**Five Times Five: Five Activities for**

**Teaching Geography's Five Themes**

**FIVE THEMES:**

• **Location** -- Where are things located? A location can be specific (for

example, it can be stated as coordinates of longitude and latitude or

as a distance from another place) or general (it's in the Northeast).

• **Place** -- What makes a place different from other places? Differences

might be defined in terms of climate, physical features, or the people

who live there and their traditions.

• **Human**-**environment** **interaction** -- What are the relationships among

people and places? How have people changed the environment to

better suit their needs?

• **Movement** -- What are the patterns of movement of people, products, and

information? A study of movement includes learning about major

modes of transportation used by people, an area's major exports and

imports, and ways in which people communicate (move ideas).

• **Regions** -- How can Earth be divided into regions for study? Regions can

be defined by a number of characteristics including area, language,

political divisions, religions, and vegetation (for example, grassland,

marshland, desert, rain forest).

**ACTIVITIES FOR TEACHING LOCATION**

**At the start of the school year.** At the start of the school year, invite

students to create from memory an outline map of the world. (As an

alternative, students might draw a map of the United States or of their state,

if those will be the focus of the year's curriculum.) Collect the maps. At the

end of the school year, repeat the activity. Then bring out the maps that the

students created in the first days of school. How have their maps changed?

Are their end-of-year maps a big improvement over those drawn at the start

of the year?

**Literature around the world.** Invite students to identify on a world map the

locations of some of their favorite books and book characters. Among the

characters that might be included are Paddington Bear (Peru), Heidi

(Switzerland), Ferdinand the Bull (Spain), Strega Nona (Italy), Red Riding

Hood (Germany), Madeline (France), and Ping (China).

**Design a country.** Challenge students to dream up their own countries and

to create maps of those countries. The maps should show natural (rivers,

mountains) and human-made (highways, major cities) features. Students

should name their countries, decide which products will provide the

economic basis of their countries, etc.

**Map puzzles.** Collect state and regional maps from around the United

States. Cut selected pieces from those maps. (The size of the "piece" might

vary depending on the grade you teach. In the middle elementary grades,

the pieces might be about 2 inches square.) Students can use place names,

natural features (lakes, rivers), and other clues on the map pieces to try to

figure out which state each map piece is from. Students might do this activity

in small groups. Each group might have copies of the same five map pieces.

Which group can un-puzzle the map pieces first?

**Create an atlas.** Assign each student the name of a state or a country.

Provide the student with a large sheet of drawing paper. The student creates

a map of the country showing major cities, natural features, and landmarks.

A fact box on each map might provide standard information about country

size, population, etc. Put together all the students' maps to create a class

atlas.

**ACTIVITIES FOR TEACHING PLACE**

**ABC book of your community.** Invite students to create an ABC book to

describe the place in which they live. The word used for each letter might

describe a unique physical feature, the weather, or the people and their

traditions. When completed, the book should tell a reader unfamiliar with

your community what life is like there.

**So many ways to say "Hello"!** Challenge student to discover how many

different ways they can say "hello." Provide one of the many translators

available on the Internet so they can find out! Students will post the different

ways on a world map. Each student might select a different word or phrase

to create a "world word map." (You can find one translator on iTool's

Language Tools Translator.)

**Create a postage stamp or a postcard.** Assign each student the name of a

country (or a state, if states are the focus of your curriculum). The student

must research that country and design a postage stamp to be used by its

citizens. The stamp might have on it a physical feature, person, or landmark

that the country is noted for. Students present their stamps to the class,

explaining why they chose to use the image they used. Older students might

design postcards. On one side, they draw an image representative of a

place. On the other side, they write a message that provides readers with

several clues about the place. Post students' cards on a bulletin board.

Number each card. Give students a week to read all the cards on their own

and to jot down their best guesses as to the place. At the end of the week,

students can turn over the cards to learn the correct answers. Who correctly

guessed the most places?

**Weather report.** Assign each student the name of a city. (This might be a

city in the United States if that is the focus of your curriculum. Or select cities

from around the world.) On the first school day of each month, students

collect information about the weather in that city. They can compare from

month to month and plot high and low temperatures over the course of a

year. Which city has the warmest year-round weather? the coolest? Which

city has the widest range of temperatures? Which city has weather most like

the weather in your city?

**ACTIVITIES FOR TEACHING HUMAN-ENVIRONMENT**

**INTERACTION**

***The Lorax.*** Read aloud the book *The Lorax* (by Dr. Seuss), a wonderful

example of human-environment interaction for all ages. Talk about the

different characters in the book. How do students feel about each of them?

Who does each character symbolize? How is each character affected by the

Once-ler? Who is the Somebody?

**Your town's growing population.** Collect population statistics for your town

as far back as they are available. Students can create graphs to show how

the town's population has changed over the decades. How has population

change affected the town?

**Wants and needs.** Invite students to make a list of the things they would

want to have to have a good life. Which of those things do they really need?

How many of those things they really need can be found in the natural

environment? Which things must be made by people?

**What if ...** Pose these questions to students: What if the yard outside your

house were never touched? What would it look like if you decided to let it "go

natural" (if you didn't mow it, water it, plant shrubs, rake leaves)? Ask

students to discuss and draw pictures to show how their yards would be

different if they let them go natural.

**A picture is worth ...** Help students collect pictures of your town over the

years. How is the town different in appearance today from the way it looked

many years ago?

**ACTIVITIES FOR TEACHING MOVEMENT**

**The products we use.** Where do the products we use originate? Invite

students to collect labels from foods, clothing, toys, and other products they

use. Where do those products come from? What percentage of those

products are made in your state? your country? other continents? Are we

dependent on products from all around the world? Talk about how products

made outside your community might get there.

**Commuter graph.** Help students create a graph to show how far their

parents travel to work each day. A different bar will represent people who

commute less than 5 miles, 6 to 10 miles, 11 to 20 miles, 21 to 30 miles, and

more than 30 miles. Provide a map for students to show the different places

people travel.

**Roots.** Where did students' families come from? Ask students to find out

about their families' roots. That information might be plotted on a class chart

so students can see the roots they share with others in the class. In addition,

let students tell what they know about when and why their ancestors came

to the United States and how they got here.

**Interview community elders.** Much can be learned from the elders in a

community. Students might interview older family members and neighbors

about their memories of long ago. Students could ask questions about the

transportation they used, the foods they ate, the clothes they wore, the

schools they went to. How have things changed?

**License plates from all around.** Challenge students to keep track of the

different license plates they see in the course of a week. (If possible, you

might go to some place where students could observe a wide range of

license plates.) What states do those plates represent? What might a license

plate tell you about a state? For a follow-up writing activity, students might

write letters to the Department of Motor Vehicles in each state. In their

letters, they might ask for information about the state's license plates.

**ACTIVITIES FOR TEACHING REGIONS**

**Map your school region.** Create a map that shows the areas in which

students live. Invite each student to add a pin to the map to indicate the

location of his or her home. What conclusions can students draw from the

map? Do more students live in one "region" of the "school region" than in

others? Why might that be so?

**Time zones.** While your students are sound asleep tonight, students in

some other parts of the world are sitting at their school desks. Why is that?

Talk with students about time zones. How do time zones affect students'

lives? How do time zones affect them as they fly from place to place? What

time is it right now in other parts of the world? (For this activity, you might

use the Internet resource World Time Zone Map.)

**Bingo.** Invite students to create their own bingo cards. They should label

each column on the bingo card with a region of the United States. (Use

whichever region arrangement appears in your students' text or your local

curriculum; if there are more than five regions, students select five regions to

use on their cards.) Invite students to draw in each square in the column the

outline of a different state in that region. The teacher will draw the name of a

state from a bag full of paper slips labeled with each state's name. Who gets

bingo first?

**Regions in your community.** Invite students to look at the neighborhoods

in their community. Talk about why those neighborhoods developed where

they did. Neighborhoods develop for many reasons. They might develop

around factories (jobs) or a church, a hill or a lake. What can you learn about

your community from its neighborhoods? Is there a part of your community

that might be called the shopping region or the factory region or the farm

region? What other regions might be part of your community?

**Cultural regions too.** Collect stamps from countries all around the world.

You can learn about cultural regions from a country's stamps. What do some

of the stamps tell you about that country's culture?