

Rethinking Wider Reading with the Reteach Project

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What do we mean by 'wider reading' in this context?

As effective educators, we recognise the indispensable role of self-reading, evident in the myriad CPD-related texts available. Metacognition, dual coding, geographical inquiry, effective fieldwork – the list is extensive. However, our focus here diverges from commonplace practices. Instead, we explore how pleasure reading and deep reading can enrich teaching and learning, fostering a more extensive reading culture among learners. For the purposes of this article, the term 'wider reading' includes 'extensive reading,' 'deep reading,' and 'reading for pleasure,' particularly embracing fictional and non-academic non-fiction texts.

Why is wider reading important for teachers?

The significance of wider reading for teachers cannot be overstated. While balancing curricular demands with personal reading poses a challenge, the benefits are substantial. By adopting the role of learners, we enhance our effectiveness as educators, staying current with subject knowledge and pedagogical approaches (Lewis & Wray, 2001). The British Council's 'TeachingEnglish' website succinctly outlines the opportunities and challenges of wider reading (Maley, n.d.). [Figure 1](#) highlights key aspects from a Geography perspective.

Benefit of wider reading	Summary	Geography
Offers 'Comprehensible Input'	Reading for interest or pleasure reinforces language, knowledge, and understanding through repeated exposure, extending boundaries.	Maintains pace with scientific understanding of geographical processes such as plate tectonics (e.g. Hamill, 2023) and migration (e.g. De Haas, 2023), ensuring relevance and currency, and facilitating discussions and critical thinking with students.
Helps develop general, world knowledge	Reading widely helps to counterbalance an individual's limited and biased experience and knowledge of the world.	Enables the challenging of stereotypes of people and places, avoids teaching geographical issues through 'single-story' narratives, and supports approaches such as anti-racist pedagogy (Sinclair & De Fonseka, 2022).
Creates and sustains motivation to read more	Engaging texts foster curiosity and a desire to keep exploring, fueling a virtuous cycle of CPD and learning.	Given the interconnected and multidimensional nature of Geography, reading widely can lead to a tapestry of connections and insights, weaving together geographical concepts and ideas.
Enriches and advances	Can have an unpredictable effect on our practice,	For example, reading a personal account or lived experience regarding a

teaching practices	especially if we read outside of our professional field, such as helping to develop new teaching and learning ideas.	geographical process or case studies, and exploring these through perception, art or drama techniques (e.g. Rackley, 2022)
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Figure 1: Ideas from Maley's British Council article linked to Geography teaching

Wider reading and pedagogy

Consider any book or extended text you've read, whether fictional or non-fictional but non-academic. Perhaps even a work of fiction based on real processes or stories. Reflect on the following questions:

1. Did it spark an idea transformed into an activity, lesson, or even a scheme of work?
2. Did it lead you to discover something entirely new, informing your teaching?
3. Did it build on your existing knowledge or skill, enhancing your teaching?
4. Did it provide stimulus to enhance students' knowledge or skill?

A compelling story serves as a potent educational tool, prompting educators to explore beyond traditional professional development and curriculum books (Willingham, 2021). Works like *The Almighty Dollar*, *Factfulness*, and *Atlas of the Invisible* offer insightful non-fiction perspectives (Stockings, 2020; Cheshire et al., 2021). Similarly, fictional works like climate-fiction ('cli-fi') can serve as motivational stimuli (Richardson, 2022). Despite the abundance of material, discovering the right books can be daunting, as ex-GA President Alan Parkinson's online GeoLibrary illustrates. For educators who aren't avid readers, this challenge can be overwhelming. Even for those who are, effectively harnessing the power of literature in the classroom can be tricky. This is where projects like the Reteach reading lists prove invaluable - assisting educators in navigating the literary landscape and tapping into the magic of narrative.

The Reteach reading lists and using them in the classroom

The Reteach Geography reading lists were curated by a team of teachers who shared a variety of resources, including books, articles, academic papers, and media such as short video clips, related to different geographical themes. Access to the entire repository is entirely free for educators, requiring registration with a UK education institution email address. The resource is available at <https://reteach.org.uk/subject/geography>.

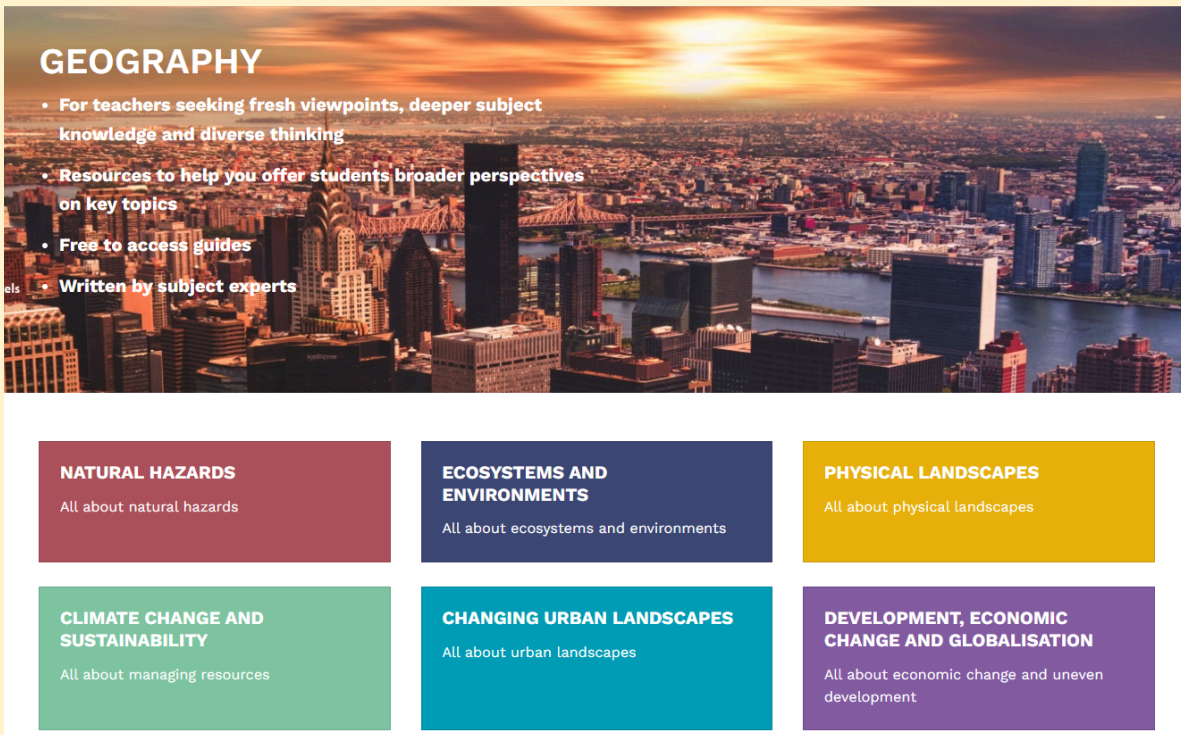


Figure 2: The menu of the Reteach Geography website displaying the themes containing reading lists and suggested uses for teaching and learning

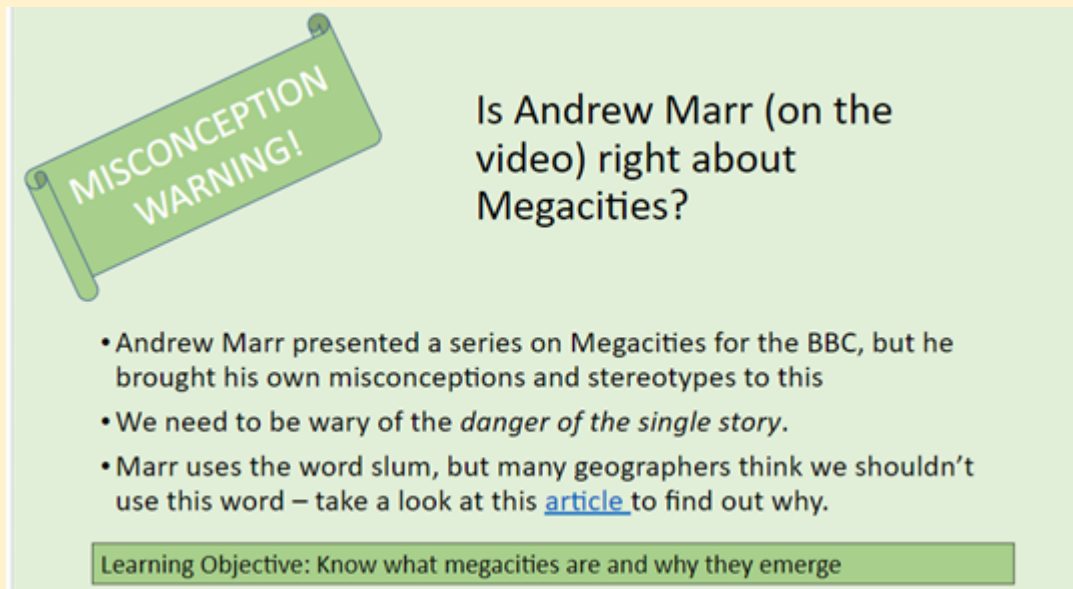
Wider reading suggestions are categorised into different geographical themes (Figure 2). Each theme offers a selection of reading lists with a succinct summary of resources, along with links to audiovisual clips and podcasts. Informative tidbits about the resources and practical tips for their use in the classroom accompany each list. These lists aim to include enjoyable books for teachers and students, encouraging reading from different perspectives and raising awareness of diverse voices. The resources not only provide informative non-fiction texts but also promote the use of storytelling. For example, the ‘Africa is not a country list’ invites readers to explore the diverse continent through books like *Born a Crime: Stories from a South African Childhood* by Trevor Noah or *An Elegy for Easterly* by Petina Gappah.

Several lists are dedicated to popular case studies, providing teachers with valuable tools for in-depth exploration, broadening their knowledge and facilitating more insightful lessons. Examples include ‘Nigeria - A case study of a NEE,’ ‘Comparing the Chile 2010 and Nepal 2015 earthquakes,’ ‘Deforesting the Amazon,’ and ‘Landforms and tourism in the Lake District.’

Many lists align with GCSE and A-level curricula, while others go beyond the traditional scope of these qualifications, introducing intriguing topics that sharpen critical thinking skills. Examples include ‘Tiny homes and car-free living’ and ‘The relationship between colonialism, imperialism, and development.’

During independent reading, you may naturally discover ideas to share with your students. For instance, Catherine’s school uses the Haiti chapter from *Disaster by Choice* by Ilan Kelman to challenge Year 8 students’ perspectives on natural disasters and extracts from *Slums: The History of a Global Injustice* by Alan Mayne to examine the concept of slums in their exam specification. Positive ideas and examples can be incorporated into lessons using sources like *Dirt to Soil* by Gabe Brown, exploring regenerative farming practices combating climate change.

Conversations with school librarians can support access to books touched upon in lessons, giving students the opportunity to delve deeper and take control of their own learning. Using texts in lessons can also build students' resilience when interacting with text, hooking them in and encouraging them to read further (Figure 3). Catherine also includes links to Reteach reading lists in her schemes of learning to support teachers in developing their knowledge and tackle misconceptions – an example can be found here: <https://bit.ly/3R5e1FA>.



MISCONCEPTION WARNING!

Is Andrew Marr (on the video) right about Megacities?

- Andrew Marr presented a series on Megacities for the BBC, but he brought his own misconceptions and stereotypes to this
- We need to be wary of the *danger of the single story*.
- Marr uses the word slum, but many geographers think we shouldn't use this word – take a look at this [article](#) to find out why.

Learning Objective: Know what megacities are and why they emerge

Figure 3: Slide from Catherine's presentation about Megacities from the GCSE Urban Challenges topic, referencing an ABC Australia article (<https://ab.co/3R5sQyw>). Students who wish to read more can borrow Mayne's text from the Humanities library.

Other forms of media that compliment wider reading

Books are magical windows, with many offering more than one type of stimulus that can enhance both engagement and accessibility. Take the example of Lauren Redniss' 2015 book *Thunder & Lightning: Weather Past, Present, Future* which features on two of the Reteach 'Natural Hazards' lists. The book is a rich source of stimuli, delving into weather, climate, and natural hazard case studies, providing cross-curricular opportunities. It enhances literacy through creative writing and poetry, art, historical events, and biblical references, fostering interdisciplinary connections (Figure 4).

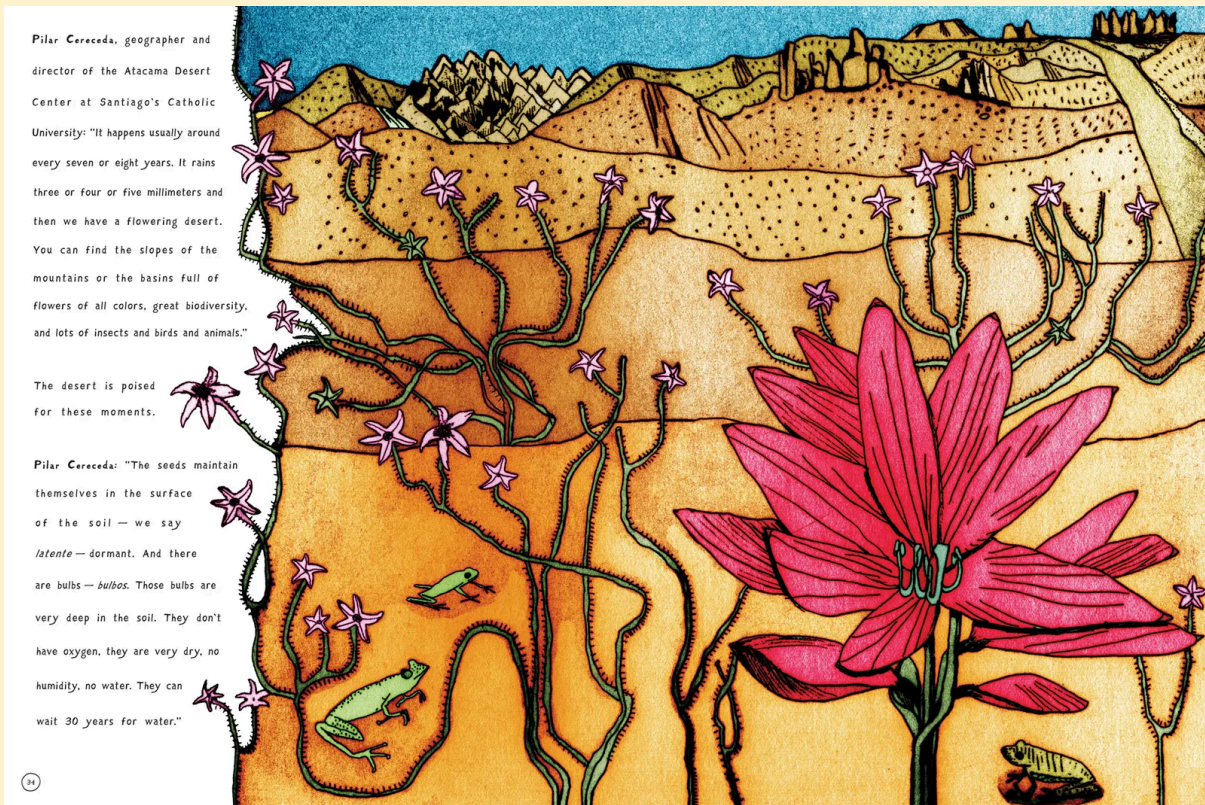


Figure 4: A double-spread page from "Thunder & Lightning" exploring the Atacama Desert through art and local knowledge. © Lauren Redniss, used with permission

Artwork, quotes from local experts, historical documentation, and so forth can, of course, be explored individually and not just within books. Therefore, especially in today's digital world, you can engage in 'wider reading' practices through other mediums. Take podcasts and audiobooks, for example. They have the benefit of providing many advantages of wider reading when time and resources are limited. These can be played during the commute, a trip to the shops, or at the kitchen counter. One example is an episode from a seemingly unrelated podcast show called *The Great Direct* discussing how the aforementioned 'cli-fi' appears in popular culture (Poulastides, 2021). Pick a geographical issue or topic, and you're guaranteed to find at least a podcast episode, if not a series on it. To get you started, try listening to *The Festival of Dangerous Ideas* for exploration of controversial issues, *BBC Digital Planet* where many features directly relate to geography, such as the use of technology in farming or disaster management, or *Coffee & Geography* which explores how people's backgrounds and lived experiences are related to geographical issues and processes. You could also listen to Reteach's own podcast series, which features some of the authors that have made it onto both the Geography and History reading lists - <https://spoti.fi/40vU2e0>. Geography guests include Ilan Kelman, Mark Maslin (climate change), and Carey Curtis (sustainable transport).

Summary

As geographers at heart, teachers have a natural curiosity to explore the world and bring their discoveries back to the classroom. Whether it's a trip abroad or simply delving into new materials, teachers can use resources like Reteach to keep their own knowledge fresh and to spark their students' imaginations. By embracing their inner geographer and tapping into these resources, teachers can ignite a love of learning in their students.

Watch the recording of Catherine and Kit Marie's GAConf23 session about wider reading and the Reteach project at <https://bit.ly/ReteachGAConf23>

Word count: 1573 (includes figure captions)

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