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Introduction

Three elements make up the Essentials Curriculum:

Threshold concepts

Threshold concepts are the 'big ideas' that shape students' thinking within each subject. The same threshold concepts will be explored in every year group and students will gradually increase their understanding of them. Previous editions of this curriculum referred to the Threshold Concepts as 'objectives'. We have stopped using this terminology because it implies that there is a target to be met. Instead of meeting objectives we now advocate exploring concepts. An important principle, therefore, is that exploring concepts will never be complete; students will continue to explore them for as long as they continue to study the subject. Each subject begins with an overview of the essential characteristics students should develop and these form the basis for the threshold concepts.

An example of one of the threshold concepts in history is "evidence tells us about the past". This, of course, cannot be taught in isolation: it would be abstract and meaningless to students. The concept must be explored within a breadth of different contexts so that it has tangibility and meaning.

Breadth of contexts

Breadth provides the contexts for exploring the threshold concepts. It has two roles:

- 1) **Knowledge***. Concepts need knowledge to make sense. Contexts give students subject specific knowledge with which to think about the concepts. For example, students will use the context of the Great Fire of London to explore the concept 'evidence tells us about the past'. They will be shown extracts of Samuel Pepys diary and will explore how an historical account gives us the knowledge of the cause and spread of the fire. The more knowledge students have, the better their understanding of the concepts becomes. Another benefit of knowledge is that it helps pupils reading comprehension. A student with a greater knowledge of the world will infer more from a text than one with little knowledge, no matter how good his or her decoding skills may be.

* by knowledge we mean procedures (skills) and meaningful facts. Knowledge does not mean simply remembering unconnected lists of facts.

Introduction

- 2) **Transference.** Whilst it is only possible to explore a concept within a context, this also causes a problem for students: their understanding is context bound. They find it very difficult to transfer the concept to another situation. By providing a breadth of contexts, students begin to transfer the concepts. They do this by comparing the new context knowledge to previously learned knowledge, the bridge being the concept. For example, if students explore the concept 'evidence tells us about the past' through the context of The Great Fire of London they learn that a vital piece of evidence is that Samuel Pepys kept a diary. They then later explore the same concept in the context of The Ancient Egyptians, in which they learn that the Rosetta Stone gives us evidence of the meaning of hieroglyphics.

Each subject has a suggested breadth of study which exceeds the requirements of the English National Curriculum. It is also recommended that schools consider additional breadth of study so that students develop cultural capital. (The essential knowledge that pupils need to be educated citizens, introducing them to the best that has been thought and said and helping to engender an appreciation of human and creative achievement.)

Milestones for progress

Because the threshold concepts are repeated in each year group it is important that students progress in their understanding of them. The Essentials Curriculum sets out this progression in the form of three 'Milestones'. Each Milestone contains a range of descriptors which give more detail to be discovered within the concept. Over a two year period students will become more and more familiar with these details by exploring them in a breadth of contexts. These descriptors are not exhaustive and should only be used as a guide for teachers. They should not be 'ticked off' as each one is covered: they should be repeated in as many different contexts as possible. For more details on progression within each Milestone, please see our supporting materials on planning for Greater Depth.

Writing

Threshold Concepts

Composition

- Write with purpose
This concept involves understanding the purpose or purposes of a piece of writing.
- Use imaginative description
This concept involves developing an appreciation of how best to convey ideas through description.
- Organise writing appropriately
This concept involves developing an appreciation of how best to convey ideas through description.
- Use paragraphs
This concept involves understanding how to group ideas so as to guide the reader.
- Use sentences appropriately
This concept involves using different types of sentences appropriately for both clarity and for effect.

Transcription

- Present neatly
This concept involves developing an understanding of handwriting and clear presentation.
- Spell correctly
This concept involves understanding the need for accuracy.
- Punctuate accurately
This concept involves understanding that punctuation adds clarity to writing.

Analysis and presentation

- Analyse writing
This concept involves understanding how grammatical choices give effect and meaning to writing.
- Present writing
This concept involves learning to reflect upon writing and reading it aloud to others.

Milestones for progress

Transcription	Milestone 1	Milestone 2	Milestone 3
Punctuate accurately	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Leave spaces between words. • Use the word 'and' to join words and sentences. • Begin to punctuate using a capital letter for the names of people, places, the days of the week and I. • Use both familiar and new punctuation correctly, including full stops, capital letters, exclamation marks, question marks, commas for lists and apostrophes for contracted forms. • Use sentences with different forms: statement, question, exclamation and command. • Use extended noun phrases to describe and specify (e.g. the blue butterfly). • Use subordination (when, if, that or because). • Use coordination (or, and, but). • Use some features of standard written English. • Use the present and past tenses correctly, including the progressive form. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop understanding of writing concepts by: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Extending the range of sentences with more than one clause by using a wider range of conjunctions, including when, if, because, although. • Using the present perfect form of verbs in contrast to the past tense. • Choosing nouns or pronouns appropriately for clarity and cohesion and to avoid repetition. • Using conjunctions, adverbs and prepositions to express time and cause. • Using fronted adverbials. • Indicate grammatical and other features by: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Using commas after fronted adverbials. • Indicating possession by using the possessive apostrophe with plural nouns. • Using and punctuating direct speech. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop understanding of writing concepts by: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recognising vocabulary and structures that are appropriate for formal speech and writing, including subjunctive forms. • Using passive verbs to affect the presentation of information in a sentence. • Using the perfect form of verbs to mark relationships of time and cause. • Using expanded noun phrases to convey complicated information concisely. • Using modal verbs or adverbs to indicate degrees of possibility. • Using relative clauses beginning with who, which, where, when, whose, that or with an implied (i.e. omitted) relative pronoun. • Indicate grammatical and other features by: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Using commas to clarify meaning or avoid ambiguity in writing. • Using hyphens to avoid ambiguity. • Using brackets, dashes or commas to indicate parenthesis. • Using semi-colons, colons or dashes to mark boundaries between independent clauses. • Using a colon to introduce a list. • Punctuating bullet points consistently.

Geography

Threshold Concepts

- **Investigate places**
This concept involves understanding the geographical location of places and their physical and human features.
- **Investigate patterns**
This concept involves understanding the relationships between the physical features of places and the human activity within them, and the appreciation of how the world's natural resources are used and transported.
- **Communicate geographically**
This concept involves understanding geographical representations, vocabulary and techniques.

Geography

Milestones for progress

	Milestone 1	Milestone 2	Milestone 3
Investigate places	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ask and answer geographical questions (such as: What is this place like? What or who will I see in this place? What do people do in this place?). • Identify the key features of a location in order to say whether it is a city, town, village, coastal or rural area. • Use world maps, atlases and globes to identify the United Kingdom and its countries, as well as other countries, continents and oceans studied. • Use simple fieldwork and observational skills to study the geography of the school and the key human and physical features of its surrounding environment. • Use aerial images and plan perspectives to recognise landmarks and basic physical features. • Name, locate and identify characteristics of the four countries and capital cities of the United Kingdom and its surrounding seas. • Name and locate the world's continents and oceans. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ask and answer geographical questions about the physical and human characteristics of a location. • Explain own views about locations, giving reasons. • Use maps, atlases, globes and digital/ computer mapping to locate countries and describe features. • Use fieldwork to observe and record the human and physical features in the local area using a range of methods including sketch maps, plans and graphs and digital technologies. • Use a range of resources to identify the key physical and human features of a location. • Name and locate counties and cities of the United Kingdom, geographical regions and their identifying human and physical characteristics, including hills, mountains, cities, rivers, key topographical features and land-use patterns; and understand how some of these aspects have changed over time. • Name and locate the countries of Europe and identify their main physical and human characteristics. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Collect and analyse statistics and other information in order to draw clear conclusions about locations. • Identify and describe how the physical features affect the human activity within a location. • Use a range of geographical resources to give detailed descriptions and opinions of the characteristic features of a location. • Use different types of fieldwork sampling (random and systematic) to observe, measure and record the human and physical features in the local area. Record the results in a range of ways. • Analyse and give views on the effectiveness of different geographical representations of a location (such as aerial images compared with maps and topological maps - as in London's Tube map). • Name and locate some of the countries and cities of the world and their identifying human and physical characteristics, including hills, mountains, rivers, key topographical features and land-use patterns; and understand how some of these aspects have changed over time. • Name and locate the countries of North and South America and identify their main physical and human characteristics.

Planning and Assessment

When planning activities it is important to bear in mind the following principle: We remember what we think about. If students **just** think about The Great Fire of London they will **not** advance their understanding of the threshold concept. We therefore recommend that teachers use the following model to think about planning:

Key Stage 1 example:

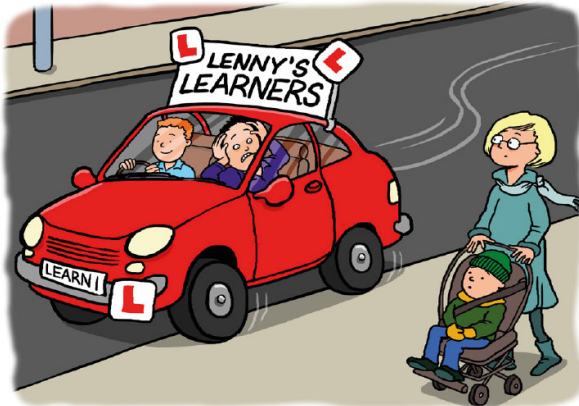
Breadth	Threshold Concept	Milestone 1 Years 1 and 2	Example Activities
The Great Fire of London	Investigate and interpret evidence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Observe or handle evidence to ask questions and find answers to questions about the past. • Ask questions such as: What was it like for people? What happened? How long ago? • Use artefacts, pictures, stories, online sources and databases to find out about the past. • Identify some of the different ways the past has been represented. 	<p>Look at the extract of Samuel Pepys' diary and answer the following questions:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. When was the Great Fire of London? 2. Where did the fire start? 3. How many buildings were burned? 4. What are the main reasons the fire spread so fast? <p>Look at pictures and newspaper cuttings from the time and answer the following questions:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. How did people try to stop the fire? 2. How did buildings change when people re-built London?

Upper Key Stage 2 example:

Breadth	Threshold Concept	Milestone 3 Years 5 and 6	Example Activities
The Ancient Egyptians	Investigate and interpret evidence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use sources of evidence to deduce information about the past. • Select suitable sources of evidence, giving reasons for choices. • Use sources of information to form testable hypotheses about the past. • Seek out and analyse a wide range of evidence in order to justify claims about the past. • Show an awareness of the concept of propaganda and how historians must understand the social context of evidence studied. • Understand that no single source of evidence gives the full answer to questions about the past. • Refine lines of enquiry as appropriate. 	<p>The picture from Medinat Habu Temple in Luxor, Egypt shows carvings representing a scene where a god hands over a dagger to Ramses the Third, to tell him to mercilessly massacre foreign enemies. Could this be propaganda to show that it was alright to kill people because a god said it must be done?</p> 

Progression within a Milestone

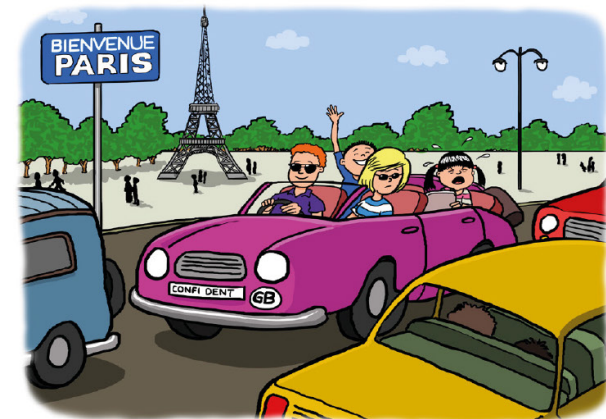
Knowledge building:
learning the **fundamental foundations**



Decision making to apply **fundamental foundations**.



Non-routine thinking that requires inventive application of **fundamental foundations**.



Basic

Advancing

Deep

We recommend students concentrate on securing the fundamental foundations into long-term memory in the first year of a Milestone. This will give them all of the procedural and semantic knowledge they need in order to move on to the Advancing and Deep stages of understanding in the second year