

North American Geography Block

This is a great block for the month of October (but any time of year will work). Make a fall trip or long weekend part of the plan! Have a project be planning the trip. This could be the primary main lesson work – plan two things to see (an historical landmark and a natural or scenic landmark). Other things to touch and do (regional crafts) to hear (regional music) and most of all to taste (food!).

Ideas for Documenting Your Block: Create a booklet with a map and pictures or a poster, or make a photo album of your trip.

Activities: Sing and play American folk songs during this main lesson, copy lyrics and create a pretty border, for example the song, *This Land is your Land*. For map work, consider getting this book from the library: *The United States of America, a State by State Guide* (Miller & Nelson). For food adventures, *Better Homes & Gardens Heritage of America Cookbook*.

Day 1 - start with the big picture. Read *They Were Strong and Good* by Lawson (a gem) and trace the family history from the book on a big map. Then trace your own and your partner's family history on a map. (Geography and family is a great connection.) Share family lore. One example: one of my grandfathers was a dairy farmer in rural Wisconsin – the other a brewery worker in Milwaukee. They both capture the particular culture of that state. Where is your family from? Get a large map of the US and plot your family on a map together.

Caveat – In the Manzer family, we always found using picture books to be a wonderful way to bring a simple story and a heartfelt sense of place to our geography main lessons. They also can give you ideas for drawings and paintings, foods to cook, and regional crafts. Also, the picture books are a great way to include the younger set. Picture books give a vibrant depiction of life in a region. Have your children observe the details – landscape and nature, clothing, houses, food, occupations, pursuits and pass times. If this does not appeal to you, you are free to just focus on the chapter books. Also remember that there are many other good books out there. (When you find that perfect treasure, please share it with us:) You could easily read through all of the picture books, but may be inclined to focus on one or two of the chapter books. Another idea: select one of the chapter books for a book club book this month.

General Questions that apply to each region: How is the life and culture of this place shaped by the land and water (or lack of) that surround it? What would it be like to live in this place? What is it like to grow up in this place now? In the past? Why do/did people make their living in this way here? Why do people eat this way here? Dress this way? Why do people do these things for fun here (ski, sail, horseback ride)?

Week #1 New England

Picture books: *The Wild Horses of Sweet Briar* (Nantucket), *The Oxcart Man* (Connecticut), *Cranberry Thanksgiving* (New England cranberry bog), *Night of the Moonjellies* (New England sea coast town-fishing), *Paul Revere's Ride* (Ted Rand)

Chapter Books: *The Courage of Sarah Noble*, *The Sign of the Beaver*, *Johnny Tremain*, Lois Lenski books: *Deer Valley Girl* (VT), *Puritan Adventure*, *Berries in the Scoop* (Cape Cod), *Blueberry Corners* (Lenski books can be a challenge to find.)

Also books about Squanto, the Pilgrims, and the First Thanksgiving, Boston.

Activities: maps of the region or individual states, paint or model landforms, experience the products and industries of the region (3rd grade go alongs)— make cranberry juice or tour a juice factory, find a bog, woolen mills, the sheep to clothing process, examine different kinds of clothing made from wool, knit, spin, etc. Fishing industry: go fishing, experience a fishing boat ride, a harbor, look at fish at the fish counter or market (whole lobsters), clam chowder. Lumber: visit a lumber yard, old saw mill. Touch lightly on the region's history and how it fits into the settlement pattern of our country (use a globe to show the journey from England to the US), try Jean's recommendations for maps and poems.

Week #2 Middle Atlantic

Picture books: I don't have any particular recommendations but picture books about Ben Franklin, Quakers, Philadelphia, the Amish, ship building, and New York City would all be good choices. I take that back— Patricia Polacco – has a great book about an Amish girl –*Just Plain Fancy* and another called *Mrs. Katz and Tush* (about the connection between an old Jewish woman and an African American boy in urban NYC – a gem)

Chapter books: deAngeli books about the Amish – *Henner's Lydia*, *All of a Kind Family* (Jewish culture in old NYC), *A Cricket in Times Square* (NYC and zoology), *The Saturdays* (things to do in NYC on a Saturday – a gem!)

Activities (some are 3rd grade go alongs) – as always the map – locations of cities, harbors, rivers, land forms, etc., buy and assemble a model kit of an old historical ship, tour a factory (HERSHEY in PA), go out to eat at a Jewish deli, Amish crafts – especially quilt – study and draw quilt patterns, make a small lap quilt or quilted pillow, make a map of NYC of Philadelphia with famous landmarks on it, learn how to sail or go sailing with someone.

Week #3 Appalachia

Picture books: *The Rag Coat, Daniel's Duck, Down, Down the Mountain, Appalachia* (Rylant)

Chapter Books: Lenski – *Blue Ridge Billy, Coal Camp Girl, Where the Lilies Bloom, Just Juice, Christy*.

Activities: Map activities. Coal and coal mining – what was coal used for – visit a mine, Appalachian folk music CDs and instruments (dulcimers etc.), wood carving –see *Daniel's Duck*. Fox Fire books – folklore, artisan crafts, food and preserving. Emphasize the way the people of the region have found ways to make to with little. Patchwork quilts.

Week # 4 The South

Picture books: A book called *Oranges* which is non-fiction about picking oranges. There are some Cajun folklore picture books out there, *Minn of the Mississippi* (Holling). Robert San Souci books like *Talking Eggs, Who Owns the Sun* by Stacy Chbosky. Picture books about Louis Armstrong.

Chapter books: *Brown Girl Dreaming* by Woodson. *Turtle in Paradise* by Jennifer Holm. *Sounder*, Lenski books – *Bayou Suzette, Strawberry Girl*, and *Cotton in my Sack, The Yearling, The Vanishing Coast* (Leland). This is more adult, but great vignettes about the vanishing way of life along the Carolina coast – oystering, basket weavers cool!

Activities: Map work, modeling land forms –drawings with a stick in the dirt– Gulf of Mexico, southern Atlantic Coast, Mississippi Delta, cajun and creole food, music and folklore, New Orleans –Dixie land music, blues, jazz – beignets (hurricanes and geography) life on the bayou, Florida citrus groves and looking at different kinds of citrus fruit – make orange juice, lemon bars, peaches and pecans, the cotton plant and how cotton cloth is made (all of this is awesome for 3rd grade as well) southern cooking, tour an old plantation—touch on the pre-civil war south, beaches and seashells and ocean life and

There is far more here than you need – pick and choose and enjoy!

By Alison Manzer (with a little bit of help from Jean Miller!)