

Geography in a One-Room Schoolhouse

By Leigh Bortins

Children of all ages like to draw. One time I challenged a classroom of 50 students ages 12 to 17 to be able to draw the continent of South America from memory and label at least 40 places at the end of an hour.

None of them even knew much more than that it was a continent, yet by the time the hour was up many could reproduce from memory a recognizable map with over 40 locations and all could draw the map and label many things. All I gave them was time, a goal, a pencil, a map of South America and plenty of paper.

At the end I asked them if they were proud of themselves. They were. Then I asked, "Why haven't we been shown how to do this before?" They didn't know. So I told them, "You have a good handle on a whole continent after one hour. There are only seven continents. Let's say you drew an hour a day. How long would it take you to grasp the seven continents? And what if you drew them off and on throughout a school year? Can you see that you'd be able to retain an understanding of places in the world?" Almost everyone wants to win a goal. We actually like to be challenged. So, you can see how this would work in a one room school house of 60 children ages 6 to 16. They can all talk about maps and draw for a while. Older kids would hopefully draw more and better maps. They may even give a friend or sibling hints on how to memorize a feature. I would talk the map out as I drew since I process aurally. Other kids would just be quiet and see the map.

My John would try to use as many shading techniques as possible if color wasn't available. My David would bounce while he studied the map and then sit on his knees as he drew. My perfectionist student would want to know exactly where to begin his drawing on the paper. Some kids would make it right the first time. Others would go through twenty sheets. Yet they can all do the project to some level of expertise and satisfaction.

This same technique can be used for verb conjugations, the periodic table, musical pieces, algebraic formulas, engine schematics, and biology dissections. Take a master page, get a piece of paper, and copy until you have the master in your head. Then start filing these master pictures into convenient shelves in your brain.

Soon you'll be able to pull a timeline event from its brain-shelf along with a map from its brain-shelf and a quote from Scripture from its brain-shelf and be able to apply that knowledge to make an intelligent prognosis on a current event. Then you'll not just be smart, but you'll also be wise.

Challenge A geography strives to remain a pure classically taught subject, without the use of modern conveniences. All that's really needed is an accurate atlas/map, a drawing utensil, and something upon which to draw. If a tutor in another country, like the Sahara region, doesn't have multiple atlases, extra paper, rulers, transparencies, vis-à-vis markers, etc., I don't want to list those as "required" supplies in the Challenge A guide or give a very detailed explanation of 'how-to' accomplish drawing the world. Tutors will help students flesh out those details in the areas in which they live.

*However, Americans have access to incredible tools. Use them!! Just know that the geography **guide** may always reflect the one-room schoolhouse model.*

Bobbie Smith

CC Challenge A Program Manager

Tutors must keep in mind that CC is intentional and deliberate about not taking the joy (and responsibility) of learning and teaching at home away from home school parents and students. As tutors, we have to constantly walk the delicate line between providing support and tools/helps to bring families along and encourage them in their own home school; and making everything so "easy" for parents and students that we remove the need "to think" and wrestle with new concepts for themselves. It is precisely in this "thinking" and wrestling that we humans learn; therefore we must tread carefully in order to not preempt this experience, but model "seeking, discovering, thinking, wrestling, learning a system, etc ..." and the rewards associated with walking through this process for oneself.

Remember that true teaching is not about showing how much the teacher knows, but inspiring and leading students to own the responsibility and process of discovering certain truths for themselves. Tutors at every level within CC strive to keep this in balance, as well as does every parent in the teaching of their own children! There is no formula concerning this balance, that's for sure! Just much needed wisdom as each community and family dynamic is unique.

Review Leigh Bortins' above article concerning teaching Geography in a one-room school house. While this model is a bit daunting for most of us "moderns", it is none-the-less a very effective learning process. I pray it will inspire you with the "spirit" and "vision" Leigh desires to convey through Challenge A's geography, while you strive to "flesh out" the practical side of teaching geography within your Challenge A program.

Heather Shirley

CC Program Director