

Session 1

Here we are



Greta is off to Transcarpathia. You have probably never heard of it, but may have heard of Ukraine, if only because of the war with Russia. Ukraine is the largest country in Europe, and Transcarpathia is just one region of Ukraine in the southwest, on the border between central and eastern Europe. In Ukrainian it is called Zakarpattia. Have a look at a map and see which countries border it.



At various times through its history, Transcarpathia has belonged to different countries – Hungary, the Czechoslovak Republics, Transylvania, the Soviet Union and, of course, Ukraine. Because of this, and because of the number of countries it borders, Transcarpathia is home to many different nationalities and ethnic groups – more than thirty in total – and the people there speak lots of different languages, especially Hungarian and Ukrainian.



The climate there is temperate, meaning it gets neither too cold nor too hot. Eighty per cent of the area is covered by mountains. 9,429 rivers run through, the biggest being a tributary of the Danube called the Tisza. There are 137 natural lakes. The lowlands have meadows with large

groups of oak trees, some more than 1,000 years old! Further into the mountains there are more beech trees and then, higher still, are fir and European spruce. There is plenty of wildlife too. The largest is the brown bear. Sadly, there are fewer than 130 bears left in the wild. Similarly wolves are on the verge of extinction in the Carpathian mountains. The Transcarpathian rivers are home to beavers, and one particularly interesting

creature is the Fiery Salamander. It is no surprise, however, that the Russian-Ukrainian war is having a serious impact on the environment and wildlife in the region.

The mountains, which are difficult to pass, mean that Transcarpathia is a bit cut off from the rest of Ukraine and has its own dialects, its own traditions, its own national dress. People have tended to feel as close to Hungary as to Ukraine. The administrative centre is the city of Uzhgorod. Can you find that on the map? It is not a very big city – there are no really big cities in Transcarpathia.

The flag and the coat of arms combine the colours of the Ukraine flag with a red bear standing up on two legs. It is believed to represent the mountains. Yellow and blue has been part of the flags of Ukraine for many years so we cannot be sure why those colours were chosen, but people today often say they represent a blue sky over golden fields full of crops.

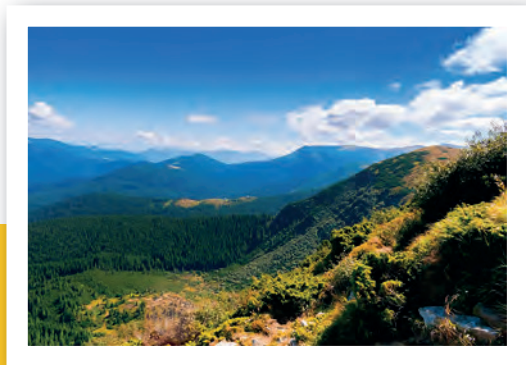


The Russo-Ukrainian war is the biggest war in Europe since the Second World War. The mountains make Transcarpathia the safest part of Ukraine at the moment. It is not completely unaffected by the war but is definitely far safer than Eastern Ukraine, so many people moved there to live until the danger is over. People who move to another part of the same country to be safer are known as displaced people. The one effect that is felt in Transcarpathia, as well as an increased population, is that power and internet sometimes fails in some places.

People in Transcarpathia are welcoming internally displaced people from across Ukraine and doing all they can to help them. Ninety eight per cent of people in Transcarpathia would describe themselves as Christian, and 1% belong to the Protestant Church.



The oldest protestant church is the Reformed Church and later in this booklet we will find out what they are doing to help the displaced people in their area. The United Reformed Church in England, Scotland and Wales has promised to do what it can to help the Reformed Church in Ukraine.



Bible Link: Psalm 121

A song of ascents

- 1 I lift up my eyes to the mountains – where does my help come from?
- 2 My help comes from the Lord, the Maker of heaven and earth.

Why might mountains make us think of God?

Prayer: God, your power is as strong as a mountain, your spirit is as refreshing as a river, your love is as important as the trees. Thank you that we can find you in everything you have created. **Amen.**

Active Prayer: Make a frame out of a piece of card with a hole in it. Go out on a prayer walk, looking at things through your frame. Think about the things you see around you that remind you of God or which would please God. Think about the things you see around you that humankind might need to say sorry to God about, which might make God sad or angry.



Greta Wonders:

- I wonder where you feel safest
- I wonder how war makes things difficult for wildlife, trees and flowers
- I wonder how many people you know of a different ethnicity or nationality to you

Activity 1:

This game is based on the game of Port and Starboard. When the leader calls out different things, the group respond by doing the correct action. Anyone who gets it wrong, or the last person to respond, is out.

Instructions:

East – run to one side of the room

West – run to the other side of the room

Mountains – arms above head, meeting at a point

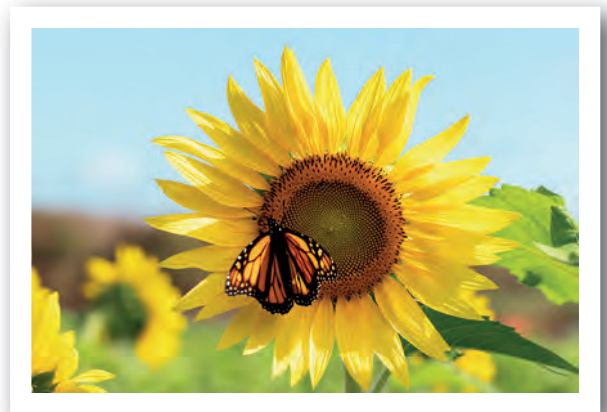
Rivers – move hands like flowing water

Bear – growl and make hands into paws with claws

Salamander – lie on the floor and squirm

Trees – arms above head forming a circle

Welcome – hug self.



Activity 2:

One important crop in Ukraine is the sunflower. The country produces and exports about half the world's sunflower oil. You may even have some in your kitchen! Despite the war, you can find massive fields of sunflowers growing in Ukraine.

Their bright colours and the way they turn to follow the sun make them a symbol of hope and happiness. Use a pot – a clean yogurt pot would do to start with – (you could decorate this with yellow and blue) and some compost, and plant a sunflower seed. I wonder how tall it might grow.



Action Point: Things you'd miss about home

Most people in Transcarpathia, and in the rest of Ukraine, love their country and the towns they live in. Think about your home town and your home country. If you were to leave and move away, what three things might be different? Apart from your friends and family and pets, what would you miss?

