
I N S I G H T S

FOR FAMILIES



Helping children learn geography



- ❖ **INSIGHTS FOR FAMILIES** is provided by your child's school in recognition of your role as a partner in education. Written by Judy McDaniel, communications consultant. Adapted from information provided by the U.S. Department of Education.

As we all know, our lives are becoming an ever tighter weave of interactions with people around the world. These tips are designed to help you stir your children's curiosity and steer that curiosity toward geographic questions and knowledge.

Use maps

Put your children's natural curiosity to work. Even small children can learn to read simple maps of their school, neighborhood, and community. Here are some simple map activities:

- ❖ Go on a walk and collect natural materials such as acorns and leaves to use for an art project. Map the location where you found those items.
- ❖ Create a treasure map for children to find hidden treats in the back yard or inside your home.
- ❖ Look for your city or town on a map. Point out where you, your relatives or your children's best friends live.
- ❖ Find the nearest park, lake, mountain, or other cultural or physical feature on a map.
- ❖ Before taking a trip, show your children a map of where you are going and how you plan to get there. Look for other ways to go, and talk about why you decided to use a particular route.
- ❖ Encourage your children to make their own maps using legends with symbols.
- ❖ Keep a globe and maps near the television and use them to locate places talked about on television programs, or to follow the travels of your favorite sports team.

Study the weather

Weather has important geographic implications that affect the character of a place.

- ❖ Watch the weather forecast on television or read the weather map in the newspaper. Save the maps for a month or more. You can see changes over time, and compare conditions over several weeks and seasons.
- ❖ Use a weather map to look up the temperatures of cities around the world and discover how hot each gets in the summer and how cold each gets in the winter.
- ❖ Make simple weather-related devices such as barometers, pinwheels, weather vanes, and wind chimes. Watch cloud formations and make weather forecasts.

Learn about other cultures

- ❖ Make different ethnic foods, take your children to an ethnic restaurant, or treat them to ethnic snacks at a folk festival. Such an experience is an opportunity to talk about why people eat different foods. What ingredients in ethnic dishes are unique to a particular area?

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Geography . . .

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- ❖ Read stories from or about other countries, and books that describe journeys. Many children's books provide colorful images of different places and a sense of what it would be like to live in them. Drawings or photographs of distant places or situations can arouse interest in other lands.

Travel in different ways

- ❖ Follow the movement of people and things
- ❖ Play the license plate game. How many different states' plates can you identify, and what, if anything, does the license plate tell you about each state? You don't have to be in a car to play. You can look at the license plates of parked cars, or those traveling by when you are walking.
- ❖ Go around your house and look at where everything comes from. Examine the labels of the clothes you wear and think of where your food comes from.
- ❖ Tell your children where your ancestors came from. Find your family's countries of origin, and chart the birthplaces of relatives on a map. Where do all your relatives live now?
- ❖ Have your children ask older relatives what their world was like when they were young. They can ask questions about transportation, heating and refrigeration, the foods they ate, the clothes they wore, and the schools they attended.

Examine cultural regions

- ❖ Take your children to visit the different political, residential, recreational, ethnic, and commercial regions of your city.
- ❖ Go to plays, movies, and puppet shows about people from different countries. These are often presented at libraries and museums.
- ❖ Give children geography lessons by tying in with ethnic holiday themes. Holidays provide an opportunity to learn about the customs of people around the world. You can use the library to discover how other people celebrate special days.
- ❖ Compare coins and stamps from other lands. They often contain information about the country.
- ❖ Learn simple words in different languages.
- ❖ If you have friends who are from different countries or have either traveled or lived abroad, invite them over to talk with your children.

Geography is a way of thinking, of asking questions, of observing and appreciating the world around us. You can help your children learn by providing interesting activities for them, and by prompting them to ask questions about their surroundings.