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## Geography and the Environment

**Jan Coleman**

*Clark County School District*

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One major criticism of the current state of education in the United States is that American students are ignorant of geography. In the past few years, however, a serious commitment has been made by National Geographic Society and Teachers to educate our students in the science of our planet.

The National Geographic Society (NGS) and the National Council for Geographic Education have been working diligently in the past decade to enable our students to compete internationally in the area of geography. In 1984, *GUIDELINES IN GEOGRAPHIC EDUCATION: FIVE THEMES*, was published. The National Geographic Society (NGS), under the leadership of Gil Grovsnor, founded the Geographic Education Program in 1985. This program marked the beginning of the NGS Alliance Network, a consortium of educational programs which was to be established in each state. As of 1994, all 50 states as well as Puerto Rico and Canada were members of the Alliance Network, working particularly with the unit known as the Geography Alliance.

These state alliances are key players in the geography movement; their goal is to train educators to successfully teach geography. Each year, workshops and conferences and Alliance Summer Geography Institutes are held throughout the United States. The State Alliances have expanded K-12 teacher geographic and environmental horizons. The NGS 1994 *WORKSHOP ON WILDERNESS*, held in Portland, Oregon, drew 104 participants nationwide who had the unique opportunity to visit several wilderness areas. This experience provided an abundance of educational information, which, it was hoped, would be shared with fellow teachers. The Workshop was specifically designed to train the teachers to implement a plan in each state to promote Geography Awareness Week. The theme was "Keeping an Eye on the Wilderness."

Last year's Geography Awareness Week, which was observed November 12-18, embraced a new theme--"Geography: Passport to the World." A packet of promotional materials is still available from NGS. The materials included are for all ages, all regions, and are adaptable to all kinds of

classrooms. The packet may be obtained from the address listed after the bibliography below.

In the summer of 1995, the Utah Geography Alliance met for 10 days, and 25 teachers traveled, explored, and learned about the geography of northern Utah and Wyoming's Grand Tetons. The Nevada Alliance also trained teachers in many aspects of geography. The Tahoe area, the Great Basin and the Donner Pass were all studied during the 17-day period. Teachers acquired ideas to take back to their classrooms. They were exposed to the new geography standards and had the opportunity to do cultural studies of several areas, including cemetery walks and photo shoots. These summer alliances are financed with grant money that is matched with funds from National Geographic Society. The teachers are then responsible for taking the information back to their schools and hopefully sharing their geographic knowledge with students and peers.

Geography should not simply be a matter of memorizing states, countries and land forms. Because of the vast diversity of the subject, the discipline can be wonderfully exciting. Teaching geography in the 90's involves helping students understand the relationships between people, places and environments. Ideas for teaching geography can be found in the new GEOGRAPHY FOR LIFE.

The GEOGRAPHY FOR LIFE; NATIONAL GEOGRAPHY STANDARDS 1994, is now available. These new standards expand on the original "Five Themes": Location, Place, Human/Environmental Interaction, Movement, and Regions. There are now 18 standards which are grouped under 6 elements. The 14th, "How Human Actions Modify the Physical Environment," 15th, "How Physical Systems Affect Human Systems," and 16th standards, "The Changes That Occur in the Meaning, Use, Distribution, and Importance of Resources," are environmentally specific. These three standards are listed under the element "Environment and Society."

The author is a school librarian interested in geography and the environment; in the following bibliography, she attempts to address the 14th standard and one of the original "Five Themes- Human/Environmental Interaction." This will assist teachers and librarians who deal with earth and environmental education for the elementary grades. Recommended books should be readily accessible and can easily be integrated into the curriculum.

This, obviously, is an ongoing project as many new books are continually

being published. This bibliography concentrates on picture books. These books are generally appropriate for use throughout the elementary grades from K-6. Although more upper level books are needed, please keep in mind that picture books have and will continue to be excellent educational resources as well as good entertainment.

### **Bibliography of Environmental Books for Children**

Allen, Judy. *Seal*. Cambridge, Mass: Candlewick Press, 1994. Hardcover US \$17.85.

While vacationing in Greece, the main character discovers a secluded beach where a rare seal hides his family. Includes information about the seal species and environmental threats. (Elementary, 2-6)

Allen, Judy. *Tiger*. Cambridge, Mass: Candlewick, 1992. Hardcover US \$17.85.

When villagers hire a famous hunter to kill the tiger rumored to live in the woods, only one young boy wishes to protect the animal. (Elementary, 2-6)

Allen, Judy. *Whale*. Cambridge, Mass: Candlewick, 1992. Hardcover US \$17.85.

Magical tale about a whale and her calf who are rescued from a terrible oil slick. (Primary)

Anholt, Laurence. *Forgotten Forest*. San Francisco: Little, Brown & Co. Sierra Club, 1992. Hardcover US \$18.10.

The tale of a group of children who try to save the last forest in the land. (Primary)

Baker, Jeannie. *Window*. New York: Greenwillow, 1991. Hardcover US \$9.54.

Chronicles the events and changes in a young boy's life and in his environment from babyhood to adulthood through wordless scenes observed from the window of his room. (Primary)

Bash, Barbara. *Desert Giant : the world of the saguaro cactus*. San Francisco, Little, Brown & Co., 1989. Hardcover US \$10.80.

Explains the life cycle and ecosystem of the giant saguaro cactus and the desert animals it helps to support. (Intermediate)

Baylor, B. and P. Parnall. *The Desert is Theirs*. New York: Macmillan, 1975. Hardcover US \$9.90.

A description of the relationship between desert people, the animals, and their land. It describes in words and pictures the Papago Indians' respect for the Sonora Desert in the Southwest. (Intermediate)

Behn, Harry. *Trees*. Holt, 1992. Hardcover US \$17.85.

A picture book that discusses why trees are such an important part of our world. (Elementary 2-5)

Brenner, Barbara and May Garelick. *The Tremendous Tree Book*. Chicago: Children's Press, 1992. Hardcover US \$15.95.

A basic introduction to trees; can be used as a model for children who wish to compose a similar book. (Primary)

Bunting, Eve. *Someday a Tree*. New York: Clarion, 1993. Hardcover US \$17.85.

Alice and her parents watch their old oak tree die as a result of toxic chemical poisoning. A picture book that shows how carelessness can affect the environment. (Primary)

Burningham, J. *Hey! Get off our Train*. New York: Crown Publishing, 1989. Hardcover US\$11.84.

A boy and his dog take a train around the world and visit with several endangered animals. The message is about how important it is to protect and treat our animals and their habitats with respect. (Primary)

Cherry, Lynn. *The Great Kapok Tree*. New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovitch, 1990. Hardcover US \$18.10.

The natural habitat of the tropical rainforest animals who live in the kapok tree is threatened when man comes along to chop the tree down. The human impact on the Amazon rainforest's environment is emphasized. (Primary)

Cherry, Lynn. *River Ran Wild*. New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovitch, 1992. Hardcover US \$18.10.

An environmental history of the Nashua River in Massachusetts, from its discovery by Native Americans, through the pollution of the Industrial Revolution, to the ambitious clean-up that brought the river back to life. (Intermediate)

Cooper, Clare. *Earthchange*. Minneapolis: Lerner Pub. Co., 1986. Hardcover.

After a catastrophe turns Earth into an inhospitable wilderness,

Rose sets out to find help for her grandmother and a baby. She finally reaches a group of survivors with scientific interests in restoring Earth to its original beauty. (Young Adult)

DeFelice, Cynthia. *Lostman's River*. New York: Macmillan, 1994. Hardcover US \$16.85.

In the early 1900s, thirteen year-old Tyler encounters vicious hunters whose actions threaten to destroy the everglades ecosystem, and, as a result, he joins the battle to protect the fragile environment. (Intermediate)

George, Jean Craighead. *Missing 'Gator of Gumbo Limbo*. New York, Harper Collins, 1992. Hardcover US \$8.50.

Ecological issues are raised in this story of homeless people living in the Florida Everglades and a young girl working to save a great alligator. (Intermediate)

George, Jean Craighead. *One Day in the Desert*. New York: Harper Collins, 1983. Hardcover US\$18.78.

This book explains how the animal and human inhabitants of the Sonoran Desert of Arizona, including a mountain lion, a roadrunner, a coyote, and Papago Indians adapt to and survive life in the desert. (Intermediate)

George, Jean Craighead. *Talking Earth*. New York: Harper Collins, 1983. Hardcover US \$8.80.

A young Seminole girl is sent to the Everglades to get in touch with her people's ways. (Young Adult)

Hackwell, W.J. *Desert of Ice : life and work in Antarctica*. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1991. Hardcover US \$18.10.

The author describes and illustrates life at an Antarctic base camp and the research that is taking place. He emphasizes the impact of humans on this environment. (Intermediate)

Jeffers, S. *Brother Eagle, Sister Sky : a Message From Chief Seattle*. New York: Dial Books, 1991.

A Native American chief describes his people's love and respect for the earth and all the creatures that live on it. The message is that our environment is sacred and we must take care of it. (Intermediate)

Lewis, T.P. *Hill of Fire*. New York: Harper & Row, 1971. Hardcover US

\$8.35.

Describes the birth of Paricutin volcano in the field of a poor Mexican farmer. The story explains the effects the volcano had on the nearby villages. (Primary)

Luenn, Nancy, and Waldman, Neil. *Mother Earth*. New York: Atheneum, 1992. Hardcover US \$16.85.

Describes the gifts of the earth and the things that we can give back to her. (Primary)

Van Allsburg, Chris. *Just a Dream*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1990. Hardcover US \$20.85.

When he has a dream about a future Earth devastated by pollution, Walter begins to understand the importance of taking care of the environment. (Elementary, 2-6)

### **Addresses:**

For Packets:

Geography Education Program  
1145 17th Street, N.W.  
Washington, D.C. 20036-4688  
(202)775-6677  
(800)368-2728

For Standards:

National Council on Geographic Education  
16 A Leonard Hall  
Indiana University of Pennsylvania  
Indiana, PA 15705-1087  
\$9.00

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