-Mackenzie (2010) argue that learners also need to engage in authentic environmental experiences that are meaningful to them. As such, authentic experiences provide the learners with the opportunity to make connections to prior learning and interpret social and ecological events in order to further their understandings of environment and place (Burke & Cutter-Mackenzie, 2010). Using such a variety of strategies, resources and tools outlined here provides an opportunity for multi-modal learning that is interactive and includes preferred digital tools and learning styles of Generation Z.

A web-story – the what and why

There is no written definition of a web-story, however as the name implies it is a story that makes use of web resources. A web-story may be created in a wide variety of platforms from a PowerPoint or Prezi to a live website. In some respects a web-story has similar qualities to that of a WebQuest as in both approaches the learners interact with resources from the World Wide Web. However, there is an important difference between a web-story and a WebQuest. A web-story is not an inquiry as a WebQuest is, however, a web-story can identify and frame an inquiry and become a resource used within an inquiry. A web-story can also be fiction or non-fiction in nature. A web-story is generally one that is non-fiction but can be told in a manner that uses a story in which to tell it. A web-story also has multiple uses. It may be used by the classroom teacher as a resource for the learners about the topic to be studied. As a resource, it could be used as a whole class resource whereby the web-story is viewed together and the links explored jointly. It could also be used for independent learning where learners work individually through a unit of work and access the web-story when needed. It may also be used as an assessment task set by the teacher for the learners to create either at the end of a unit of work or as an on-going task.

The use of a web-story provides a link for engaging Generation Z learners in learning. A web-story is digital, providing the learners with a learning tool that they are familiar with. A web-story also targets the visual senses and provides the learners with opportunity to interact with the technology and other learners. As a resource a web-story can help to inform the learners about a particular topic or issue. However if it is used as a learning task that the learners create, a web-story can promote creativity. A story, whether told through digital resources or told aurally, can inspire curiosity and can lead learners

to valid interpretation of and enquiries about events, people and places (Jackson, Humphries, & Bracey, 2005).

The wide range of digital tools available both within schools and outside of school indicates that access to information and images (both fiction and non-fiction) is much easier than before. This makes the use of resources such as a web-story easier to create and access. The information (story and web links) in a web-story is also current, as opposed to the encyclopedias of the past that were often out of date as soon as they arrived in the library catalogue. The beauty of 21st century digital tools that schools have access to do not limit learners just to information gathering. Most schools now have access to programs that allow learners to create resources of many types in a range of spaces in which to record their idea and designs. All such digital tools contribute to heightened engagement and thus different forms of learning for our tech savvy Generation Z.

As shown in Table 1, there are six components of a web-story, four of which are related to the structure of the web-story and two of which are related to specific inclusions. There is no particular length of a web-story, however most web stories do not exceed 20 slides in a PowerPoint format.

Table 1 – Components of a Web-story

Structural components	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Introduce the place and/or event (provide the context) 2. Provide a factual story which may be told using a narrative or timeline 3. Identify an issue 4. Pose a question for investigation into the issue
Inclusions	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Images 2. Web links

Component 1

The introduction of the web-story should ‘hook’ the audience into the topic, thus the introduction should include an engaging title, image and background. Also included in the introduction is the presentation of the topic that ideally would frame the context of the topic and provide background to the story. The introduction of the web-story may occur over several slides or pages.

Component 2

Following the introduction the story itself would then begin. As such, using a new history or critical history approach, the story should be told through a variety of perspectives that provides the audience with an all-encompassing view of the topic. Each of the slides would contain web links where appropriate as well as images that help to convey the story.

Component 3

Towards the end of the story, an issue or problem should be identified that is authentic and relevant to the learners. The issue or problem that is identified needs to be one that the learners are able to contribute to or do something about.

Component 4

The final component of the web-story is the posing of a question that leads towards an investigation into the issue. A web-story should ask a ‘big question’, that is a question that encourages the learners to inquire about an answer or solution to an issue that is affecting a place. The question should be open ended and enable the learners to engage in an inquiry. The question should be relative, relevant, but critical and able to be answered after research.

Components 5 and 6

The web-story will also include images and web links throughout. The images will assist in engaging the learners, but they will also present further information (through visual means) that the learners then deconstruct in order to make meaning from. Thus the images may include real life photos, artworks, pictorial artifacts, posters and diagrams. The web links themselves provide sources of further information or may even include access to online games and quizzes, video clips, blogs, forums and images for the learners. Despite the wide variety of web links that may be included, it is important that the web links are age appropriate and easy to navigate.

Web-story example

The following web-story is an example that demonstrates the possibilities that such a resource allows. This example is of a teacher developed resource that is to be used as the platform for an inquiry into the local area. The web-story was created by the author and is representative of a web-story. The web-story was created for year 2 learners and three learning statements were identified from the history and geography curriculum that guided the creation of the web-story.

1. History Learning Statement: The history of a significant person, building, site or art of the natural environment in the local community and what it reveals about the past.
2. Geography Learning Statement: People are connected to other places.
3. Geography Learning Statement: The significance of an environment or place contributes to how it is used.

The web-story presented in this paper is entitled 'The Story of the Glass House Mountains'. The title slide of the web-story, as shown in Figure 2, introduces the story through a visual image and the title, thus setting the scene for the audience. Remembering that the age group of the intended audience is approximately 7 years old, the text throughout the web-story is told using simple vocabulary appropriate for this age group.



Figure 2. Web-story title slide

Following the title slide, is the introduction to the topic of the web-story. As it can be seen from Figure 3, the second slide in the sequence provides the learners with general background information: the location, geology and importance of the Glass House Mountains. Contained within this introductory slide is a web link that leads the learners to a 'scenic' video that provides visual images of the Glass House Mountains region. As such, Slide 2 begins to set the scene for the learners.

*Figure 3. Web-story slide 2*

Slides 3 and 4 continue to set the scene for the learners by providing information about the historic origins of the mountains. Two cultural perspectives are provided. Firstly slide 3 provides dialogue about the origin of the name of the Glass House Mountains, whereas slide 4 explains the link to local Indigenous culture. As shown in Figure 4, slides 3 and 4 also contain web links. The web link in slide 3 takes the learners to a children's website about Captain Cook who named the Glass House Mountains. Within this website, the learners can further explore the journey of Captain Cook as he travelled around Australia. This allows the learners to build some early knowledge around explorers. The web link in slide 4 provides the learners with the opportunity to find further information about the importance of the Glass House Mountains to Indigenous culture.





Figure 4. Web-story slides 3 and 4

After setting the scene for the learners, the web-story begins to explore the story of the Glass House Mountains in further detail. In this section of the web-story, a narrative is used along with a timeline of historic events and facts. Due to significant links to the Aboriginal people of the Sunshine Coast, this web-story recounts an Indigenous dreaming story. The dreaming story tells of how the mountains became positioned as they are now. The dreamtime story is presented on the next four slides of the web-story. Figure 5 presents the beginning slide of the story and also presents the web link embedded within slide 5. In varying the web links that are used within the web-story, the link embedded into slide 5 is a musical version of the dreamtime story.



Figure 5. Web-story slide 5

After the dreamtime story of the Glasshouse Mountains is told, the web-story then tells the story of development and 'progress' within the area. As shown in Figure 6, slide 9 sets the scene for this and uses a chronological timeline to document change in the area. A web link is not used in this slide.

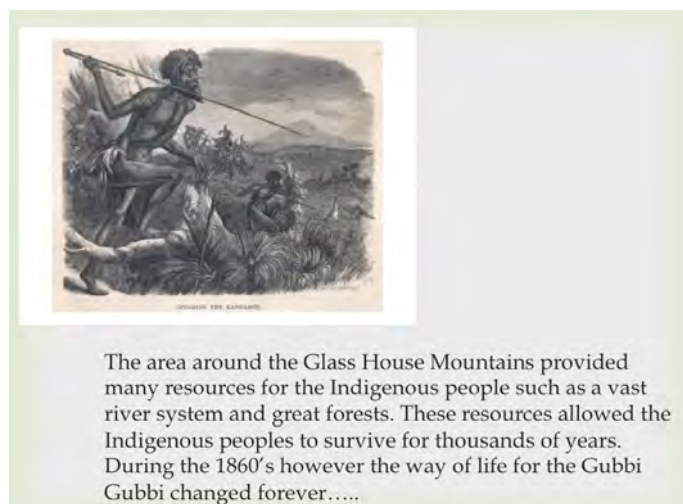


Figure 6. Web-story slide 9

The following six slides of the web-story document the development of the Glass House Mountains region through the use of chronology from the 1860s to the 2000s. Thus Figure 7 provides an example of two slides that occur in this sequence. Slides 10 and 11 show two events in the history of the Glass House Mountains region. The web links embed into the slides take the learners to a family story of settlement in the area and to a more detailed timeline of settlement.



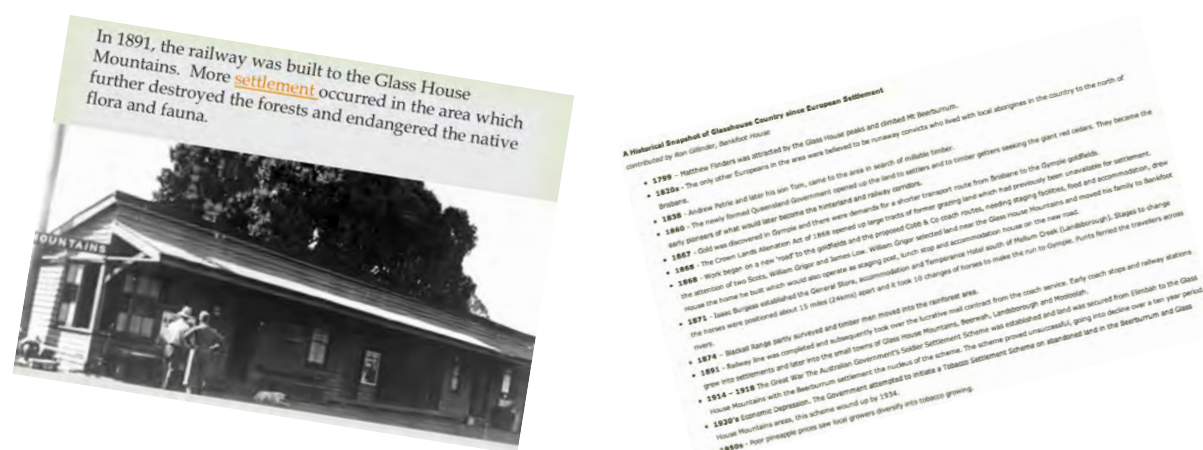


Figure 7. Web-story slides 10 and 11

Although slides 10 and 11 of the web-story communicate the history of the Glasshouse Mountains region, they also tell of the environmental damage done by settlement. Slides 10 and 11 are written specifically to convey a negative tone, however this negative tone is balanced with a positive tone in slide 12. It can be seen from Figure 8, that slide 12 also provides the audience with one perspective of a settlement's solution towards amending the environmental damage done by the past generation.

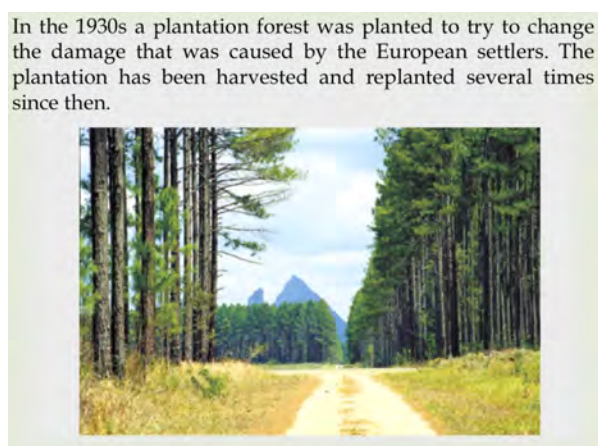


Figure 8. Web-story slide 12

As the sequence progresses towards the end of the story, the chronological timeline of the web-story brings the audience to the present day. As can be seen in Figure 9, slides 13 and 14 provide dialogue about how the area has progressed into the twenty-first century. Slide 13 presents the Glasshouse Mountains as a tourist attraction that is utilized for leisure activities and slide 14 provides information about local farming and shows industry in the region. The web links embedded in the slides provide

further information in the form of maps, visual images and facts.



Figure 9. Web-story slides 13 and 14

The final slide in the web-story leads to the inquiry. As shown in Figure 10 the final slide poses an investigative question for the audience. The question asked is 'How can we continue to enjoy the Glass House Mountains, but yet protect them for future generations?'. Once the web-story has been read and explored, the classroom teacher would guide the learners towards the planning of an inquiry that will answer the question posed.

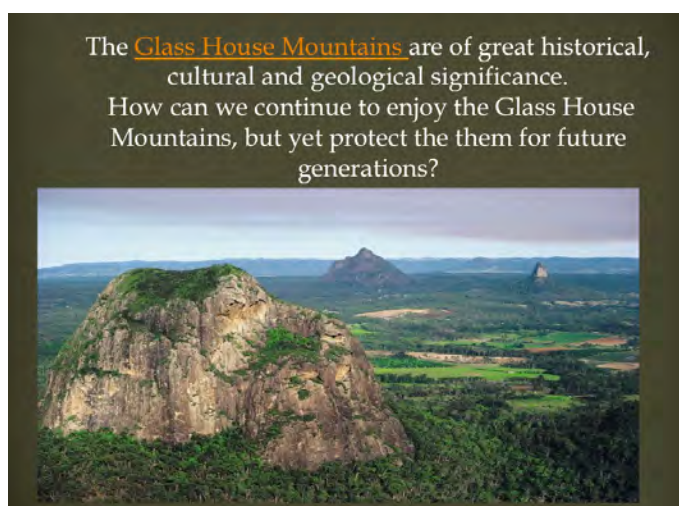


Figure 10. Web-story slide 10

The web-story that has been presented provides the learners with opportunities to further their knowledge and understanding of a local place. It also presents provides the learners with a starting point in which to make connections to place. People have had a particular impact on this place and the web-story affords the learners the opportunity to consider human action in relation to the creation of a sustainable future. It also encourages the learners to consider how their own actions can impact on not only this place, but others like it. The interconnections between natural systems and human systems emerge as the story is told. However, the web-story presents the learners with the option of developing their own conclusions about the place and how a sustainable future can be re-imaged for it.

Final thoughts

Key education policy makers in Australia have identified that an important goal of schooling is to produce students who are successful learners, confident and creative individuals and active and informed citizens. This paper has presented a digital tool that can engage our 21st century learners in learning about and developing active citizenship. This paper has also presented an approach which involves learners in becoming aware of place and how we can act sustainably towards protecting place. The digital tool presented demonstrates how we can engage learners in learning about place through exploration and discussion that targets values and attitudes towards sustainability (Littledyke, 2009). Clarke (2012) proposes that in order to solve issues within our communities we need to re-imagine our place. This paper has proposed that in order to sustain our environments we need to examine the past and present, in order to re-imagine our future places and become active citizens. The future is in the hands of our current generation – engaging them meaningfully in the topics and issues of today will create the problem solvers and decision makers of tomorrow.

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