

Reading the Landscape in Children's Literature

By Jean Marr, Fort Wayne, Indiana, June 1992

(With special "thanks" to Brenda Whitsell, 1989 National Geographic Society Summer Geography Institute graduate and Geography Teacher Consultant; based upon her lesson "Reading the Landscape in Children's Literature, An Appalachian Application. Most of the lesson is Brenda's original plan, and I could not have done it better; this made my task of adaptation easier!)

Purpose: To demonstrate the use of children's literature as a resource for learning about the geography of the setting and about knowing the geography of the setting enhances comprehension of the literary story.

Grade Level(s): appropriate for all grade levels

National Geography Standards:

1. How to use maps and other geographic representations, tools, and technologies to acquire, process, and report information from a spatial perspective.
4. The physical and human characteristics of places.
8. The characteristics and spatial distribution of ecosystems on Earth's surface.
9. The characteristics, distribution, and migration of human populations on Earth's surface.
14. How human actions modify the physical environment.
15. How physical systems affect human systems.

Indiana English Standards: (not limited to below – expand the activity and worksheet to incorporate and target specific standards you wish to address in upper grade levels)

Kindergarten

K.1.1, 1.2, 1.3, 1.4, 1.12, 1.20, 2.1, 2.5, 3.3, 4.1, 4.2, 4.3, 7.1, 7.3, 7.5

Third Grade

3.1.1, 1.2, 1.5, 1.6, 1.7, 1.8, 2.1, 2.3, 2.4, 2.5, 2.6, 2.7, 3.2, 3.3, 4.1, 4.2, 4.4, 5.1, 5.2, 7.1, 7.2, 7.5

Sixth Grade

6.2.2, 2.3, 2.4, 2.6, 2.7, 3.3, 3.6, 4.1, 4.4, 4.5, 4.8, 4.9, 5.1, 7.3

Ninth Grade

9.2.4, 4.1, 4.5, 4.10, 4.11, 4.12

Twelfth Grade

12.4.1, 4.6, 4.8, 4.11, 4.12, 5.1, 6.1, 6.2

Indiana Social Studies Standards: (not limited to below – expand the activity and worksheet to incorporate and target specific standards you wish to address)

Kindergarten

K.3.1, 3.4, 3.5, 5.5, 5.3, 5.4

Third Grade

3.1.6, 3.1, 3.3, 3.4, 3.5, 3.6, 5.1, 5.2, 5.4

Sixth Grade

6.1.18, 1.19, 1.20, 3.4, 3.5, 3.7, 3.8, 3.9, 3.10, 3.11, 3.13, 3.14, 3.15, 3.16, 5.3, 5.4, 5.5

Grades Nine – Twelve (dependent upon the course: World History and Civilizations, U.S. History, U.S. Government, Civics and Government, Individual/Society/Cultural)

Materials Required:

- a copy of the [“Discovering Geography Clues in Literature”](#) handout for each student
- a diverse selection of reading-level appropriate books
- atlases and globes available as resources

Objectives: Upon completion of the following activity, students will be able to

1. identify geographical information about landscapes found in children’s literature,
2. demonstrate an organizing tool, developed around geographical themes, for the recording of information, and
3. share the uses of this approach in a variety of educational settings.

Procedures:

1. Utilizing a chart-sized version of the geographical clue sheet, introduce the activity to the students giving examples of each section so an understanding of the various items and their meanings exists.
2. As a group, explore a literary work together as a class. (“Where The Wild Things Are” by Maurice Sendak for younger students, “The Cay” by Theodore Taylor for middle-aged students, and “A Walk Across America” by Peter Jenkins for older students). After reading through the work for the sense of the story and its richness, look together for any clues about the geography of the setting (human and physical). Record these clues as you find them.
3. Step outside the book to obtain additional information. Find the location on maps and look it up in a variety of reference materials. Discuss what the story reveals about the geography (human and physical) not apparent from these other sources. Also make comparisons with the geography of the students’ location and region.
4. Organize cooperative learning groups and assign each group a different picture book from the same region. Allow them to use clue sheets to proceed through the steps just as the total class did with the first selection. At the conclusion of their work, bring together all of the geographical clues by using one super chart or posting all of the groups’ individual charts.

Adaptations/Extensions:

In reading and library classes, students can develop a deepened appreciation for setting in a greatly expanded sense. Use of such an approach for a variety of reading selections can enable the students to look for the interaction between the setting and the story and promote a desire to look beyond the current selections to relationships with other selections.

After exploring the geography in several pieces of literature, have students do a piece of their own creative writing for a geographical setting they chose or one assigned to

them. The need for knowing about the geographical setting before beginning to write is now a real force. To gain such knowledge they would research sources such as atlases, maps, photos, and data.

Conversely, the topics and places in social studies, geography, and history classes can make use of this strategy to draw on novels, picture books, etc. to enliven and enrich such topics.

Learning about the geography in literature gives the formal dimension of geography a very practical and interesting application. It offers opportunities to assess inaccuracies in the text or illustration and issues of stereotyping. The clue charts facilitate note taking, also. Finally, the geographical understanding of the literature can initiate a variety of other pursuits such as map making.

Students helped to develop an understanding of the landscapes of literature (human and physical) will be, throughout their lives, adding to their framework of geographical knowledge. For every time they read a new selection, its setting will add to their internal map of the world.

[Download Geographical Clue Sheet](#)