Lesson Overview

Functional literacy is important in both English/language arts and geography. Using the “found poetry” strategy, students will summarize a piece of text, identify main ideas and find geographic connections.

In 2010, Hinde emphasized the importance of functional literacy. While using young adult literature is a great way to incorporate geography into English/language arts classroom, understanding of geography and geographic themes may be better demonstrated by analyzing and interpreting nonfiction. By using nonfiction readings to supplement the textbook in the secondary geography classroom, the teachers not only encourage the growth of geographic skills but many English/language arts skills as well. Exposure to quality, creative, nonfiction writing expands students’ understandings of cultures and in turn, helps dispel myths and stereotypes.

Newspapers, magazines, and radio/Internet news sources make for great reading and are wonderful ways to incorporate current events into the classroom. For example, NPR.org provides transcripts of most stories (Greene, 2010). The following lesson is a geography adaptation of “Found and Headline Poetry” (Dunning & Stafford, 1992; and Schulze, 2011). Using quality, short, non-fiction readings, students expand their knowledge and understanding of geographic concepts to create unique poems using quotes from the article. Greater interaction with an article may help struggling readers to establish language fluency and increase understanding of key geographic vocabulary.

Lesson Plan

This lesson is designed for the grades 6–12 geography/social studies and English/language arts classroom.

Time

One to two class periods (45–55 minutes)

Standards

National Geography Standards

The World in Spatial Terms:

2. How to use mental maps to organize information about people, places, and environments in a spatial context.

Places and Regions:

6. How culture and experience influence people’s perceptions of places and regions.

Environment and Society:

15. How physical systems affect human systems.

16. The changes that occur in the meaning, use, distribution, and importance of resources.
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The Uses of Geography:

17. How to apply geography to interpret the past.
18. How to apply geography to interpret the present and plan for the future.

Lesson Objectives

- Students will be able to analyze and interpret geographic information about a place from a piece of text.
- Students will be able to apply basic literary elements in creating found poems.

Preparation

Materials/Resources

- A class set of a news or magazine article about a place/topic being studied
- A class set of “A Student’s Guide to Finding Geography” – may be displayed as an overhead or PowerPoint slide
- Strips on construction paper (about two inches wide) – enough for three to five strips per student
- 11×17 manila paper – enough for one per group
- Glue or Post-It sticks – one per group
- Rubric for group poems – one per group

Opening, Developing, and Concluding Instruction

1. The teacher distributes “A Student’s Guide to Finding Geography” (Handout 1) to all students.
2. Individually or as a class, students read the chosen text, making notes about the main idea and characteristics of the people and place(s) as they read.
3. Using their notes, students identify three to five key phrases from the text they feel are the most important to understanding the people or place described.
4. The teacher distributes construction paper strips to each student.
5. Student writes each key phrase on a separate strip.
6. The teacher divides the students into groups of three or four.
7. Teacher distributes rubric (Handout 2) to each group.
8. In groups of three or four, students are asked to arrange their strips into a poem. All students’ strips must be used. Students may not add words or phrases, using only what is provided on the strips. (Students should refer to the rubric. Some encouragement to think of literary elements such as repetition may be necessary at this point.)
9. Groups should glue their poems onto the 11×17 manila paper and create a title for their poems.
10. Each group will share their poems with the class.

Assessment

Group poems will be assessed using the rubric attached (Handout 2). Additionally, students may be asked to write a short essay or take a short quiz about the place/event described in the story to determine individual understanding of the systems and concepts at play.

References


Handout 1

A Student’s Guide to Finding Geography

1. Where does the story take place? How do you know this?
2. Is the story about a past, current, or future event? How can you tell?
3. What physical systems characteristics of the place can you identify in the story? (Think of land, water, animals, climate)
   o How do you know this?
Lesson Plan

4. What human systems/characteristics of place can you identify in the story?
   o How do you know this?

5. Are any residents quoted?
   o Does everyone agree? If not, why not?
   o How do the people describe their place?

6. Are any outsiders or experts quoted?
   o Do they agree? If not why not?
   o How do they describe the place?

7. What do you think the place will be like in two, five, and ten years?
   o What in the story makes you feel this way?

Handout 2.

Rubric for Group Poems

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<th>4</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>1</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mechanics</td>
<td>Has a unique title, strips neatly fixed to paper, and all strips (from all members) are used.</td>
<td>Has a title, strips are attached to paper, not all strips are used in the poem (but are attached to the back of the paper).</td>
<td>Title is the same as the story, strips are attached, some group members' strips are missing.</td>
<td>No title, strips are attached, some group members' strips are missing.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Key Phrases/Quotes</td>
<td>Are unique and possess a strong literary element. Clear understanding of geographic systems.</td>
<td>Show some understanding of geographic systems, but include some random facts, lacks literary “feel.”</td>
<td>Show a limited understanding of geographic systems, are too long/short, seem to be random facts, do not have literary feel.</td>
<td>Are all random facts and/or do not demonstrate an understanding of geography.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use of literary devices*</td>
<td>Group uses at least 3 literary devices to create a poem that flows well.</td>
<td>Group uses at least 2 literary devices.</td>
<td>Group uses at least 1 literary device.</td>
<td>Group uses no literary devices.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clear geographic theme</td>
<td>Is clear. Poem establishes a firm “sense of place.”</td>
<td>Is clear, but may include other related themes.</td>
<td>Is vague. Poem focuses on other unrelated themes.</td>
<td>No geographic theme is present.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Summarizes the main points (author's or speaker's)</td>
<td>Poem clearly draws from the text presented and builds on the main idea.</td>
<td>Poem draws from the text to present the author's main idea.</td>
<td>Poem draws from the text, but does not summarize the main idea.</td>
<td>The poem does not summarize any of the key points.</td>
</tr>
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</table>

*Examples of literary devices that may be used in “found” poetry include (but are not limited to): simile (or metaphor), allusion, personification, onomatopoeia, alliteration (or assonance), repetition, hyperbole, and oxymoron.

Sample Student Poem from “Baikal: Russia’s Sacred Sea” by Don Belt (1992)

Baikal is Special
(unsinged)

Suddenly, his memory turned a corner and he wondered aloud
Barely a year had passed since Stalin’s death, and
the dictators hand still lay heavy on the land
Ordinary citizen banded together to fight it
Baikal was special

Been living on a ship that brought Cold Warriors and industrial handiwork to these shores

He was astonished to find himself talking freely with an American

Man does not have enough feelings to respond to this wonder

Baikal is a living museum of aquatic plants and animals, incredibly rich in life at all depths

A breathtaking region rarely seen by foreigners

Call it the Pearl of Siberia and the Sacred Sea

Baikal is special
Ellen J. Foster is an assistant professor at the University of Mississippi where she teaches undergraduate and graduate courses in secondary social studies education. Her research interests focus on geographic education, integrating social studies within the content areas, and recruiting and retention of underrepresented populations. Dr. Foster has nine years’ experience in the secondary social studies classroom. She enjoys sharing new ways to apply old classroom strategies with her students and colleagues. In addition to her teaching duties, Dr. Foster observes pre-service teachers and is active in the Mississippi Geographic Alliance.