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ABSTRACT

This paper offers teachers interesting ways to enliven geography instruction for students. Fast means the activities are quick to prepare and initiate. Fun means activities are enjoyable for student and teacher alike. Cheap means the activities are inexpensive to prepare and materials for these activities are usually available. The activities involve recycling older materials, using classroom equipment in new ways, and making better use of classroom space. (Author/LBG)

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FAST, FUN, AND CHEAP: GEOGRAPHY ACTIVITIES FOR CHILDREN

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FAST, FUN, AND CHEAP: GEOGRAPHY ACTIVITIES FOR CHILDREN

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ABSTRACT: Fast, Fun, and Cheap offers teachers many interesting ways to enliven geography instruction for students. Fast means the activities are quick to prepare and initiate. Fun means the activities are enjoyable for student and teacher alike. Cheap means the activities are inexpensive to prepare and materials for these activities are usually at hand. The activities involve recycling older materials, using classroom equipment in new ways, and making better use of classroom space.

KEY WORDS: grid system, fundamental themes, attributes of a map, integrated skills, literature-based geography, paved surfaces, recycling, contact paper

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Introduction: FAST, FUN, and CHEAP: Geography Activities for Elementary Students presents strategies for developing geographic understandings in elementary students. Activities are hands-on, developmentally appropriate, and child-centered. Resources for using activities in the classroom are easily made with materials at hand. Fast means easy to make. Fun means teachers and children enjoy using the activities. And Cheap means the cost of preparing each activity is minimal. Fast, Fun, and Cheap is designed for elementary teachers, even those without a geography background.

The activities will be described with many applications. I have tried-out each activity and each activity is FAST prepare, FUN for teacher and student alike, and CHEAP in that I don't spend a lot of money buying materials. Each activity really accomplishes its goals. The children enjoy doing these activities. FAST, FUN, and CHEAP offers teachers creative ways of involving children in geography education. The activities involve recycling used materials, developing map making skills, and developing an understanding of how maps are interpreted.

RECYCLE WALL MAPS

The bookroom has many out of date maps. Even though some of the data is outdated, the maps can be put to good use. After receiving the principal's permission, the teacher can use roll-down maps in many ways. Cut off the top rolling part

F.A.S.T., F.U.N., AND C.H.E.A.P.

and the bottom wooden pole. This map can be rolled up and stored in your room when not in use. You can use it in your classroom in many ways. These activities reinforce the geographic themes of location and place.

STAND ON THE MAP: Unroll the map on the floor. The children can stand on the map when locating continents and oceans. Children find it easier to locate directions. Instead of saying "up" and "down" for directions, children can actually face the correct direction on the map. The child says "north" when facing north. Make labels so that children can put labels on the map. Change the labels as often as you change the geography skills under study.

MATCHING: Use two out of date maps. Unroll one as in the stand on the map activity. Cut out the continents and features which show the attributes of a map (compass, scale of miles, key, etc.) Laminate these materials. The children can use the cut-outs to match with the features which are on the unrolled floor map.

MOBILES: You can cut-out features (such as continents or attributes) and laminate them. Tie string to the top part. Hang the continents from the ceiling. Use unbent paper clips as hooks. Don't forget to label the continents or attributes of the map. The ceiling is often an underutilized part of classroom space.

TAKE IT ANYWHERE: Your unrolled map can be rolled up

FAST, FUN, AND CHEAP

and moved anywhere. This is especially nice for incidental instruction or when referring to a specific location when studying literature. If the weather is nice, take the map outside for a lesson.

PUZZLES: Cut out the continents. They are already quite stiff. Cut them out into pieces. Put the pieces into 9x12 manilla envelopes. Paste a small map of the continent on the outside of the envelope. This is a good reference for the children. It helps to label the reverse of each continent a different color: this helps keep the pieces for each continent in its right envelope.

SELF-LABELING: Paint out the labels on the map of those places you want children to learn. Let children relabel the blanks using washable markers. Children can self-correct their own work.

RECYCLE BOOKS

Before discarded books are sent to wherever your school deposits them, recycle the parts you can use. There are maps, charts, pictures, illustrations, and short articles which will provide learning activities for future use. Recruit parent volunteers to do this work for you. They will appreciate your (in these tight budgetary days) thriftiness. These activities reinforce the geographic themes of movement, environment, place, and especially, region. Reading

FAST, FUN, AND CHEAP

vocabulary is also stimulated.

BULLETIN BOARD: Use the pictures to create bulletin boards. Discuss each picture with the children before hanging it up. Label each picture with a key word as it goes up.

MATCHING GAME: By using the same pictures from books you can make multiple copies of matching games. One game involves matching the key word with the picture of the word. Store pictures and word cards in manilla envelopes. Another game requires the student to sort pictures of similar things by category.

POSTCARDS: Cut-out and mount a picture on 6x9 tagboard. Laminate the rear side. The children can write a note and practice writing addresses. The picture on the front serves as the note-writing stimulus.

STORY STARTERS: Pictures serve as story starters for creative writing activities. The pictures serve as pre-writing stimuli for student authors. They are also the illustrations for the creative writing.

ATLAS: Students can create their own atlases by using maps from discarded books. The maps can be pasted onto newsprint books and labeled according to criteria set forth by the teacher. Often catalogs from publishers have small, but detailed maps students can use for this purpose, too.

ARTICLE MARKING: Cut out and laminate enough articles about a chosen topic for classroom use. Use the article as a

F.A.S.T., F.U.N., AND C.H.E.A.P.

directed teaching activity to teach main idea and supporting ideas. The children can be taught to locate and underline specific points of information. The student can mark the passage using washable markers or crayons. This skill is important when students begin writing notes for reports.

A VISIT TO CARPETVILLE

This is a five day mini-unit which reinforces the attributes of a map and introduces the children to the grid system. The language arts skills of capitalization are introduced. Geographic vocabulary is an important component of this mini-unit. This unit capitalizes on the fact that children see the world in miniaturization, especially when they are at play. After finishing this unit, leave the map in place for several weeks. It will receive a great deal of use!

DAY 1: We will create a map on the area carpet in our room. The edge of the carpet will be the border of the map. Create the key and reinforce other attributes of the map as you proceed with making the map on the carpet. Using duck (duct) tape, create a meandering river across the carpet. Create a fairly wide lake, too. Explain to the students that the natural environment exists before man-made things are created. Brainstorm for names of waterbodies. The teacher is the recorder who copies suggestions down. Always save student created (brainstorm) lists for future activities. The

FAST, FUN, AND CHEAP

students name the _____River and the _____Lake. The river and lake are named after students in the classroom. Children are learning the language arts rule about capitalizing proper nouns. Their interest is captured because they know that something on the map will be named for each member of the class!

DAY 2: Brainstorm, record, and save names for paved surfaces. Names like: road, boulevard, avenue, alley, and lane. Intermediate students will quickly create a list. Primary students will need prompting. Ask a question like, "Where do you live?" or "What is your address?" Use masking tape to begin to create a grid system with intersecting roadways. Masking tape curves nicely so that you can create winding roads or parkways to follow the river you created yesterday. Give each paved surface a different name. Then ask children which road surfaces they would like to have named after them. One child might prefer to have the _____Street named after him/her. Again, language arts skills about proper nouns are being reinforced. Children are becoming familiar with one kind of grid system and the attributes of a map are being reinforced.

DAY 3: Today the children will brainstorm about buildings they see in the their community. Write each word in the list. Next to each write the name it is currently given (if the children know.) Children should be familiar with

EAST, FUN, AND CHEAP

landmarks in their community. Use contact paper cut in 5 inch squares to represent buildings. Use a marker to name each kind of building and name each building after a class member.

DAY 4: Brainstorm about greenspaces in the community: cemeteries, parks, etc. This is more difficult for children to do than I thought it would be. Use contact paper cut into 5 inch squares of a different color as the symbol for greenspaces. Again, label each space and name it after a member of the class. Children have begun to see how communities develop and how communities can change, especially if the teacher leads a discussion about change.

DAY 5: The teacher asks questions about relationships. Examples are: "Where is the park located?" "What is at the intersection of... and ...?" "Trace the route from ... to..." Children begin to see how the grid system helps them locate places on the map.

EXTENSION ACTIVITIES: The map will last about two weeks. The masking tape and contact paper pull-up easily from the carpet. Match Box cars fit the road system quite well. Your students can paint milk cartons to look like building to place in the correct spaces on the map. This produces a "flying over" three dimensional look. The attributes of the map have been reinforced and students have had a great deal of practice following directions and increasing vocabulary.

There are many uses for the vocabulary lists children

EAST, FUN, AND CHEAP

have contributed to. Mix-up several kinds of words and let children sort them out according to: vehicle, roadway, building, greenspace, service, or occupation. This map making activity has a great deal of vocabulary building invested in it. Children can find examples of words with blends, digraphs, short/long vowel sounds, or compound words.

Children can put selected groups of words into alphabetical order. The extension activities can be accomplished in small groups or assigned as meaningful seat work. Such seat work activities are meaningful, in that reading skills reinforce a social studies skill.

If you are reading any of the "Madeleine" books you can use this activity to make the book come alive for students. Use masking tape to lay out the roadways of Paris or London. Use contact paper to serve as symbols for the places in the story Madeleine and her friends visit. If you have pictures of these places they can be mounted atop the contact paper symbols.

The same kind of activity can be completed if you are reading a work of fiction with no real place in mind. The "Miss Nelson" trilogy or the "Harry, the Dirty Dog" books come to mind. In each story, there are places mentioned which can be plotted on the roadway grid system. The children can retell the story by tracing the characters route through the masking tape, contact paper village. These literature

EAST, FUN, AND CHEAP

activities help children recall story details and help children remember the sequence of the story.

STAND ON THE MAP

The end result of this activity is a world map created on the floor of your room. The map is made with contact paper and is quite durable. Even with constant traffic on it, the map survives quite nicely until May. Then I usually remove it. Why contact paper? It's durable, but not permanent. I would like to be able paint the floor, but that is not a possibility in my case. Besides, painting the floor limits repositioning the map whenever I rearrange the furniture in the room.

I usually begin this activity after the children have had some practice with the attributes of a map and the seven continents. This activity reinforces the fundamental theme of location. The students are really fascinated with the idea of having a map on the floor. The children become more familiar with the positions of the continents relative to each other. The children also become more familiar with the sizes and shapes of the continents. I usually keep all of the continents the same color. This is not really necessary because children in my classroom see a variety of maps using different colors for each continent. I want the children to recognize each continent by its location and shape, not by

FAST, FUN, AND CHEAP

color.

After reviewing the continents on the pull-down wall map. The children label the continents with self-adhering labels. Each child labels a different continent. Children are also working on their own maps at their desks. When we have finished identifying the continents, we review the attributes of the map that are applicable to our grade level.

The continents have been traced onto contact paper using the overhead projector. I usually begin to peel the paper off the plastic part before the lesson begins. This saves time and makes waiting time less boring for students. When we are ready to begin, all the students sit in a circle on the floor around the area which will become our floor map. They have an easy time referring to the wall map, too. Taking each continent one at a time, the children identify the continent and position it on the floor. Each successive continent is named and located on the floor in the comparable position it would occupy on the wall map. After all of the continents have been positioned, the same labels which were used on the wall map are transferred to the floor map.

The floor map has no attributes. The attributes must be made for the map. Masking tape makes a good border for the map. Contact paper serves as a key. Permanent markers wear very well on the floor. Any labels written in marker will wear well.

FAST, FUN, AND CHEAP

Children can stand on the map whenever you want them to locate the continents (or the oceans.) Direction finding becomes easier since children now relate to north, etc. more easily. Children find it more difficult to say "up" or "down" when standing on the map.

The map can be used in other ways. Use the permanent marker to label news/current events locations for the class. Throughout the year more news/ current events locations will be added. By the end of the year, there will be many placers that children have been introduced to. Another activity for the floor map involves the kind of multi-cultural, literature-based reading that you do in class. Every time you read a book with a setting in a different country, label the country and the book's title on the floor map. You can label the countries where the authors came from, too. Let your fingers do the walking and discuss travel time with the children.

Conclusion: Fast, Fun, and Cheap offers several usable ideas for classroom teachers. Each activity uses materials at hand. Activities do not cost much to prepare. The activities are enjoyable and the children are learning some important geographical skills.