

**You *Can* Get There From Here:  
An Introduction to World Travel for Elementary Students**

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**INTRODUCTION**

I have developed a unit based on a global perspective theme with the element of travel as an integral aspect of this unit. For some time now, we have all been inundated with sound bytes such as “global perspective” and “global economy.” In order to appreciate what these terms mean and possibly imply, one must have an understanding of who we are in relation to the rest of the world. Moreover, we must feel so secure in who we are that we are not threatened by learning how someone else lives.

Before proceeding with the Institute and its course of study, I had to be honest with myself so that I might effectively deal with any shortcomings that I had which could adversely affect the success of the unit. When I was high school, I had the opportunity to go on a trip with other juniors that was led by the late Congressman Mickey Leland. Everyone was all abuzz after his presentation to our junior class. He was so excited and genuine about all that this trip could offer us. We were dismissed to begin preparation on our essays, which would determine our admission. I still remember how excited I wanted to be. I was scared to death. I became even more terrified as the day went on. I continued to hear comments from friends about how good it would look on college applications, and what an honor it would be to just be in the midst of Congressman Leland. I didn’t consider myself a good writer, but I did enjoy it and frequently proofread papers for others. Teachers pulled me to the side, just to make sure everything was going all right with my paper. Nothing was going right with my paper; I had no intention of writing it! I didn’t want to go. As an only child of parents who have been divorced all my life, I’ve never felt the urge stray from home. I couldn’t bear the thought of leaving my mother alone. Moreover, I couldn’t bear the thought of being alone. I’ve never told my mother this. She would be mortified. She’s spent her life seeking to afford me every opportunity and would just die if she knew that there was one out there that I missed. Therefore, I embraced the opportunity to pursue a course of study in travel. I believe that I can do a very good job in preparing and presenting this unit because I can empathize with the “less-than-eager” traveler.

Since the tragic events of September 11, 2001, it is not only common, but viewed as advantageous to be guarded, to stay close to home, and to question the unfamiliar. The graphic images and looming questions regarding those who are different threaten the once natural curiosity to travel. Therefore, I believe it is important to teach others about these cultural and geographical differences so that students may develop a more balanced approach about events that may affect them. Moreover, we are all responsible for maintaining our connectivity to each other as part of the human experience.

As an elementary teacher I have seen students with opportunities to travel. At our school in particular, the fifth-grade students have two such opportunities. They are often invited to go to camp – a district-sponsored camp, run by a most capable staff. The parents are provided a presentation on what their children will learn and experience, all free of charge. Historically, it is a wonderful experience for the children. However, every year there are a few who are not allowed to attend. They are good kids who are most deserving of this unique learning opportunity, but many the parents don't give their permission. There is also an annual day trip to San Antonio, which is taken by bus on the last day of school. There are several parents who initially balk at the idea during the informational meeting, but eventually give in by the time of the trip. What's the difference here? Well, the San Antonio trip is an annual tradition, where each child is afforded the opportunity to go free of charge. There is a candy sale, and if they sell two cases, they may go free of charge. If not, they pay the difference from the \$50 full price. It is a trip that begins before dawn and ends with a 10-o'clock return to school. On the other hand, the camping trip is offered to the students on a rotating basis throughout the district, and therefore our students don't necessarily attend every year. It's every other year at best. Therefore, the San Antonio trip is the more anticipated trip, as it has a greater investment on the part of the students. In addition, it is an established tradition fortified with a yearlong anticipation-building support system. It sometimes takes that long for all of the students to sell the candy or recuperate the money. It's always on the last day of school, so the fifth graders look forward to saying goodbye in grand style. Both trips have an educational component. However, a Texas history unit precedes the San Antonio trip and the camping trip is a field experience at an outdoor educational facility. After years and years of seeing my fifth grade colleagues struggle with parents regarding these traveling issues; I decided to address them in this unit. I understand that there are several emotions involved; however I would like to make the idea of travel a natural occurrence in students' lives. I believe that the opportunity to travel should be anticipated and that traveling separately from one's parents should be a pinnacle milestone to be treasured always. I recognize that these desires will not just appear; rather they must be fostered, developed and nurtured.

I believe that if you teach children, they will make good choices. I want them to know about other cultures and the element of travel to actually experience them firsthand. The best way to teach any topic is to begin with familiar in a concrete form and move to the unfamiliar in more abstract forms. Using a literature base across the subject areas, (reading, math, social studies and science) the unit would include such titles as *Galimoto*. Students would learn about the life of the main character, a young boy in an African village. This story is especially popular with children because it's the story how the boy goes about making a toy. Other titles would include, but would not be limited to, *Everyone Eats Rice*, *The Tree of Cranes*, *Everyone Goes To School*, and *Strega Nona*. In order to maximize effectiveness, I would seek to use titles which I could locate in both English and Spanish. Since I teach a first grade bilingual class, I find that reading the book in Spanish first makes the comprehension and acquisition of new English vocabulary much easier. In addition, students eagerly respond to texts in their native

language, and are more receptive to the English texts when they have a “springboard” from which to work. I believe that the Spanish texts provide this necessary “anchor” as they embark onto new “travels” in learning. Children understand other children and are naturally curious about what they eat, how they go to school and what kind of clothes they wear. I would emphasize a respect for all that is different, as that is what it is, different, not better. Where we live and who we are works for us, it may not work for everyone. Therefore, students will develop both knowledge and respect.

After only a few class meetings and readings, my objective for this unit became abundantly clear. Fussel presents the dichotomy of tourism and travel. Most don’t even recognize a difference. One could say that it is the difference between reading the Cliff Notes and reading the novel. Admittedly after reading the Cliff Notes you have some sense of character, plot and setting, but you’ve missed the nuances of the language of the author. It may also be compared to having only appetizers at a “five star” restaurant. Sure you’ve been there, but have you had a sufficient experience upon which to reflect or even pass on a recommendation to others? However, the notion of travel is a timeless one. Just as in the times of the Great Expedition, today, to be well traveled is an indication of means. And this is what I wish to impart to my students. I want them to value the mere desire to embark on a potentially life-changing experience.

I am particularly concerned with the willingness to travel, but the unwillingness to learn the language or respect the culture. This attitude is exemplified when potential tourists tout their interest in another country because of its similarities to the United States. So if it is so much like the United States, why would you want to go there? If one is truly interested in traveling, they should be totally willing to embrace the culture. This is a critical element that I will address upon the completion of this unit.

Education is a key element of successful travel. It holds the universal truth, “The more you put into it, the more you get out of it.” Research is the notion in this case. Give of yourself and invest your time for the purpose of learning something new for a sense of fulfillment. For example, we see this phenomenon especially in religious sects. It is sometimes seen as a life-long dream or duty to travel to the Holy Land. One may think that society has become complacent on the spoon-fed images of the media. Whether these be news stories, magazine photographs or live web-cam images on the internet none are substitutes for actual experiences. We are cautioned to stop and examine these phenomena of accepting provided images and reality television as experiences. Needless to say these examples may serve to add to a traveling experience, but is no way a substitute.

This brings to mind a story that a friend told me, and has been repeated by several others in various forms. She had to go to New York about month after the tragic events of September 11<sup>th</sup>. She watched much of the news involving those events and was very often moved to tears. She felt as if she were an informed person regarding these events. Much to her dismay, she told me of an overwhelming sense of pain and sorrow as she

approached a somewhat familiar skyline with a noticeable absence. She said that it was as if you saw an old friend and when they smiled their two front teeth were missing. Much of what you remember about is the same, but something is noticeably missing, which affects the whole face. When teeth are missing the mouth is held differently, the speech is sometimes changes, and many things are affected. These feelings only intensified as she approached the site where the towers once stood. She recalled that the abyss which remained left a gaping hole in her soul. Nothing she saw on television prepared her for this.

I site this example because it is one that many of us find a point of reference. We can all remember the endless news stories and visual images, but many of us haven't been to the site since these events occurred. Although this is an unpleasant example, it does serve as a reminder to us all. You may think you know, but you have no idea. Her experience helped me to understand that although we prepare ourselves for situations, we need to prepare ourselves for the unexpected. My grandfather always said, "It's easy to know what you don't know, but some people don't even know that they don't know." That was amusingly confusing to me as a child, but it now rings painfully true to me as an adult.

## **UNIT HISTORY**

This unit is not just "a good idea" that I thought was worth writing. I began working on it some fifteen years ago. It began as a grade-level brainstorming session on how to present the concept of continents and oceans to second grade students. We all agreed to choose a country from a different continent. We would study it and provide a series of presentations for the entire grade level on a given day. The presentations would be twenty to thirty minutes in length. A schedule would be posted on the door, and the presentation would be repeated until the schedule was completed. Admittedly, this went very well for us and inadvertently caused a "buzz" around the school.

As the presentations began other teachers asked if they could bring their classes in. Some were studying the countries presented, others were just plain curious. We did these presentations the week before Winter Break and coined the name "Christmas Around The World." It caught on like wildfire! The next year more teachers joined by choosing other countries and it eventually expanded school wide!

The following year the principal required each grade level to sign up for a month to provide entertainment for the P.T.O. meetings. My grade level quickly chose December. We devised a plan to take the presentations and present them in the form of a play. We gave all our presentation notes to one teacher and she created a script for the play! It began with two small children too excited to sleep on Christmas eve. They stayed up and saw Santa, accompanying him around the world as he delivered presents to all children. It became a school tradition. Children began to choose their next year's teacher based on the country they knew him or her to present. We even moved it to the spring one year,

and each class maintained their country's name for field day. We had an opening ceremony like the Olympics where each class marched in with their country's flag.

What happened during that time was magical for me as a teacher. I was excited about what I was doing, and impressed with what my colleagues were doing. We were all speaking the same language, but talking about different things. It is situations such as this one that energizes teachers and wards off "burn out." There was a true spirit of working together and the synergistic effect was evident.

## **UNIT BACKGROUND**

This unit is designed to cover a nine-week period. This time frame considers its audience to have little or no prior knowledge of world geography. Therefore it will begin with a basic introduction of the seven continents and four oceans. After a two week study of continents and oceans, students will move onto individual country study. Since there's not too much going on in Antarctica, you will have time to reflect on all the new things learned over the course of the unit during the last week. Before the actual "visits" will take place, students will prepare their very own "passports." As they enter the individual countries, their passports will be "stamped" with the country's flag. I have chosen the following countries based on accessibility of information: Mexico, Brazil, England, China, Nigeria and Australia. However, the unit may be adapted to reflect resources that are more readily available to the teacher. For example, if you have a Vietnamese student, you may want to consider focusing on Vietnam when you visit Asia.

Each country studied will include a course of study of geography, music, books, language, culture and holidays. This interdisciplinary approach will serve various time and treatment needs to the curriculum areas. Any time an endeavor of this time is attempted; there is often a concern for time management. Course of study such as this unit are critical in developing the higher order thinking skills which are tested on standardized tests. As educators we must strive to find ways to provide the "out of the box" experiences which our children desperately need. Participation in units such as this one, prepares students for longitudinal courses of study. I have often heard teachers comment that their students don't retain what is learned or they don't connect prior knowledge to newly acquired knowledge. This unit requires the constant recall of previous knowledge in order to make it through. At the conclusion of each country's study, students will taste a food indicative of the area. These are foods which require little or no preparation and are generally easily handled by small hands. As a country is visited, students will learn new vocabulary, which is critical in every grade level.

### **Overview of Each Country**

The following is a small bit of information on several countries. It is good basic knowledge to have, but may not necessarily be appropriate to include in a lesson for young children. I realize that this unit may appear to be an overwhelming task.

However, you may find it to be an excitedly infectious one. Once you begin preparation on one country's presentation, you will find more information. This information will give rise to more creative ideas regarding other countries. The value is exponential. It is not too terribly difficult to encourage others to participate, which "gives you more bang for your buck." Although it is difficult to work out the mechanics of time management, commitment to the project is time well spent. This is the reason that we, as a school, stopped participating in the program. Ironically, it did not happen all at once. Unfortunately it was a waning of participants over the years. Each year fewer and fewer participated. Of course the upper grade teachers were the first to go. Then the lower grade teachers ultimately stopped. I believe this to be a "solidarity move" on our parts. We had grown accustomed to participating as a school. It just didn't seem right to go back to its original state of only one group of teacher participating. Moreover, the upper grade students would see the presentations in progress as they passed in the halls and ask when they would be doing theirs. Teachers struggled to prepare students for a rigorous testing and it just "fell by the wayside." I believe situations like this one are the true measure of who we are as educators and what we are made of. We must identify quality educational experiences for our children, and develop ways of incorporating them into the instructional day. This is not impossible, it is imperative. Units of study like this one are indicative of the in-depth thinking which is required of students. The Houston Teachers Institute compels the teacher to explore topics in ways much like this unit. I highly recommend it as a course of study and self-reflection.

### *Mexico*

Mexico is our continental neighbor to the south. Mexico is one of several countries which tout Spanish as their official language. This is an excellent teaching point when presenting this country or any other Spanish speaking country. Students must be taught that anyone who speaks Spanish is not necessarily a Mexican. This is a point of confusion for some Americans. However this is not a point of confusion for Hispanics. They understand that there are various dialects of Spanish indigenous to parts of Mexico. They also understand that Spanish spoken by a Mexican may not necessarily be clearly understood by a Columbian. Once again, this is an excellent opportunity for teaching if you have a significant Hispanic population in your classroom. There is a basic need for understanding and respect of all cultures, and the study of Hispanic cultures can be a very meaningful caveat of the unit. As with any country it is important to present the same set of basic facts as each country is introduced. Students should have some basic knowledge of the country. Older students will be able to learn significantly more detailed information, all of which is supported by CLEAR objectives. Mexico's flag is comprised of three equal vertical bands of green (hoist side), white, and red; the coat of arms (an eagle perched on a cactus with a snake in its beak) is centered in the white band. When studying another country it is often helpful to point out similarities in size, terrain and weather patterns. This provides students with a sense of familiarity, so that they may begin to understand the new concepts. HISD is fortunate in that it has a significant Hispanic population, many of whom are of Mexican descent. Since Mexico is a

bordering country, it can be reached by car quite easily from Houston in about 7 hours. The country boasts beautiful coasts which are quite the tourist attraction. Acapulco, Ixtapa, Puerto Vallarta and the Yucatan peninsula are among some of the favorites. In addition to beautiful beaches, Mexico has mountain ranges, volcanoes, major cities and quaint towns. Mexican culture is strongly influenced by the indigenous populations of the past which included the Mayans and Aztecs. When preparing a presentation of Mexico, it is helpful to provide the students with an edible treat which is indicative of the country. You can take this as far as you like. You may choose something as inexpensive as Chiclets or you may go as far as to prepare tamales. Whatever your preference, the food should be cut into small bite sized pieces, just enough to be served on a cocktail napkin.

### *England*

England is an island located in Western Europe. England is slightly smaller than Oregon. England has some interesting weather patterns, which some students may find interesting. Weather patterns are of particular concern when studying other countries. Many times they influence where people live, how they make a living, and how they travel and move about the city. Houston does not lend itself to significant changes between seasons. Therefore, when you speak about snow or vivid color changes of leaves, you must understand that a native Houstonian may have no firsthand knowledge. Although the majority of England's population considers itself English, there is a significant presence of other cultures. England is also home to Scottish, Irish, Welsh, West Indian, Indian, Pakistani, and others. The conventional long form of the country's name is: United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland. England's flag is comprised of a blue field with the red cross of Saint George (patron saint of England) edged in white, superimposed on the diagonal red cross of Saint Patrick (patron saint of Ireland), which is superimposed on the diagonal white cross of Saint Andrew (patron saint of Scotland). This flag is officially known as the Union Flag, but commonly called the Union Jack. The official language of England is English. However, there are slight differences in England's English and the United States' English, which have boggled many a traveler. This is an excellent opportunity for vocabulary study. In this instance English-speaking students can do the same type of language studies as Spanish-speaking students can. Although the same words are spoken, they often have other meanings in other English speaking countries. Vocabulary is key here, and respect for that vocabulary leads to respect for that country. One such example is present on familial level for me. I had a dear aunt who always referred to the remote control as the "clicker pusher." Everyone who visited understood the term, but did not necessarily use it. When she asked for the "clicker pusher," we got it for her. No one ever corrected her or ridiculed her terminology. You just understood that when you were in Auntie's house you abided by her rules, both spoken and unspoken. I believe that learning these "rules" separates the tourists from the travelers. Mastery of these rules makes the traveler seamlessly integrate in the foreign country while the tourist bumbles through with maps and guides. For example, in England, what we know to be an elevator is called a "lift" and the mixture of

the colors black and white is spelled “grey” not “gray.” I suffered from this pitfall firsthand when tutoring an English child. She made a mistake while writing, and asked if I had a rubber. When her father came home, he announced that he needed to go out for a fag. Tutoring led to babysitting, and I developed a wonderful relationship with the family. I finally gained enough confidence to question some of the words in our conversations. It’s amazing how one or two misunderstood words can change things. I eventually discovered that a “rubber” was an eraser and a “fag” was cigarette. Initially, I felt that the family was a bit progressive for me. This is why this particular course of study is so important for children. “Tea time” is a cultural mainstay in the British culture and is a good topic for discussion and study. It lends itself nicely to the preparation of the edible treat, should you decide to include this in your unit. Shortbread cookies are very inexpensive and an excellent choice for small hands. An alternative may be the study of one of England’s holidays. Christmas is always exciting, and students are fascinated with the twelve days of Christmas, the song and the celebration.

## *China*

China is officially known as People’s Republic of China. China’s official language is standard Chinese or Mandarin. China’s flag is red with a large, yellow, five-pointed star and four smaller, yellow, five-pointed stars (arranged in a vertical arc toward the middle of the flag) in the upper hoist-side corner. China is in an interesting part of the world. It has many neighboring countries, which may or may not be familiar to your students. Focusing on bordering countries helps students to understand some political issues that they may see in the news.

This unit is a good one, if I do say so myself. It has a variety of activities that are good for children. Moreover, there are life lessons here that are good to know if you plan on making it in this global society. As educators, we often give voice to how we are preparing our children to be part of a global community. An innate responsibility to actively prepare students for this was a driving force in pursuing this unit. I discuss this at this point in the unit, because by now you probably think that you have a sense of what my objectives for this unit are, and can probably guess how it will play out. It is more than an overview of flags, languages, landforms, and bordering countries. These are all important facts to know. However, it is more important to me that students come away knowing that not all people with almond shaped eyes are Chinese. I want them to develop a sense of respect for differences. Therefore, that what looks or sounds “Chinese” may be more accurately described as “Asian,” until you know for sure.

Children are very interested in the celebration of Chinese New Year. Lion Dancing, firecrackers, and huge feasts define this special celebration. In preparing an edible treat for China, you may find that individually wrapped fortune cookies make a good choice. However, you may be able to convince a local restaurateur to provide you with enough fried rice for all your students to sample. As always, it never hurts to ask.



## *Nigeria*

Nigeria is located in western Africa, bordering the Gulf of Guinea, between Benin and Cameroon. It is slightly more than twice the size of California. It borders Benin, Cameroon, Chad, and Niger. Nigeria is officially known as the Federal Republic of Nigeria. Its flag is comprised of three equal vertical bands of green (hoist side), white, and green. Nigeria gained its independence from the United Kingdom on October 1, 1960. Historically, Nigeria has been under military rule.

Take time to discuss “military rule” with your students. Ask students what they think it means, and clear up any misconceptions. Ask their opinions on how they think military rule looks as you travel around your city. Ask critical questions. “Would you feel safer? Would armed soldiers frighten you? How are soldiers different from police?” Participating in these types of discussions is critical for students so that they may develop the skill of looking at their lives with a critical eye.

In 1999, the transition to a civilian government was made in Nigeria without incident. In order to establish Nigeria as a competitor in the world market, it must rebuild a petroleum-based economy. Unfortunately, much of what was gained was lost due to corruption and mismanagement. Nigeria is equal to the task as it boasts natural gas, petroleum, tin, columbite, iron ore, coal, limestone, lead, zinc, and arable land among its natural resources. However, to ensure its future success, it must battle existing problems such as soil degradation, rapid deforestation, and urban air and water pollution. These are issues which are mentioned in the United States. It is an excellent opportunity to discuss the earth, the issues around us, and how we will all have the responsibility to resolve them. It is important to point out these similarities as we develop the sense of a global community. Nigeria, which is Africa’s most populous country, is composed of more than 250 ethnic groups. Although English is the official language, indigenous groups maintain their own languages as well. Lagos was known as Nigeria’s capital; however, as of December 12, 1991 the capital was officially transferred to Abuja. Some of Nigeria’s natural resources include, but are not limited to, crude oil, coal, tin, columbite, palm oil, and peanuts.

## *Australia*

Australia became a commonwealth of the British Empire in 1901. It was able to take advantage of its natural resources to rapidly develop its agricultural and manufacturing industries and to make a major contribution to the British effort in World Wars I and II. Australia the continent has one country: Australia. For this reason I suggest you save it as one of the later countries of the unit. The concept of continent versus country is difficult enough without introducing this unique situation at the outset. Australia is located between the Indian Ocean and the South Pacific Ocean. It is slightly smaller than the US contiguous 48 states. Its climate is described as generally arid to semiarid, temperate in the south and east, and tropical in the north. Australia’s natural resources

are noted as follows: bauxite, coal, iron ore, copper, tin, gold, silver, uranium, nickel, tungsten, mineral sands, lead, zinc, diamonds, natural gas, and petroleum. Australia is the world's smallest continent but the sixth-largest country. The population is concentrated along the eastern and southeastern coasts. Australia's climate is tropical, with an invigorating sea breeze known as "the Doctor" which occurs along the west coast in the summer. The population is predominately Caucasian (over 90%), with some Asians and aboriginals. Australia's official language is English. Once again, Australia's English is unique, much like that of England's. A friend is a "mate." Maybe Americans should consider this concept given the current divorce rate in the United States. The conventional long form of Australia is the Commonwealth of Australia. Australia's flag reflects its rich history. It is blue with the flag of the UK in the upper hoist-side quadrant and a large seven-pointed star in the lower hoist-side quadrant known as the Commonwealth Star. The Commonwealth represents the federation of the colonies of Australia in 1901. The star depicts one point for each of the six original states and one representing all of Australia's internal and external territories; the remaining half is a representation of the Southern Cross constellation in white with one small, five-pointed star and four larger, seven-pointed stars. The study of the Australian flag can be a springboard to future lessons and possibly a unit of study on all flags. Australia's Western-style capitalist economy is comparable with the four dominant West European economies. Students are easily "caught up" in Australia's mystique. Its wild outback, adorable koalas, and trademark kangaroos can peak any interest.

### ***Brazil***

Following three centuries under the rule of Portugal, Brazil became an independent nation in 1822. It is largest and most populous country in South America. Brazil has overcome more than half a century of military intervention. Much of this struggle has been the result of a desire to participate in the global economy. Brazil's official name of record is the Federative Republic of Brazil. Brazil is located in the eastern part of South America, bordering the Atlantic Ocean. It is slightly smaller than the US. Its bordering nations are Argentina, Bolivia, Colombia, French Guiana, Guyana, Paraguay, Peru, Suriname, Uruguay, and Venezuela. Brazil's climate is mostly tropical. The following natural resources are prevalent: bauxite, gold, iron ore, manganese, nickel, phosphates, platinum, tin, uranium, petroleum, hydropower and timber. Unfortunately, deforestation in the Amazon Basin destroys the habitat and endangers a multitude of plant and animal species indigenous to the area. Older students can research this extensively. Once again, there have been several resources found here and only here that are disappearing. So, one must ask, what is deforestation? Is it fair? Do you have the right to eliminate something that could be a future use to many others, just because you can? What is your responsibility to the world and its future? Brazil's natural resources are further exploited by the lucrative illegal wildlife trade and by air and water pollution in Rio de Janeiro, Sao Paulo, and several other large cities. Brazil's white population includes Portuguese, Germans, Italians, Spanish, and Polish and comprises 55% of its overall population. Other races also noted in the population are mixed white and black, 38%; black, 6%; and

“other” (includes Japanese, Arab, and Amerindian), 1%. Languages spoken include Portuguese (official), Spanish, English, and French. As students study these countries and their populations, they will learn how many countries are home to multiple cultures. Brazil is economically the strongest country in South America. It is currently striving to be a greater presence in the world markets. Brazil’s flag is green with a large yellow diamond in the center bearing a blue celestial globe with 27 white five-pointed stars (one for each state and the Federal District) arranged in the same pattern as the night sky over Brazil; the globe has a white equatorial band with the motto *Ordem e Progresso* (Order and Progress).

## **IMPLEMENTATION STRATEGIES**

In order to help students remember the continents and oceans, you should have them engage in various songs, maps, finger plays and mnemonic. A clear understanding – even by the youngest student – is essential to the individual’s success with the unit. Once there is a basic understanding of the idea of a continent, students will be introduced to individual countries from that continent. This has historically been a difficult concept for most elementary students (of all ages) to grasp. The development of this concept is aided by the teacher, as special attention is noted as maps of continents are colored. Some maps that reflect the general shape of a continent serve only one purpose. However, maps of continents that reflect the borders of countries should also be included. It is good to utilize as many different kinds of maps as possible during this part of the unit. Students can then easily compare the countries of Africa, which are more than fifty, to those of North America, which are only three. Teachers may also introduce water masses as a course of study. However, the same level of questioning should be done before a continent is presented. Examples of such questions are as follows: What oceans touch this continent? What continents are to the north, south, east, and west of this continent? What bodies of water do we see on this continent? If we were to travel to this continent from Houston, in which direction would we travel? Which methods of transportation could be used to get to this continent? What are their major holidays and celebrations? What language is spoken there? Admittedly, answers would be scarce at first. Teachers should take advantage of this opportunity to verbalize strategies which arrive at the correct answer. Physically moving students from their desks to the front of the room, closer to pull-down world maps, is a good strategy. It is sometimes helpful to make transparencies of maps and model how countries and bodies of water are to be colored. Students will soon understand the rhythm of this particular cycle of teaching. You may find that they will pose the questions themselves, understanding that these are commonalities of several countries. It will also help to include vivid visuals during a country’s study. I have included some websites in the bibliography which you may find helpful. Many consulates are eager to share information. Some may even provide you with some items, either permanently or for a termed loan. Travel agents are excellent resources for large, striking, color posters; sometimes you just have to ask.

## **Transformation/Preparation of the Classroom**

The outside of classroom should serve as your gateway to travel. Post a world map outside with a star indicating your country's location. World maps are especially good for this purpose because they maintain the focus of where the other country is in relation to the United States. This is a good idea because posting space inside the classroom can become scarce. Feel free to take the class outside in front of the display and use this as a teaching space. This is a good time to revisit the concept of transportation. Ask students what modes of transportation may be used and which would be the best and why. Is quick always best? Is air travel better than a cruise? Is a cruise possible when traveling to this particular destination? What should you consider when you choose your method of travel? Use butcher paper to make your country's flag and add it to the display. There are several commercial vendors available. For example, Trend™ and Carson Dellosa™ offer bulletin boards sets which depict children from around the world in cultural dress. These would be excellent additions to the outside of your classroom. If cost is a factor, which it sometimes is, color printing from Internet sites mounted on construction paper can give the display that "museum look."

A small table or display area should be prepared. On this table you should display various items indicative of the country you are presently studying. A small flag, figurines, postcards, artifacts, informational books about the country, as well as folktales are good items.

The literature center in your classroom should contain books about the country. A good mix of fiction and non-fiction books should be the core of your classroom library at this time. In addition to these books, folktales and fairytales make for interesting reading also. Many times you will find different versions or similar stories of familiar tales. One such story is Cinderella. Many countries have variations of this tale. A comparison/contrast study of such stories is at the very core of the notion of exploring curriculum in depth and with complexity.

Don't just limit yourself to books! Diaries, poetry, toys, cultural dress, military uniforms, kitchen utensils . . . anything from that country can be useful. Music is always a good item and can generally be obtained easily. However, it is probably a good idea to establish a listening center with headphones. Utilizing the concept of "centers" during this course of study is a good idea. You will inevitably have some students with time on their hands throughout the day, and how nice it will be to have a place to "visit" during the course of the day!

## **Selecting Materials for Independent Instruction**

Maps are a timeless favorite. For some reason students enjoy coloring them. If you don't already use them in your class, this is a great time for using colored pencils. Students should know that certain colors represent certain things on a map. For example green

generally represents land and blue, bodies of water. In some cases, especially when dealing with Europe, Asia, and Africa, a variety of colors are necessary to show the borders of the many countries.

Worksheets are readily available from educational vendors. Many of these commercial products have multicultural units of study and will go very nicely with this unit. You may also want to create your own word searches or crossword puzzles using new vocabulary. There are several free sites on the Internet that provide this service for teachers.

### **Don't Reinvent the Wheel**

We are very fortunate to live in a multicultural society. Houston is a virtual hotbed of international festivals and multicultural exhibits. Take advantage of these activities that are already in place! The Miller Outdoor Theatre has a host of events scheduled each year which have various cultural themes. The 2004 schedule includes performances by the Asian Pacific American Heritage Association, The Society for Indian Performing Arts, The Houston Ebony Opera Guild, and many others. These performances are free, and parents should be encouraged to take their families on these outings. There are also exhibits at the Museum of Natural Science, the Museum of Fine Arts, and the Contemporary Arts Museum which have cultural focuses. There are also evenings when all these museums are open to the public free of charge. The Houston Zoological Gardens even has a multicultural focus. Have you ever considered where all those animals originated? Did you know that Hermann Park has an authentic Japanese Garden? Miller Outdoor Theatre also hosts performances specifically for young audiences. That calendar begins in April and continues through October. You could feasibly take your class on a fieldtrip to one of these productions, for the mere cost of the transportation.

## **LESSON PLANS**

### **Lesson Plan 1: Jigsaw Reading**

#### ***Materials***

*Everybody Cooks Rice*

Butcher Paper

Markers and Tape

#### ***Introduction***

Explain to the students that by working in groups, we will accomplish more while doing less. Each group will read a section of the book and share it with whole class. After all presentations are completed, everyone will know what happened in the story while only having read a small part. Emphasize that students will need to do their best reading and present their findings clearly . . . there will be a test!

***Preparation***

Divide the students into groups. Your grouping should accommodate your materials, the students' abilities, and their group experience. You may prefer pairs, triads, or quads (groups of four). Assign the pages to be read.

***Focus***

Read the back of the book, which contains a synopsis of the story.

***Activity***

Provide sustained silent reading time for the groups. This is why the number of texts you have will affect your grouping. After the reading, ask each group for a representative who will collect a piece of butcher paper and marker. You will provide the groups with a framework from which to work. For the sake of this particular lesson, I will use six groups. This accommodates my class and the story structure. Group One will present on the Darlings, Group Two will present on the Diaz family, Group Three on the Trans, Group Four on Rajit, Group Five on The Huas, and Group Six on The Bleus. Students will be asked to provide the class with the following information in their presentations: What is the family name? Where are they from? What items are in their rice recipe?

***Evaluation***

After the presentations, remove the pieces of butcher paper. Begin by questioning each group on the others' presentations. The group will agree on one answer and one speaker prior to providing the answer. A point is awarded for each correct answer. The group with the most points wins!

***Extension***

Have students locate the countries mentioned in the story on a world map or globe.

**Lesson Plan 2: Extreme Makeover – Story Edition*****Materials***

*Everybody Cooks Rice* or something else (Any Text Will Do!)

Butcher Paper

Tape

Markers

***Introduction***

Begin by using *Everybody Cooks Rice*. This is a good idea because the students are familiar with the text and will get the concept quickly. Students will be substituting their own neighbors' names for the names in the story.

***Preparation***

Students will be asked to bring in the names of seven neighbors. You may consider sending this part of assignment home for homework for younger students. These names will be necessary for completion of the assignment.

***Focus***

Read the back of the book, which contains a synopsis of the story.

***Activity***

Provide sustained silent reading time for the students. Students will do individual presentations, substituting their names and those of brothers, sister, or cousins. As their re-telling of the story unfolds, the students will substitute the names of their neighbors for those originally used in the text. This is an exciting activity as students often live near each other and enjoy hearing their family's name as one of the neighbors.

***Evaluation***

After each student's presentation, have him/her "field" questions from the audience. The questions are written on a piece of butcher paper and taped at the front of the class for all to see. Students from the audience will be called upon to ask the "presenter" a question from the board. The questions to be asked are to be predetermined by the teacher. Some suggestions are, "What is the name of the family in your neighborhood from Barbados?" or "What is the name of the family member that you are looking for?"

***Extension***

Have students write their extremely made-over stories. After completion, bind all stories together for a very nice volume for your classroom library.

**Lesson Plan 3: Roving News Reporting*****Materials:***

*Everybody Cooks Rice*

Evaluation

Butcher Paper

Markers and Tape

***Introduction***

Explain to the students that by working in groups, we will accomplish more while doing less. Each group will read a section of the book and share it with the class in the form of a news report. After all presentations are completed, everyone will know what happened in the story while only having read a small part. Emphasize that students will need to do their best reading and present their findings clearly.

***Preparation***

Divide the students in groups. Your grouping should accommodate your materials, the students' abilities, and their group experience. Assign each group a particular family on which to report.

***Focus***

Read the back of the book, which contains a synopsis of the story. Bring in a videotape of a newscast. Take special care to review content and ensure that it is appropriate for

young viewers. Review the elements of a good news story (who, what, how, where, when, and why), as these are also important elements of writing.

***Activity***

The activity will begin with the teacher as the lead reporter, “at the desk in the studio,” setting up the series of reports to follow. There is a search for a missing child, who was last seen in the afternoon and was noticed missing around dinnertime. Group One will report from the home of the Darlings, Group Two from the Diaz family, Group Three, from the Trans, Group Four, from Rajit, Group Five, from the Huas, and Group Six, from the Bleus. Of course, this story will have a happy ending, but we can also take the opportunity to address some very real issues concerning children at this time.

***Evaluation***

Give each student an “evaluation” that asks them to rate things such as speech clarity, eye contact with the audience, clarity of details, etc . . .

***Extension***

Obtain a video camera and tape the presentations for your own “newscast.”



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