

Difference between “Above” and “Over”

Both “over” and “above” mean ‘higher than’ and in many cases are interchangeable:

She was sitting and watching the clouds above/over her head go by.

Tom put his bag in the locker above/over his head.

The main difference between them is the context, e.g. over indicates movement, while above refers to a location.

We use over, but not above, to imply movement from one location to another:

Jane was going over the street.

On the other hand, we use above, but not over, to imply the location:

The book was on the shelf above the desk.

We use over, but not above, when there is contact between the things:

She put a blanket over her to get warmer (not ~~She put a blanket above her to get warmer~~)

We use above, but not over, when something is higher than something else, without touching:

The bird was singing above her head. (not ~~The bird was singing over her head~~)

We usually use over, not above, with numbers:

There were over a thousand people at the demonstrations. (not ~~There were above a thousand people at the demonstrations~~)

Exercise

1. The clouds were passing _____ her head.
2. Sheila receives _____ 30 SMSes a day.
3. It got cold so I put the cardigan _____ my shoulders.
4. That big bird was flying _____ the hills.
5. By the last census, there were _____ 13,000 people living in the town.
6. I saw Mark going _____ the street.

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