Suggestions for Teaching
5th Grade Geography

Preparation
Steiner shares that our main task when teaching 5th grade geography is to awaken our students’ interest in each region of our country (and continent). We strive to show them how the geography of each region of our country (and other countries on the continent) influenced and still influences the culture and economic life of that place. We want to show how each region sustains itself. We also want to guide the students to see how the influences of each culture have formed our national identity. And lastly we want to share such lively presentations that our students feel gratitude for the special identity and gifts of each region.

How do we accomplish these goals? Overall we keep our focus on the rich and diverse cultural life of each region. Then we specifically:

- Choose biographies and folk/tall stories that bring each culture alive. Only pick the most representative pictures of each region to highlight.

- Share full descriptions of the natural riches of each region. Show how these riches have created the economics of that area. For example while describing the East Coast you might share the whaling industry of its past.

- Connect their new learning to their past and future lessons
  
  *Show how the culture of each region arises out of the animal life. For example, we draw connections to what the students learned in 4th grade about animals by sharing the animals of each region to them. For example share how the salmon struggles up river in the West and how that struggle influences life in that region. Only take a few representative animals of each region that the students may not know.*

  Be mindful of what our students will be learning in the 7th and 8th grades so that we share just hints of the history that is to come. We don't need to connect all the regions in one historical continuum. Instead we unite the students with little bits of history. For example we share references of presidents and key historical events without going into the detail that we will in the later grades. Save 99% of our country’s history for the 7th and 8th grades with explorers in 7th and the American Revolution and the founding of our nation in 8th.

- Sing the folk songs of each region.

- If possible, have the students experience a unique art (dances, visual arts, etc.) and special food dishes of each region.

- At the end of the blocks, let the students engage in comparing the regions, uniting the regions with “bits of history” for the children to see the whole again.
Overview of Blocks
Your location in the country will determine where you begin your study of the regions. I like beginning the first block with a brief review of what the students remember of the folklore, first peoples, geography and economics they heard about their local area in the 4th grade. And as always, start with the whole and then go to the parts by taking the students on a “eagle’s eye view” of the whole continent before moving ever wider to the different regions of the continent (see An Eagle’s Flight dictation for example).

In the United States one great way to connect the regions is by taking the students on journeys along the great rivers of the country. Share the gifts of each river, evoking a picture of the region for the students. For example, talk about how the Mississippi supports farming. Later in the block you weave all the regions together.

Divide up the regions between the two blocks. Here’s one suggestion for keeping the number of states in each region of a reasonable size. If you were to use these regions, I suggest that you present New England-The Southeast in one block and The Southwest-Mexico in the other:

- **New England** (Maine, New Hampshire, Vermont, Massachusetts, Rhode Island, Connecticut)
- **The Northeast or Mid-Atlantic States** (New York, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Delaware, Maryland)
- **The Heartland** (Minnesota, Iowa, Nebraska, North Dakota, South Dakota, Kansas, Missouri)
- **The Midwest** (Ohio, Indiana, Michigan, Illinois, Wisconsin)
- **The Appalachian Highlands** (West Virginia, Virginia, North Carolina, South Carolina, Kentucky, Tennessee)
- **The Southeast** (Georgia, Florida, Alabama, Mississippi, Louisiana)
- **The Southwest** (Texas, Oklahoma, New Mexico, Arizona)
- **The Rocky Mountain States** (Colorado, Utah, Nevada, Wyoming, Idaho, Montana)
- **The Pacific States** (Washington, Oregon, California, Hawaii, Alaska)
- **Canada**
- **Mexico**
Plan for the students to have time to draw detailed maps of each region that include the major geographical sites and points of interest. Use a grid system in your own main lesson book and expect the students to be accurate mapmakers in this grade.

Make sure you have enough fun activities for the students to learn the names and locations of the states and the names of their capital cities.

Add folk and patriotic songs, reciting poetry that fits with a region, and maybe even teach them a few folk and square dances!

To give you an idea of my expectations, here are **Geography Goals** I had for my students:

1. Identify major mountains, rivers, and important cities of each region
2. Describe how the geographical features of each region have influenced the cultures of that area
3. Hear and retell stories of the people, history and geography of each region
4. Identify location of each state in each region and their capital cities

**Possible Projects**
Here are two ideas for projects:

1. Small groups of students research, take notes, follow the teacher’s outline and practice a 5-10 min. presentation about a Native American tribe to share with the rest of the class.
2. Individual state report in which student researches, takes notes, uses the teacher’s outline and writes a “facts page” about a state. The students also draw a map and create a poster about the state. See the attached State Report Guidelines for more detailed information.

**Suggestions for Biographies and Stories**
I highly encourage you to choose biographies and stories that would really inspire your group of students but thought that these might be inspirations for you. These are biographies and factual stories for the different regions that Janet or I shared with our classes. There are more here than you could possibly share! In the suggestions below, John Muir was the defining character who lived or traveled in almost every region!

**New England and The Northeast**
Iroquois, whaling, Tasha Tudor, Susan B. Anthony, Quakers, Erie Canal-rivers created industry, Niagara Falls tightrope walker

**The Midwest**
French voyageurs and traders, begin John Muir's childhood on the Mississippi and college days
**The Heartland**
Cahokia (North America’s first city at its peak from 1050-1200 A.D. located on Mississippi), Great Plains Indians, Marquette and Joliet on the Mississippi

**The Appalachian Highlands and The Southeast**
Jamestown and plantations, Daniel Boone, cotton sharecroppers, John Henry, George Washington Carver, J. Muir's trip to Florida

**Rocky Mountain States, The Southwest and the Pacific States**
Lewis and Clark, Sacajewa, mountain men, Southwest Indians, cowboys, Northwest Indians, George Attla (Alaska), Polynesians and Captain Cook, John Muir in Alaska and California

**Canada**
Henry Hudson

**Mexico**
Aztecs, Mayans

**Suggested Songs**

*Folk Songs*
This Land is Your Land
500 Miles
If I Had a Hammer
Red River Valley
The Erie Canal
John Henry
Wabash Cannonball
Simple Gifts (Amish song)
Come, Come, Shaker

*Songs of the South*
My Old Kentucky Home
Cumberland Gap
Shenandoah

*Patriotic Songs*
America the Beautiful
My Country Tis of Thee
The Star Spangled Banner

*Cowboy Songs*
Ghost Riders in the Sky
Home on the Range
Suggested Poetry
*The Song of Hiawatha* by Longfellow
*My Heart Soars* by Chief Dan George
Excerpt from *Leaves of Grass* by Walt Whitman

Suggested Class Readers
*Amos Fortune*, Elizabeth Yates (1700’s, slavery to freedom - 4 wks.)
*Birchbark House*, Louise Erdrich (Omakayas and Ojibwe community by 1847)
*Carry on Mr. Bowditch*, Jean Lee Latham (1700’s, sailor and mathematical wizard)
*John Muir: My Life With Nature*, John Muir and Joseph Cornell
*Paddle to the Sea, Minn of the Mississippi, Tree in the Trail* etc., Holling C. Holling
*Sacajawea*, Della Rowland
*Sign of the Beaver*, Elizabeth Speare

*Newberry Award Winner

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