

DISCOVERY FILM FESTIVAL

Scotland's International Film Festival
for Young Audiences



Teacher's Resource: Giovanni's Island

Level 2

Created by James Miller

Discovery Film Festival: Sat 25 October - Sun 9 November 2014

discoveryfilmfestival.org.uk

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Introduction

Discovery Learning Resources give you exciting classroom activities to enhance Curriculum for Excellence delivery. They are created by classroom teachers and education professionals. Each resource aims to:

- Support and extend working with film in the classroom
- Help prepare teachers for a class visit to a Discovery Film Festival film and to extend the impact of that visit for delivery of CfE
- Develop confidence in Moving Image Education approaches and working with 21st Century Literacy /moving image texts

Each resource is free and available to download from www.discoveryfilmfestival.org.uk/resources or via the Discovery Film Festival area on GLOW, which can be found within the Dundee 21st Century Literacy Group.

We do hope that you find this useful and enjoy your cinema experience with us,

- Discovery Film Festival team



Giovanni's Island (Giovanni no Shima)

Dir. Mizuho Nishikubo
Japan 2014 / 1h 42m

Synopsis

The film begins on the island of Shikotan, where brothers Kanta and Junpei enjoy an idyllic childhood. The end of the Second World War signals changes for the brothers, and the island itself, as altered borders mean that Shikotan becomes Russian territory. Russian occupation begins, the island adjusts to its new occupants and Junpei meets Tanya - daughter of the Russian commander. This beautifully animated story about friendship between children of different cultures and the way they cope with incredible upheavals to their lives will leave a lasting impression on Discovery Film Festival audiences and ensure not a dry eye in the house when the end credits roll.

The Discovery Film Festival is a fantastic opportunity for our young people to be exposed to cinema texts they might otherwise miss. Like many texts out there already, *Giovanni's Island* will support interdisciplinary learning for topics such as WWII or Japan, but this text is one they are guaranteed not to have seen or read before! I have tried to include activities that will hit reading targets at 2nd Level and also encourage the higher order thinking skills of analysing and evaluating. Using Moving Image Education in the classroom benefits literacy across the board and at all levels in a bright, lively and engaging way. Enjoy the film!



Before the film

Watch the Japanese trailer - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KaUhdXO57J8>

Without any English, the pupils will have to focus on the images and soundtrack alone to predict the content of the film. Discuss the setting and period of the film. The trailer begins with children singing then cuts to two boys, Kanta and Junpei collecting eggs. Who are they? From the buildings, clothes etc. the children will notice the film is set in the past. Perhaps pause on the date- 1945. Invite discussion about the historical importance of that year. We are soon shown another of the film's protagonists, Tanya. Does she look like she belongs to the setting the children have established? Why not? If not, who is she and can they explain her presence there? Soon after, the singing stops and we see a cannon fired. A more dramatic score kicks in and darker colours are used in scenes of violence, contrasting with the peaceful mood from before. There is a recurring image that might be noticed here of a train/train track. Why might that be?

Activity

Having pieced together the clues from the trailer, have the children imagine they are going to be writing a story based on their ideas about the film. They could begin by setting down a plan in the form of a story mountain (see the **Worksheet** at the end of this Resource Pack). Share their ideas.

Discussion Points

Locate Shikotan on Google Maps and discuss its position in relation to Russia and Japan. Inform the children that historically, this area of the world has been claimed by both Japan and Russia. *Giovanni's Island* is set at the end of WWII when Russian troops occupied Shikotan. The young brothers Junpei and Kanta have to adapt to the new status quo and in doing so befriend Tanya, the daughter of the Russian commander. Invite discussion on the enemies and allies of Japan and Russia in WWII. The brothers are obsessed with trains, discuss why this might be (there are no trains on the island, they've never seen one in real life). Can the children think of anything in their own life that has changed their life dramatically e.g. moving house, changing school. How did they cope? Can the class empathise with the boys concerning the huge upheaval in their lives?

Activity 1 - Emotional Journey

The characters in *Giovanni's Island* are all presented as well-rounded and reasonable. There are no 'villains' in the story, just people coping with the situation they find themselves in. For example, Tanya's parents have the brothers to dinner and even when they are discovered along with Miss Sawako outside the internment camp, they are fed, given warmth and returned to their own camp. However, like in real life, the children's emotions and feelings change as the story moves on. With the class, have a think about one of the characters from the film, perhaps Kanta. How did he feel at the beginning? Challenge the children to think of precise and meaningful adjectives to describe these emotions. Now think of moments from the film text that you feel provide evidence. On the whiteboard, begin to compile notes in the following way:

Kanta

B

carefree, unworried, content: he collects eggs to give them away, he laughs, smiles, runs and plays with Junpei, not in a huge rush to get to the air-raid shelter

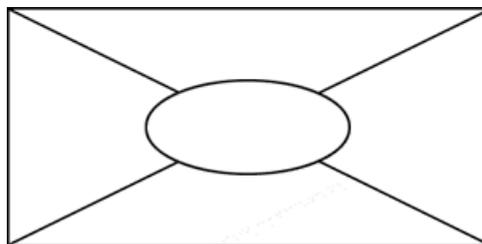
increasingly concerned, anxious, perturbed: he begins to pay more attention to events and people, follows Junpei to the hill, isn't sleeping as soundly

M

E

Complete as a class for Beginning, Middle and Ending. There may well be more than one emotion for each stage.

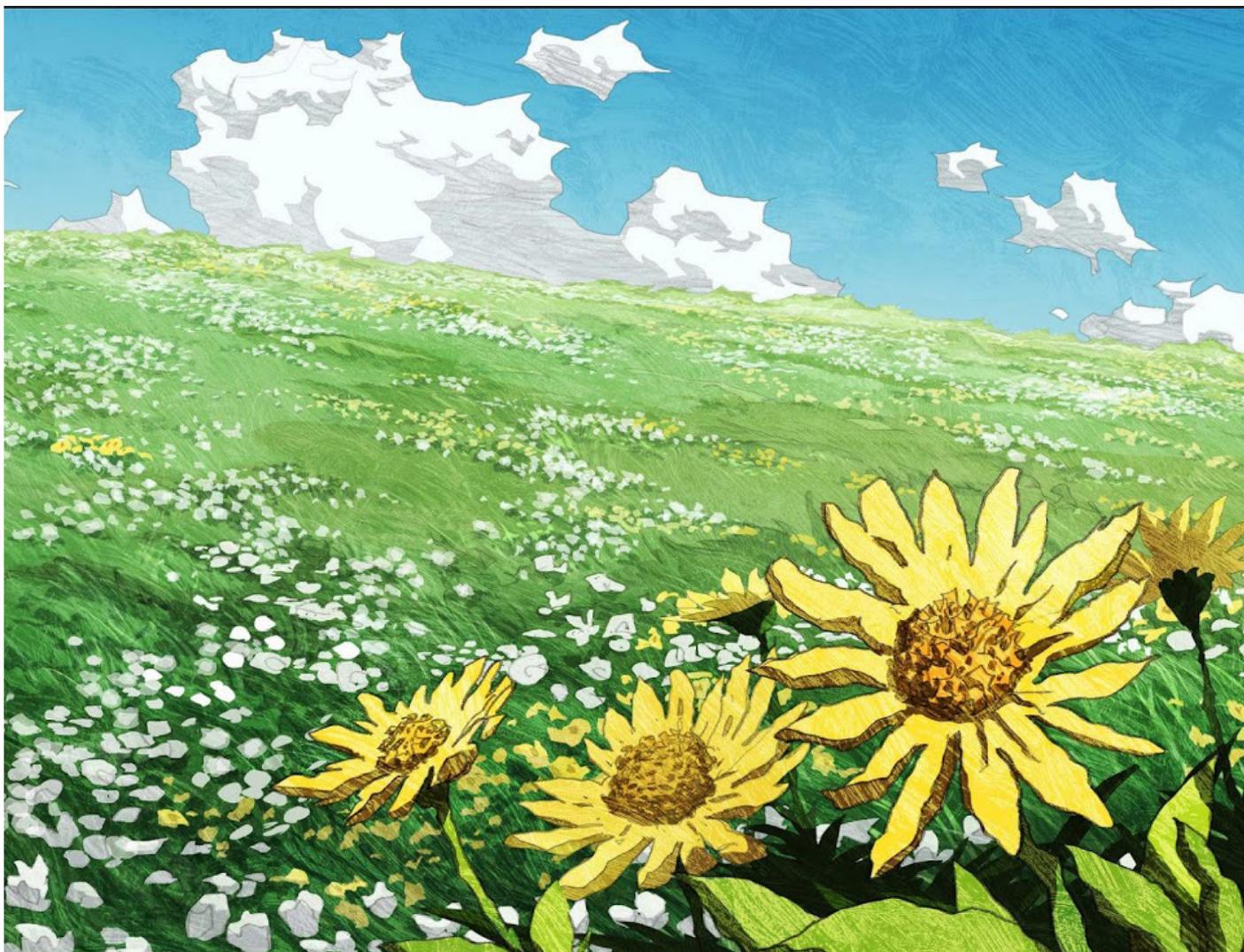
In groups of 4, children will choose another character from the movie. Each group will receive an A3 piece of paper. The children should draw lines to divide the paper like so:



The outer sections are for each child to complete an Emotional Journey for their chosen character. After allotted time, round robin to share notes. The central section should be used to note down common points/group Emotional Journey. Report back to class.

I can:

- *discuss structure, characterisation and/or setting*
- *recognise the relevance of the writer's theme and how this relates to my own and others' experiences*
- *discuss the writer's style and other features appropriate to genre.* **ENG 2-19a**



Activity 2 – What a View

In the story, the island of Shikotan changed after the occupation by the Russian troops. Imagine looking out of the brother's bedroom window before August 1945. Think back to the idyllic elements we were introduced to at the start, the girls playing in the sand, Tatsuo patrolling on horseback etc. Now think of that same scene from the window, after Tanya inherits the room.

Fold an A4 piece of paper in half, on the left hand side draw pre-occupation and on the right half draw post-occupation. Try to keep the landscape the same, but alter the details. Remember, in the film, the colours of the sky were often used to show the difference, with many of the more serious elements being played out against a dark or red sky with crashing waves. You can be equally artistic!

I can:

- *discuss structure, characterisation and/or setting*
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Activity 3 – That Reminds Me Of...

There are many themes in the movie, one of which is how children cope with radical life changes and stress and adapt accordingly. One mechanism the boys use is the idea of the Galactic Railroad, from the book by Kenji Miyazawa. Junpei first uses it when he is asked by Uncle Hideo to light the fire in the cliff. He imagines the map he is given to be a magic ticket that will take him to any destination. He uses this ticket again when Kanta is dying at the end of the film, to encourage him to fight on. Have the children think of examples of this theme of coping with extreme change turning up in other texts. An example might be Charlie from *The Lottie Project* by Jacqueline Wilson. She creates a diary of a Victorian maid whose story closely echoes her own life when her mother finds a boyfriend and Charlie's reality is threatened. Discuss other themes from the film, such as:

- The film has no villains- just everyday people coping with horrendous reality. We are deliberately shown the caring, normal sides of both Russians and Japanese to highlight the facts of the very real historical situation, without fictional elements getting in the way.
- Relocation, often unwilling, of families- the deportation of the Japanese to Sakhalin is shown in stark reality. They are then moved from the camp there back to Japan. However, when we first see Tanya, she is crying in her room. We are led to believe she is also trying to cope with the upheaval in her life.
- Tanya and Junpei become close friends before their unavoidable differences tear them apart. They do this with language, societal and physical barriers (remember the row of pots initially separating the playground?) keeping them segregated.
- Have children analyse the themes of the film. They should then compare them to similar situations from other texts. They could do this through discussion, or writing, but they should include details from the text in their analysis.

I can:

- *discuss structure, characterisation and/or setting*
- *recognise the relevance of the writer's theme and how this relates to my own and others' experiences*
- *discuss the writer's style and other features appropriate to genre.* **ENG 2-19a**

As I listen or watch, I can identify and discuss the purpose, main ideas and supporting detail contained within the text, and use this information for different purposes. **LIT 2-04a**



Suggested cross curricular links

The Galactic Railroad sequences are beautifully animated. Have the children emulate these by drawing with white wax crayon onto white paper then doing a bright watercolour wash over the top. Draw the Galactic Railroad with all the whooshes and swirls seen in the film.

A traditional Japanese home is very different to a western one. Research online then use a shoe box to create a miniature version. Include all the elements- sliding doors, tatami mats, ofuro etc. Watch more anime! 'Anime' is the Japanese term for animation and a good starting point would be the films of Studio Ghibli. *The Wind Rises* is set in Japan during WWII, but *My Neighbour Totoro*, *Spirited Away* and *Howl's Moving Castle* should be enough to get you started!

The film sits alongside commonly used texts such as *Kensuke's Kingdom* (Michael Morpurgo) and *The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas* (John Boyne). Analyse and evaluate these texts alongside *Giovanni's Island*.

Background to the film

Soviet Union and Japanese citizens lived side by side on those forgotten islands on the edge of the world for almost two years, until all Japanese nationals were moved to Sakhalin and then repatriated to Japan in 1947.

Set on the small island of Shikotan, *Giovanni's Island* describes the dramatic events affecting people who found themselves overnight on the other side of a new border traced in the aftermath of a great war. For Japan, it was indeed a wave finally coming back to its starting point, relentlessly crushing everything on its path. However, this story could have happened anywhere. We would like to believe that our world is being saved every day by nameless Junpeis and Tanyas who are still able to find each other in spite of greater games above them.

Giovanni's Island is dedicated to them.

The events narrated in this film are based on the experiences of Hiroshi Tokuno, as he told them to the scriptwriters and the director, and the lead character, Junpei is modeled after him. "Mr. Tokuno told us his extraordinary story of an ordinary child living on the island of Shikotan when the events narrated in the movie happened" explains Mizuho Nishikubo, the director of the film. "We learned about the relatively peaceful life on this little piece of land without electricity while the world around was burning; we heard stories of competition, but also cross-cultural friendship, among Soviet and Japanese children, who lived side by side for two whole years... and a lot more. We believed we could talk about that war and its aftermath from a completely different point of view by telling a story nobody ever told before in a movie. *Giovanni's Island* is a retelling of those events as seen from the eyes of a 10-year-old boy who hardly understood what was happening around him and why. This is why I tried to expose events like in a documentary, rather than interpret them. For this reason, you won't find good or bad guys in this movie. I have no specific message or thesis to advocate. I just want people to re-live Junpei's experience as he goes through it again."



Background to the film (continued)

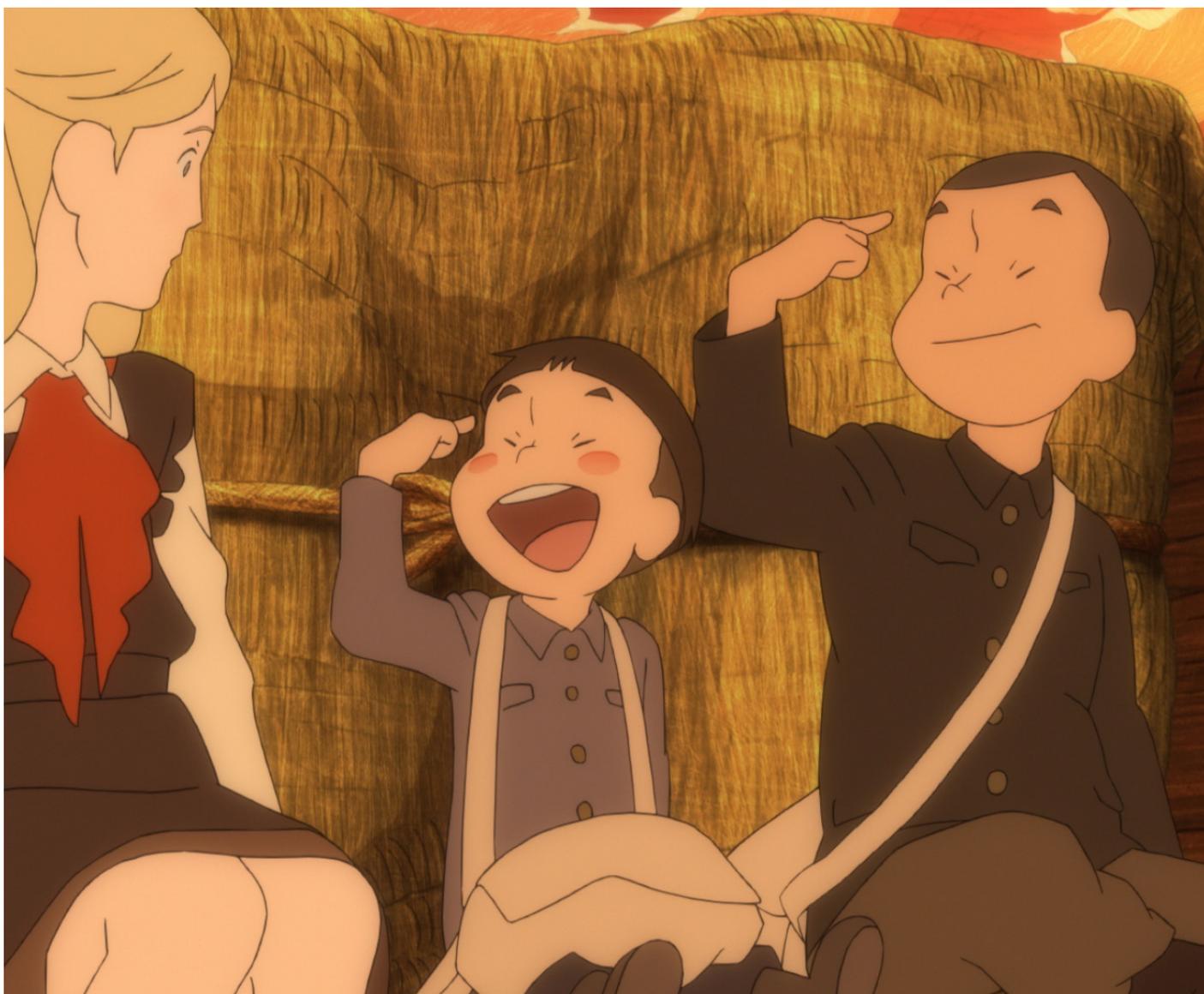
All Soviet characters in this movie have been dubbed in Russian. Recording sessions took place in Moscow during September 2013, and we are very grateful to all Russian professionals and friends who understood the spirit of our project and provided their enthusiastic and invaluable contribution to make this movie possible. 15-year-old Polina Ilyushenko, who already had voice acting experience in several Disney Channel Russia shows, was selected among more than thirty candidates to perform Tanya, the Russian main character. “All voice actors were great, starting from Polina” recalls director Nishikubo. “In the film, we had a key sequence where both Russian and Japanese children sing their own songs. So we had hired a professional children chorus from Moscow, but they were so astonishingly good I had to beg them to sing more like... ordinary children, as their Japanese counterparts had done. They were all really, really impressive.”

Profile: Shigemichi Sugita (Original Story / Screenplay)

Born in Toyohashi, Aichi Prefecture, in 1943. A multi-awarded director, scriptwriter and film producer, he is probably best known for directing the hugely successful Hokkaido-set TV drama series, *Kita no Kuni kara (From the Northern Lands)*, that started in 1981 and ran for 21 years, spanning one season and several annual specials, with audience share peaking 38.4%. He directed a number of other popular dramas (including *Shonen H / A Boy Called H*, from the award-winning novel by Kappa Senoo) and three feature films, namely *Yushun - Oración* (1988, from Teru Miyamoto's novel), *Last Song* (1994), and Japan Academy Prize-winner *Saigo no Chushingura (The Last Ronin)*, (2010). He is currently chairman of the All Nippon Producers Association and President & CEO of Nihon Eiga Satellite Broadcasting Corporation.

Profile: Mizuho Nishikubo (Director)

Nishikubo was born in Tokyo on January 15, 1953. A longtime and most trusted collaborator of Mamoru Oshii, he has participated as sequence director (but under his real name of Toshihiko Nishikubo) in all Oshii's works since *Patlabor 2: The Movie* (1993), namely *Ghost in the Shell* (1995), Cannes Palme d'Or-nominated *Ghost in the Shell 2: Innocence* (2004) and Golden Lion-nominated *The Sky Crawlers* (2008). It is said that Oshii's movies would never look the same without his contribution. He uses his alias Mizuho Nishikubo when he directs. While still studying at Waseda University, Nishikubo began his career in animation in 1975 by joining legendary studio Tatsunoko Production. After leaving Tatsunoko in 1979, he became a protégé of Osamu Dezaki, one of Japan's most respected animation directors. His collaborations with Dezaki include TV series *Lady Oscar* (1979) and *Ashita no Jo 2 (aka The Champion)*, (1980) as episodic director. Nishikubo made his directorial debut in 1983 with Mitsuru Adachi's romantic comedy *Miyuki* (1983, TV series). Other credits include *Red Photon Zillion*, (1987, TV series) *Legend of Heavenly Sphere Shurato* (1989, TV series), *Video Girl Ai* (1992, OVA), *Otogi Zoshi* (2004, TV series) and the full CG feature film *Atagoal: Cat's Magical Forest* (2006). He also directed the music clip *Tsepi i kol'tsa / Chains & Rings* (2003) for the hugely popular Russian rock star Linda, and the internationally praised *NEXT A-Class* commercial film for Mercedes-Benz (600,000 views on YouTube in 3 days). His latest feature film, *Musashi: The Dream of the Last Samurai* (2009) screened in some of the world's most prestigious international film festivals, including Locarno, Sitges, Warsaw, Stockholm and Vladivostok.



Evaluating this resource

We hope that you found this resource useful and appropriate.

Please do send us film reviews, letters from your pupils, documentation of classwork and your feedback by e-mailing mike.tait@dca.org.uk

Would you make a good Discovery Film Festival Case Study?

We are seeking a number of simple Case Studies in how teachers have used or are using Discovery films in the classroom across Curriculum for Excellence and across the Levels.

Any case studies that we develop would be intended for presentation on GLOW, the Creativity Portal and on Discovery Film Festival websites. We have a simple template to be completed and are keen to have classwork and documentation included.

If you would like to be a Discovery Case Study please e-mail sarah.derrick@dca.org.uk

Worksheet

