

Connections between Geography & Literature: A Geographic Study of the Everglades

Topic: Using Dr. Ed Fernald's "A Geographic Model for Understanding A Place" on a children's book by Jean Craighead George called *Everglades*. ISBN#0-06-446194-7. Harper Collins Publishers, can be an effective way to teach geography literacy through literature.

Grade Level: K-12

Social Studies Concept or Theme: Understanding a methodology for studying a place and the qualities that make that place unique.

Materials: Model Handout, *Everglades* by Jean Craighead George

Time to Teach Lesson: 2-4 class periods.

Objectives/Goals:

Students will:

- 1) develop an understanding of the Everglades by using the model for studying a place.
- 2) discuss consequences of human development and how it will affect the future of the Everglades using a piece of selected literature.
- 3) show spatial understanding of the significance of the Everglades.

Teacher Background:

I. "Sometimes the spirit of a place is so strong you may think you see its face and glimpse its gamboling over a field or peeking out of forest, but at other times you struggle for words to describe it."- Thomas Moore, 1996.

"Books that provide a unique sense of place are more memorable than those that do not."

"The setting of the story is important in creating mood, authenticity, and credibility."

"Place, time, and people are inextricably bound together."

"Both the time and the place of the story should affect the action, the characters, and the theme."

Source: Huck, Hepler, Hickman, & Kiefer et al. (1997).

II. Model for Understanding A Place

It is important for authors and illustrators to be able to describe and explain the spatial realm or setting so that it is one of honesty and understanding of that specific place. Books may be used to dispel negative images, perceptions, and beliefs. This model for understanding place can be used when reading books to “breakdown” a book by its physical, human, economic, historic phenomena, as well as issues of problems and prospects.

“Geographers are interested in where people and things are located and how they interact.”- *Dr. Ed Fernald*

- Geography is the study of place.
- The Model for Understanding Place was developed by Dr. Ed Fernald in the hopes that it would be used as a “thinking outline” or a “frame of reference” when studying place.

III. Two Methods Used when Teaching Geography:

- 1) Areal Distribution: Example: (density)-“to the abundance came the birds; clouds of lacy, white egrets made their home in the Everglades.”
- 2) Spatial Interaction: Example: “when the Everglades was perfect, people who called themselves Calusas arrived; they lived gracefully on the fish and game and made tools out of seashells.”

Initiating Activity:

1. Show students the poster of Public Lands and ask them to examine the federal, state and local lands in Florida. Generate a list of things they know about these lands and what makes them special.
2. Ask them to locate the Everglades on the poster, then set up the following role play scenario: You are all Florida ambassadors who will be taking a group of visitors from Russia to our favorite National Park, the Everglades. What would you need to know about the Everglades before you could take them on their tour? (generate a list of questions they may have or think their guests may have on the board) Then ask them to organize their questions by like topics. They may need a little assistance, but categories such as location & physical, population & cultural, economic & land use, historic and problems and prospects should emerge - the Model headings. Tell the students that we will be using the book *The Everglades* to help us explore these questions and get an understanding of how the author shares their knowledge about a place through their work.

Teaching Strategy: Read the story to the class aloud. Have students keep their questions and model handout near by. Remind students to listen to the descriptions that are developed as well as looking at the pictures for clues. The following is an example of how the model can be completed using the book: (Students will have some variation and can talk about what they felt the author was trying to share about the everglades.)

Example:

Model used for Everglades by Jean Craighead George

I) Location and Physical Characteristics

A) Location:

Relative- "the spill became a river that seeped one hundred miles down the peninsula from Lake Okeechobee to the Florida Bay."

B) Physiography: "the seashells framed a rock called limestone on the sea bottom."

"Florida glistened with green land and blue-green lakes."

C) Climate: "rain gushed from the storm clouds in summer."

"sun bathed the land in winter."

D) Vegetation: "moss grew, then ferns, then grass and trees."

E) Soils: "into the shallow, warm river came tiny one-celled animals and plants; they lived and died and made gray-green soil on the bottom of the river, saw grass took root in the soil."

F) Natural Resources: "one was Lake Okeechobee, round, deep, and as clear as window glass."

II) Population and Cultural Characteristics

A) Where People Live

3) Distribution- "north of Florida, European men pushed the Creek Indians out of the Carolinas; some of them walked south until they came to the silvery Everglades; they poled deep into the saw grass and settled in the islands."

B) How People Made a Living-

1) Urban Occupations: "business people built towns and roads upon it."

2) Rural Occupations: "they vanished when engineers dug canals in the Everglades and drained the fresh water into the sea to make land."

"farmers tilled the land."

C) Characteristics of Place

1) Racial- "when the Everglades was perfect, people who called themselves Calusas arrived."

“the Spanish conquistadors arrived and the Calusa people disappeared.”

III) Historical Background (sequent occupance)

“the conquistadors were afraid of the flesh-ripping grass and roaring animals of the Everglades, and they moved on.”

IV) Major Economic Activities and Land Use

- A) Agriculture: “farmers tilled the land.”
- B) Manufacturing: “the orchid hunters picked gardens and gardens of them (orchids) and sold them to put on ladies’ dresses; practically none can be found.”
- C) Transportation- “ five children and a storyteller poled into the Everglades.”
- H) Extractive Industries: “and where did the mammals and snails and one-celled and animals go?they vanished when the engineer dug canals in the Everglades and drained the fresh water into the sea to make land.”

V) Problems and Prospects

- 1) Problems: “pesticides and fertilizers flowed into the river waters and poisoned the one-celled animals and plants; the snails died, the fish died, the mammals and birds died.”

Prospects: “eventually the children grew up and ran the Earth...the clouds of birds returned to an abundance of fish in the water.”

Culminating Activity: Once the students feel comfortable with their understandings of the Everglades, ask them to plan a field guide, storybook, song, poem or other tool that they would use with their visitors from Russia to help them explore the Everglades.

Evaluation: The notes and materials used in class can be evaluated as well as the final product produced by the students.

National Geography Standard:

14-Environment and Society-How human’s actions modify the physical environment.

16-Environment and Society- The changes that occur in the meaning, use, distribution, and importance of resources.

17-The Uses of Geography-How to apply Geography to interpret the past.

Sunshine State Standards:

SS.B.1.3.1-uses various map forms and other geographic representations, tools, and technologies to acquire, process, and report geographic information including patterns

of land use, connections between places, and patterns and processes of migration and diffusion.

FCAT: LA.A.2.2.7-Recognizes the use of comparison and contrast in a text.

LA.A.2.4.4-Locates, gathers, analyzes, and evaluates written information for a variety of purposes, including research projects, real-world tasks, and self-improvement.

LA.A.2.3.5- Locates, organizes, and interprets written information for a variety of purposes, including classroom research, collaborative decision- making, and performing a school or real-world task.



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