Interpreting Halong Bay

HEart activity
Viet Nam

Objectives

To enable students to gain an appreciation for the natural heritage at the World Heritage site of Halong Bay. This exercise uses art to encourage students to focus on the unique natural features of the site and teaches them about ways to preserve and protect Halong Bay.

Activities

1. Warm-up question and answer session

Inspire interest in the topic by asking the students a set of questions that make them think about Halong Bay: its unique features and why it is listed as a World Heritage site, for example:

- Where is Halong Bay? (Look at map)
- What are the features of the site (mountainous islands, blue sea, etc.)?
  (Compare pictures of Halong Bay with pictures of other bays)
- Who lives on Halong Bay and how do they earn a living?
- Why do people visit Halong Bay?
- Look at the World Heritage Convention. What criteria does Halong Bay meet?
- What are the threats to Halong Bay (pollution, etc)?

2. Shapes and forms

Ask the students to examine the forms and shapes that make up the bay (for example, the cone-shaped mountains, the wave-shapes of the sea, the shapes of sea-animals, the triangular or fan-shaped sails of the traditional fishing boats, etc). Then ask students to think about the colours (green plants, blue sea, red sails of boats, etc). The teacher should then provide the students with some reading material about Halong Bay.
The students should then discuss how the shapes or colours would be different if Halong Bay became polluted or otherwise damaged. If possible, the teacher should take the students to visit the Eco-museum at Halong Bay, where they can learn more about what makes the bay so precious.

3. Creating an artwork based on Halong Bay

Divide the students into groups and ask them to create a piece of art based on one or more of the shapes and colours of the bay. The students can create their own piece of art or work together as a group to make a collage.

4. Synthesis

After the artworks have been completed each group (or individual) should explain what their artwork represents. The students should then discuss what measures people can take to ensure that Halong Bay is protected.

Materials

- Background information on Halong Bay - text and pictures
- Map of Viet Nam
- World Heritage Education Kit
- Video/DVD documentary about Halong Bay (if available)

Threats to the Site

The following is a list of threats to Halong Bay’s beauty and biodiversity:

- Destruction of coral reefs (through such things as dynamiting the reefs by fishermen, dredging and anchoring of boats).
- Overfishing (taking more sea-life than can be sustainably replaced).
- Sale of wild species such as coral, shells, tortoise meat and shell, and endangered types of fish.
- Water pollution (from littering, refuse dumping and sewage outflows).
- Excessive numbers of visitors. When many tourists visit the caves and islands it can cause erosion and destroy the beauty of the site.
Halong Bay: World Heritage Site

Halong Bay is located in north-eastern Viet Nam, about 170 kilometres from the capital city, Hanoi. It features many hundreds of islands and limestone rocks which rise out of the turquoise sea. The larger islands have caves and grottoes to explore.

The bay is considered to be one of the most beautiful in Asia and has inspired poets and writers for centuries. Legend has it that the many islands were created when mountains were split with the lash of a dragon’s tail when a dragon came to the defense of the Vietnamese when they were under attack. The name “Halong Bay” means “Bay of the Descending Dragon”.

The waters of Halong Bay are the home of a multitude of forms of sea-life, including coral and a variety of fish species. Local traditional fishing boats with their distinctive red sails ply the waters.

Many local people rely on the sea-life as a source of food and fishing is the primary source of livelihoods in the area. Increasingly, however, tourism is taking over as a source of employment and income.

In recognition of its distinctive beauty and extensive biodiversity, in 1994 Halong Bay was designated as a UNESCO World Heritage Site.

Responsible use of Halong Bay

Here are a number of things you can do to protect Halong Bay:

• Do not moor boats on coral reefs.
• Do not buy coral or other forms of wildlife (such as shells or tortoise-shell or meat).
• Do not litter and make sure your rubbish is not dumped into the sea.
• When visiting an island keep to the paths and do not pick any plants or harm any animals you encounter there.
• When visiting caves make sure you are careful not to cause any damage - do not touch the limestone walls of caves (it makes the walls black) or break off any stalactites or stalagmites.
• Try to avoid areas that are already overcrowded with tourists.
• Make sure your boat anchor does not harm coral reefs.
For further information see the following websites about Halong Bay and responsible tourism:

- www.unesco.org/whc
- http://www.footprintsvietnam.com/responsible_environment.htm