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December 4, 2012, 2:29 pm 5 Comments

All Over the Map: 10 Ways to Teach About Geography

By TOM MARSHALL and MICHAEL GONCHAR

Student Opinion

Questions about issues in the news for students 13 and older.

• See all Student Opinion »



Lalo de Almeida for The New York Times

Population growth in the Brazilian jungle is visible in places like Parauapebas. On the outskirts, slums stretch to the horizon and houses continue to go up. [Go to related article »](#)

Geography frequently takes a back seat to history in the social studies classroom, but teaching geographic literacy is essential if students are going to understanding the challenges and opportunities of our complex world.

We have created 10 activities for teaching about geography using Times content, all related to the [National Geography Standards](#), which were produced by the [Geography Education National Implementation Project](#).

Our list is a grab-bag of ideas — from designing maps to analyzing border conflicts — and teachers can use the activities in any order, or as a road map for tracking ongoing coverage of [geography-related issues](#).

1. Start with Geography Bingo: Use this [BINGO card](#), which lists many of the geography standards, and find examples of stories from The New York Times that take on topics like migration, culture and ecosystems in various ways. When you have a diagonal, horizontal or vertical row of examples, you

Lesson Plan

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This Week

Looking Back at 2012



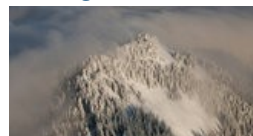
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Reading Club



Rap Lyrics Contest



have “Bingo!” Students can search either a print copy of the paper or the online [archives](#). (Each of the concepts in the squares was taken from the [National Geography Standards](#).)

2. People use [mental maps](#) to understand the world. Every time you memorize a route to the grocery store or plot a route through the subway, you’re using a mental map. It’s one of the key tools a geographically skilled person uses to navigate their world. Read these stories on the [science of mental mapping](#) and the [risks of losing such skills](#) because of technology. Then ask students to think of a time when they got lost or figured out how to find something, drawing and annotating their own mental maps to tell the story. Post them in a classroom “Atlas of the Mind” exhibit.

3. [Some maps are better than others.](#) What exactly is a ‘map,’ and what does it do? Ask students to define the term. Then look at these [examples of maps](#) in The New York Times that use technology, symbols or images to broaden our understanding. Ask students to explain what each map shows, and how it conveys more information than a simple road map. Then students can brainstorm and design their own maps of a place they know well, a location described in a film or novel, or an imaginary place, using similar methods to convey detail and enhance people’s understanding.

4. [Groups struggle over boundaries.](#) Palestinians and Israelis have struggled for generations over the question of borders. Earlier this month the United Nations General Assembly [voted to grant Palestine nonmember observer status](#), just a week after the latest [cease-fire](#) in the conflict and 65 years after the U.N. first called for the creation of separate Jewish and Arab nations in the land then known as Palestine. Why has it taken [so long](#) to draw one map? Ask students to brainstorm the factors that have kept Palestinians and Israelis from reaching a final agreement on territory and borders. Then watch this [series of five videos](#), noting the arguments and obstacles cited by each side. Does the conflict seem intractable, or do you see signs of progress?

As a culminating activity, ask students to look for other examples of boundary conflicts in the [Borderlines](#) blog at The New York Times, and hold a class contest to find the most interesting or compelling examples that no one has ever heard of.

5. [Culture affects perceptions and stereotypes of other places?](#) Everyone holds opinions about other cultures, and they can easily lead to misunderstandings or disputes. Lead students through a safe introductory discussion of stereotyping. Then read highlights from this interview of a business executive who has [learned from his mistakes working in Asia](#) and this story about [perceptions about immigration in Europe](#), and discuss the main points or lessons of each story. Ask students to search the [archives](#) and track coverage in The New York Times for examples of stereotyping in all cultures, gathering examples and making presentations on how people can resist or counteract this all-too-human tendency.

6. [The world’s economy is interconnected, for good and ill.](#) It’s old news that globalization has sent many American jobs overseas. But how exactly does the process work, and what happens when there’s a glitch? Watch this [video on the iPhone economy](#), which explains what happens when the United States gains (or loses) 1,000 manufacturing jobs. Then read stories about how [floods in Thailand](#) and an [earthquake and tsunami in Japan](#) threw a monkey wrench in the [global supply chain](#). Ask students to make up a fictional American company that produces a very desirable electronic product, and appoint themselves to the job of vice president in charge of logistics and supplies. Write a memo to your boss recommending a long-term strategy for ensuring that your supply chain is never interrupted for long by an international disaster.



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Comments of the Moment

“Paige, Emma, and Carley all agree about the resotion to make your family’s life happier is to not always be on you iPod or iPad or iPhone and to actually talk and communicate with your family and friends.”

— Carley, Period 4 Journalism
[What Are Your Hopes for 2013?](#)

“yes, i do because some people watch the show and want to be just like the characters so they do what they do. i.e. drink and curse. i believe they should be REAL with their show ; they shouldn't tell the cast what they have to do to make the show live.”

— Trevonna H.
[Does Reality TV Promote Dangerous Stereotypes?](#)

“I think that reality TV shows like “Jersey Shore” and “Buckwild” promote stereotypes that do not fit every Italian American of every person who lives in West Virginia, but they are really just for entertainment. I don’t think anyone in our modern day society turns on a “reality” TV show and expects to see what really happens in life. I don’t watch reality TV that much, except when my mom has The Real House Wives of Orange County on. That show is really funny because you can tell that they are putting on this big production just to keep it on the air. They are fights all the time and everyone is all

7. Geography isn't just about places on a map; it's about the people, culture, history and landscape of those places. And every vacation or travel story provides an opportunity to gather information and describe those places. Read some examples of colorful, descriptive writing in the Travel Section of The New York Times, like the [Frugal Traveler](#) blog and the [Journeys](#) columns. Then ask students to write their own travel stories about a place they've visited, either locally or farther from home, using vivid examples and description to help readers fully imagine that place.

8. People change or modify the environment for better or worse. Since the dawn of time, populations have grown and expanded. Read about the [growth of cities](#) within the Brazilian rain forest, and watch a [video about efforts in Paraguay](#) to protect similar woodlands. Then explore the [Dot Earth](#) blog at The New York Times to find more stories about the effort to [balance environmental and human needs](#), like this project by scientists to [map gas leaks](#) in cities. Ask students to pick a topic related to humanity's management of the environment and global resources, track coverage and identify the most promising solutions, presenting their findings in a Sustainability Fair.

9. Physical systems affect or threaten people. From storms and earthquakes to global warming, it's clear that the physical environment exerts a powerful effect on people. Sometimes, as with [Hurricane Sandy](#), the impact is destructive. But environmental challenges also offer opportunities for people to create new industries and systems to provide a safer future. Brainstorm with students on whether the New York City metropolitan region ought to take steps to prevent future storm-related flooding, or simply move the city to higher ground. Then read this story on [floodgates in Connecticut](#), a proposal for [inflatable subway-stoppers](#) and this Room for Debate [feature](#). As a culminating activity, students can write letters to local officials suggesting the wisest policy.

10. People settle or migrate to new places. People make decisions on where to live for all kinds of reasons; some are pulled to a new destination, while others are pushed or blocked from leaving by factors beyond their control. Divide students into small groups, and assign each group to read one of these stories about migration trends within the [United States](#), [Asia](#), [Europe](#) and [Latin America](#), or find their own stories in the [archives](#) of The New York Times. For each story, students can fill in a Post-it note under the heading "Pushed," "Pulled" or "Blocked," summarizing the situation and posting it on a class map of the world. Each group can then present their findings to the class.

Common Core ELA Standards, 6-12

Reading

1. Read closely to determine what the text says explicitly and to make logical inferences from it; cite specific textual evidence when writing or speaking to support conclusions drawn from the text.
2. Determine central ideas or themes of a text and analyze their development; summarize the key supporting details and ideas.
10. Read and comprehend complex literary and informational texts independently and proficiently.

Writing

1. Write arguments to support claims in an analysis of substantive topics or texts, using valid reasoning and relevant and sufficient evidence.
2. Write informative/explanatory texts to examine and convey complex ideas and information clearly and accurately through the effective selection, organization, and analysis of content.
4. Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization and style are appropriate to task, purpose and audience.

Speaking and Listening

1. Prepare for and participate effectively in a range of conversations and

botoxed-up."

—Adam S.
Does Reality TV Promote Dangerous Stereotypes?

"If a child is raised properly there is no TV show on earth that can persuade them to act this way. It's all the parents responsibly. LOOK TO THE PARENTS! I would not shame my parents, family OR friends in this manner. If you notice in the trailer you'll see the kid's parents performing, (literally) somewhat the same way. I'm proud my parents brought me up to respect others and especially myself."

—R. C. Jack
Does Reality TV Promote Dangerous Stereotypes?

"There are numerous other things in life we could have a TV show about like the daily life of a tormented kid to not only give notice to people about bullying but to try and get bullies to decrease in population."

—Patrick S
Does Reality TV Promote Dangerous Stereotypes?

"It is unfortunate, but I do believe that some of the audience do not understand that the cast are usually just performing for them and do not act like that when the camera is off."

—Julianna, English 1, Period 1
Does Reality TV Promote Dangerous Stereotypes?

"Me and my friends used to think that our middle school would make an amazing idea for a reality show. It would simply show what went on at our school, whether or not there are stereotypes would be only controlled by whether students decided to promote them themselves or not."

—John B.
Does Reality TV Promote Dangerous Stereotypes?

"Jersey Shore promotes stupidity and the real world does not live the way the cast on the show lives. Reality TV, is not reality, it is only promoted to gain audience viewers and make money."

—Nelson L
Does Reality TV Promote Dangerous Stereotypes?

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January 03 **Poetry Pairing | 'Fire and Ice'**
This week's Poetry Pairing matches Robert Frost's classic poem "Fire and Ice" with "Is This the End?," an Opinion piece that, in addition to quoting Frost's poem (and T.S. Eliot as well), states that "whether in 50 or 100 or 200 years, there's a good chance that New York City will sink beneath the sea."

January 03 **Does Reality TV Promote Dangerous Stereotypes?**
Do you think shows like "Jersey Shore" and "Buckwild" promote stereotypes? Or do you think they are harmless entertainment?

collaborations with diverse partners, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively.

2. Integrate and evaluate information presented in diverse media and formats, including visually, quantitatively and orally.

4. Present information, findings, and supporting evidence such that listeners can follow the line of reasoning and the organization, development, and style are appropriate to task, purpose and audience.

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5 Comments

1. December 4, 2012 5:12 pm
[Link](#)

I am a retired teacher who goes back to teaching students who are blind. I always was impressed that they could understand about geography, maps, charts and graphs. I worked hard producing adapted materials for them, but it always made it easier for them to comprehend. Many of my former students have a better idea of directionality, laterality and distance than sighted students have. National Geo has produced wonderful materials for children from preschool...remember that globe with a handle that opened up to reveal objects from around the world? Keep up the wonderful work you are doing. I wish I could be part of it from retirement.

— Pat Allan

2. December 5, 2012 12:53 pm
[Link](#)

I am social studies teacher and I can tell you we need more Geography in schools. For me the two best resources I have for teaching geography are NatGeo and being a member of the National Council for Geographic Education (ncge.org). Thank you for doing this story!

— Josh Turner

3. December 5, 2012 1:10 pm
[Link](#)

Geography is essential to all types of learning. As a higher ed. professor and administrator, I see far too many students come to colleges/universities that not only lack geographic literacy and knowledge of placenames (i.e., toponymy), but lacking spatial thinking skills as well. These cross all disciplines. Perhaps the effort to "re-invent" geography will come to fruition and cure some of these sad stories.

Dr. Rich Schultz
National Council for Geographic Education (ncge.org)
Vice President

— Rich Schultz

4. December 5, 2012 I used foods to teach geography. Topography and

January 03

Women Hold Top Seats in New Hampshire Politics

What are the top political positions that women hold in New Hampshire?

January 03

Test Yourself | English, Jan. 3, 2013

Can you choose the word that correctly completes the sentence?

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- The New York Times in Education (NIE)
- The New York Times Upfront
- Times Education section
- Today's Front Page

[Link](#)

climate dictate the types of foods that can be grown and until the relatively recent advancements in food processing including refrigeration, the vegetation that grew in a region determined what the people ate and to a certain extent, how they lived. Spicy foods in hot climates, corn closer to the equator, berries and large animals further north where freezing temperatures enabled keeping food longer.

Food provides a natural connection between student of any age and many of the areas of social studies. I could write a book about all the connections [and maybe should] but consider food as an important vehicle for teaching geography.

— Lucia Schroeder

5. December 6, 2012
1:37 am

[Link](#)

I am a passionate geography teacher but yet to be employed in Nigeria due to unemployment and fading nature of the subject.

I must comment that National Geography is doing a great Job.

The world can't do without Geography.

Ayo Ilesanmi

— Ayo

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5
6