

Chapter 12

Teaching through the Five Themes of Geography

This section explores each of the five themes and gives suggested ways to teach these themes. It isn't necessary for the students to memorize these themes; they are given for the teacher's benefit. After reading more about the five themes, you'll more easily recognize geographic teaching opportunities as they arise.

Five Themes:

Theme 1 - Location

Position on the Earth's surface

Theme 2 - Place

Physical and Human characteristics. What makes it special? Soil, temperature, rivers, historical events? People -- how are they affected by the characteristics of the place? Their language, government, architecture, industries all help define the unique characteristics of a place.

Theme 3 - Relationships within Places

Humans and their environments

Theme 4 - Movement

People interacting on Earth

Theme 5 - Regions

How they form and change

The following pages include tips and ideas for teaching about the five themes of geography.

Theme 1 - Location

Just as you taught your children “above” and “below,” “on” and “under,” teach them other important positional words like: left, right, north, and south. Words that describe features like size and shape are necessary, too.

Activities for Teaching Directions

1. Hot & Cold becomes North & South! Play the old “hot & cold” game with a twist. One person picks an object in the room and the other player(s) must try to guess what was chosen by walking around and listening to directions. As a player gets closer to the object the person who chose the object says things like “You’re getting warmer, continue heading south.” or “You’re getting colder, turn right.”
2. Treasure Hunts can be simple or complicated. For a quick and easy Treasure Hunt game hide a little treat somewhere in the house or yard. Walk with the players as they look and give them little hints like “Go four more paces and turn left” (or perhaps “east” for an older child). “It’s under something big and brown.” “Walk to the hall closet and then turn right.” “Go behind the garage and then walk due north.” Use hints that are age appropriate. Take the time to teach new concepts as you play.



Theme 2 - Place

Discovery Walk

Spend some time walking around your neighborhood. What are some of its characteristics? Things you might watch for include:

- ☐ Plants
- ☐ Animals
- ☐ Soil
- ☐ Climate
- ☐ Types and designs of buildings

Questions to Consider

1. How are the people living here affected by the characteristics of this place?
2. In what ways are this place similar to other places your student is familiar with? In what ways is it different?
3. Read stories with vivid descriptions of life in faraway lands. Watch good videos set in foreign places. Compare and contrast these locations to your own city or town.

Climate

Climate is a wonderful connection between science and geography. Climate certainly affects the characteristics of a place. Can your student think of examples? (i.e., heat/cold can determine clothing styles/choices, types of crops, housing, and if it is a desirable place to live.) The amount of sun/rain/snow, the wind, humidity, and even the likelihood of severe weather (hurricanes, tornadoes, blizzards, etc.) all affect the characteristics of a place.

Weather or Not

Watch the weather on the news, local, national and even worldwide. Learn the terminology. Look at weather maps in the newspaper or off the Internet. Make your own weather map. Learn to identify cloud types. What is necessary to know in order to forecast weather? Begin a forecast chart -- compare yours to the weatherman's. Who needs to know the weather? Do you know a farmer, pilot, or sailor who regularly watches and forecasts the weather -- if so, talk to him and ask questions about their skill and knowledge.

What physical characteristics in your area affect the weather?

Learn about barometers, rain gauges, and other weather-related devices. Use a good weather book to do science experiments related to weather. *Over Our Heads in Wonder -- Science and the Sky* is a wonderful book that ties together Biblical principles and scripture verses with weather-related activities.

Theme 3 - Relationships within Places

How do people adjust to and modify their environment to suit their needs?

Activity – In the Home

Arrange furniture according to the shape of the room, outlets, and how the room is to be used. Make a floor plan of your home. Cut out furniture pieces from construction paper and arrange them on graph paper sectioned into the rooms of your home.

Tip

This is not easy! Young students will need considerable help in graphing a room on paper. As you work with them, you can be discussing math principles as well as the challenges cartographers face as they try to represent our three-dimensional world on paper!

Activity – In the Yard

Make a map of your yard. How have you modified the environment there? Planted shade trees? Weeded? Mowed? Cut down trees or bushes? Dug a pond, paved an area for a basketball court, added a screened porch or a bird feeder?

Activity

Look for pictures in books or magazines of how people have shaped their environment. For example: cliff dwellers like the Anasazi in the Southwest as well as the “cliff dwellers” living in ocean front towns of southern California today.

Irrigation, reservoirs, dams, building in difficult places, fencing for animal pastures are all examples of ways man has changed his environment. Some ways in which man has adapted to his environment: houses on stilts, building roads around mountains, and wearing protective clothing in the desert.

Make a chart or collage showing ways in which man has changed or adapted to his environment. Or cut out the pictures and paste them into a geography scrapbook.

Theme 4 - Movement

The patterns of movement of people, products, and information influence the way we learn about geography. We depend on other places for much of our food, clothing, and other items. We share information with others -- communication.

Travel Activity

Provide opportunities for different ways in which to travel: bus rides, subway, train, boat, foot, bike, horse, or ferry.

Clothes Hunt

Do a clothing hunt in your home. Look at the "made in" labels and then mark that country on a map. Who has clothing made from the farthest away? Who has clothing made on an island? Sneakers are good for this game, too.

Food Chain

Trace lunch back to its origins. Make a chart showing from where each ingredient may have originated. Why did your bananas come from Central America but not your milk and eggs? How did the food get to your home? What kinds of foods did your grandparents eat? Why? What are some of the reasons we have such an incredible variety of foods available to us today?

The Name Game

What are the names of some of your students' ancestors? Where were they born? Where did they die? Did they leave their birthplace? Why? How did they travel?

Movement of Information

Brainstorm ways in which ideas and information are presented. (From obvious forms like books and newspapers to less obvious ones like graffiti, bumper stickers, and posters.) Discuss ways your kids communicate with others. Consider these questions and others:

1. How would you get out a message that your ship was under attack?
2. How would you get out a message that you've discovered a cure for the cold?
3. How would you get out a message that a political candidate has something important to say?
4. How would you get out a message that you were having a birthday party?
5. How do people around the world communicate?

Theme 4 - Movement (continued)

License Plate Bingo

Watch for license plates from other states as you travel or just drive around town. Do you see a pattern where you live for cars from out of state? (i.e., “snow birds” heading south for the winter, rural folks coming into town to shop on Fridays, summer beach traffic, etc.)

B I N G O				
		Free Space		

Theme 5 - Regions

Regions are used to describe a smaller portion of the earth -- an area in which the places have something in common.

The two basic categories are **physical** and **cultural**. **Physical regions** are defined by: land forms, climate, plants, and soil. **Cultural regions** are defined by traits like languages, religions, politics, industry, etc.

What's the difference between a region and a place? West Palm Beach is a place. The Southern United States is a region.

Look at both on a map. Compare and contrast places to regions.

Cities have regions within their boundaries:

- ☐ Residential
- ☐ Commercial
- ☐ Recreational

Regions can be defined by common denominators like:

- ☐ agricultural: The Breadbasket of Europe
- ☐ culture: Latin America or Lapland
- ☐ language: The Arab World
- ☐ historic context: the Original 13 Colonies
- ☐ climate: Rainforests

Other examples of regions are: Central Park, The Gold Coast, Appalachia, Silicon Valley, The Balkans, Normandy, Scandinavia, Indo-China.

Activity

Divide your state, city or neighborhood into regions. Read about other cultures and the regions in which they flourish.

Make a map of the world using regions instead of countries. How many different regions can you think of?