

Task #4b: Journey to School

Investigate the Arrival Routes to School.

Every school day begins and ends with hundreds, thousands, and even tens of thousands of little journeys. What kinds of views and sceneries can be admired on these adventures? What is the mood of the traveller like? What do they notice? What do they enjoy? What are the things the traveller repeats routinely, and which are the things they like to do differently each time on those daily journeys?

The aim of the task investigating the journey to school is to study the ways and possibilities of arriving at school. Of course, everyone could name and list different means of transport with both eyes closed, but it would be quite boring if the task ended there!

4b.1 Brainstorm

To start, try brainstorming. Brainstorming is a type of collective thinking where all sorts of ideas related to the topic are proposed. The aim is to encourage a free and creative atmosphere where proposals are not criticized or judged.

The question is: how to investigate the route to school and the habits of the students passing it daily? There are many ways to do this. Write all the possible ways on a board or paper. Try to come up with novel ideas that can be added to those listed below. Discuss these options collectively and decide how to proceed.

Some examples of different ways in which the school routes can be investigated include the following:

a) Collect statistical data of your school or class. How far are the people migrating from? Who lives the farthest? Who is the closest? What is the average distance passed on the trip to school? What is the most common means of transport? Which are the most unusual ways of arriving?

b) Carry out a collective experiment. For example, everybody has to come to school in a non-habitual way one morning, by choosing a new route or different means of transport. How to summarize the experience? For example, everyone can take a photograph that conveys their experience of the journey and supplement the image with a short caption. You could also write a poem about it. Think of different ways of communicating the experience of arrival.

c) Map the school routes of your class. Which streets, roads, or directions are most commonly passed? Which are the most uncommon? Which are the designated,

planned roads and paths? Which ones are spontaneous, unplanned? Why do spontaneous paths develop? What are the most pleasant paths and environments to pass through?

d) Try to figure out one of the most complicated tasks of science: how to study something that cannot be measured in numbers? How to compare the pleasantness of different routes? How to assess how interesting it is? What else is important besides speed and distance?

4b.2 Collect Data

Once you have decided the subject of your investigation, make an action plan and get started. Certain smartphone applications may come in handy, for example, to save the commuting routes on maps, count steps, or measure distance and average speed. Of course, there are other ways as well. How did people measure the distance on a map before computers showed up? You may introduce the "ancient" technique using thread and pins. Take pictures and videos, draw maps, and sketch views ...

Present the collected data as the outcome of the task. Statistical information can be presented numerically, while other kinds of information like paths, for example, can be shown on a map or as an image. Don't forget to add a few explanatory sentences. Why did you choose to investigate your subject; how did you carry out the investigation and what did you discover?

A Few More Notes

1. This task is actually grounded in the vast and complex topic of planning streets and the urban space for movement in such a way that everybody is satisfied and happy. In many cities of the world, these decisions are still made with a car-centred mindset, turning the streets into the territory of cars, instead of an attractive place to be and engage in various pastime activities. At the same time, there are also many cities that acknowledge this tendency as a problem, and they are putting effort into creating more diverse streetscapes and places where people would also like to stay, instead of just passing through. In small towns and rural areas these problems may be less pronounced, but the environment there also affects the ways people commute and spend time in the public space.

The aim of the task is to show the students that daily means of movement can be a decision, although it tends to be a habit. Decisions can be made, and good urban spaces support environmentally friendly choices, making it easier and more natural to choose to go by bike instead of by car, for example.

2. 2. If you get lucky with the weather and have fresh snow covering the ground, then it would be clever to observe the walking trails from the window of an upper floor. Snow makes it easy to observe which paths are used the most, which are unused, and which ones people spontaneously create.

Have fun observing!

Video examples on the topic:

Example #1

Tour d'ÖÖ Tallinn XVI

www.vimeo.com/76413791 (1,5 min)

Tour d'ÖÖ is a collective cycling tour that brings together an unprecedented number of cyclists on the streets of Tallinn and other towns in Estonia. The atmosphere is sublime: cars pull aside as all sorts of cyclists cruise through the city. Imagine the difference if even half of these cyclists were a daily phenomenon on our streets! See more videos on the web page of the event: tallinnbicycleweek.ee/videod

Example #2

Painting Reality

www.youtube.com/watch?v=N1AHBZybjW4 (1,5 min)

Rosenthaler Platz is one of Berlin's many dull crossroads. It is a vast field of asphalt, worn road markings, and cars arriving from all directions and waiting patiently for their turn to pass. About a dozen cyclists arrive, pour 500 litres of (water based, environmentally friendly) paint on the road, and leave the scene. The traffic continues and thousands of vehicles mark their trajectory on the asphalt. Traffic-painting.

Example #3

Secret life of the cat: The science of tracking our pets

www.bbc.com/news/science-environment-22821639

When showing this map to the students, let them guess whose trajectory is marked on the map. Although the answer is simple, it might not cross their minds immediately. But indeed, British scientists equipped ordinary domestic cats with tracking devices that accurately recorded their movement. How do cats move in urban spaces? What is important to them? What determines their direction? How different is the cat's worldview from that of a human's?

Example #4

Epic Bus Ad from Denmark (in Danish, with English subtitles)

www.youtube.com/watch?v=75F3CSZcCFs (1,5 min)

This is an example already familiar from another task. Sometimes it is necessary to remind people about the most basic things, like the awesomeness of public transport compared to using a private car. This hilarious bus commercial is a good example of highlighting habitual everyday things as something extraordinary.