Lesson 1

Teacher Resource Sheet

High ground and low ground

What this lesson is for

Children learn to read high ground, low ground and steep slopes on a contour map of land around their school. Pinning with the key forces them to use colour and line spacing, not guess from the picture.

In the curriculum (NCCA Primary SEE, 2025)

Stage 2, My locality: Environment and sustainable living. Identify, connect with and describe physical features of the local natural environment, looking at changes that happen over time.

Before the lesson

- Print one activity sheet for each child; it comes with the lesson.

How the lesson runs

1. Where are we?	5 min	4. Write it in your copy	3 min
2. Talk and learn	6 min	5. What we found	6 min
3. Pin high, low and water	13 min		
Then the activity sheet, at the children's desks			about 12 min

Teaching tips

- Read each slide aloud and point back to the map key when introducing the colour bands.
- Call children up one at a time to pin and ask which colour told them before each pin.
- Steer answers about crowded lines to steep ground rather than higher ground.
- Collect ideas on what the map cannot tell us such as how wet the ground feels.

What to watch for

- Writing 'high' instead of 'steep' for close contour lines. Point the child back to the last slide without naming the answer.
- Confusing high ground with steep ground when discussing the map.
- **A common wrong idea:** “Map colours show what covers the land, such as grass or bare earth.” Point back to the key. Say the colours stand for height bands on this map, not plants or soil. Ask which colour the key links to high ground.

Help and stretch

- Support: Stand beside a child at the board and point to the key first then one colour band before they pin.
- Extension: Ask whether our school sits on higher or lower ground than the pins placed.
- Support: For the copy sentence, quietly point back to the last slide.

Lesson 1

If you are short of time

Take fewer pinning turns, still covering high, low, water and one steep spot. Keep the copy sentence and the closing answers.

Background for you

A contour line joins places at the same height above sea level. Where lines sit close together the land rises or falls quickly, so the ground is steep. Where they sit far apart the slope is gentle. Colour bands on a school contour map group heights so the eye can find high and low ground fast. The key tells you what each colour means on that map.

The map shows height and shape only. It does not show how wet the ground feels, what grows there, or whether a path is muddy today. If the land around the school is almost flat, lines will be sparse. That is real information about the place, not a fault in the map.

Key words

high ground	land that stands up above the land around it
low ground	land that sits lower than the land around it
contour line	a line joining places of the same height
steep	ground that rises or falls quickly

Children will ask

Why are some lines bunched and some spread out? Bunched lines mean the land changes height quickly, so it is steep. Spread out lines mean the height changes slowly, so the slope is gentle.

Is our school on a hill? Use the pins and the key. Compare the school's colour band with the highest and lowest pins the class placed. The map will show you.

Activity sheet answers

1. Label Label the picture. Use the words in the box.
1 steep slope. 2 high ground. 3 low ground. 4 stream. 5 village.

2. Circle Circle the right answer for each question.
1 height. 2 gently. 3 height.

3. Finish Finish the sentence.
A good answer names colours or the key, for example: the colour bands and the key on the map.