

A Child's Place in the World – PART II: Using dual language books to initiate social studies learning at home and at school

Guest Writer: Heather Leaman

Schools and families have acknowledged the importance of extending children's learning beyond an understanding of our country to include an understanding of the world. While social studies is an ideal school subject to help children understand the world around them, many schools have significantly reduced their social studies instruction due in part to the influence of No Child Left Behind.

However, reducing class time for social studies instruction does not mean that teachers must eliminate instruction about our world for elementary school children. There are outstanding tools available for teaching social studies in tandem with instruction in reading, writing and math. In addition, there are many activities parents and families can engage in at home to supplement their children's social studies education. Dual language books are an ideal example of a tool that can be used to introduce children to their world and to initiate deeper learning.

When teachers and families share dual language books with their children, they are increasing a child's connection to the world through language, culture and geography. There are a multitude of activities that can be used in concert with dual language books to help children understand and find their place in the world around them. Activities such as those listed below can be used at home or at school.

Locating Countries: After reading dual language books, use a current world map to help children locate countries where each language is spoken. The online CIA World Factbook provides an excellent description of countries including information about the country's geography, people and cultural characteristics for adult and student reference.

Learning About Culture: After locating countries where the selected languages are spoken, read about that country, its people, customs, government, religion, economic resources and history.

Recognizing Diversity in the USA: Have children draw, color or label a map of the USA and identify the numerous languages spoken in the country. The Modern Language Association's website includes census data and a Language Map that students can use to find out about the linguistic and cultural diversity in the United States.

Introduce New Reading Material: Check your local or school library for stories, poems or folktales originating from various nations or select books with characters or settings connected to the country or language under study. Libraries also offer electronic and audio books, many accessible from home.

Celebrate Diverse Cultures: Investigate and replicate traditions from around the world. Cook national specialties from various world regions, create art in the traditional style of various countries, or play games from different parts of the world.

Examine Internet sites: Use child-friendly, high quality Internet sites to help kids learn about the languages and cultures they are investigating. A few examples include:

Nationalgeographic.com/kids
Worldalmanacforkids.com
Whitehousekids.com
UN.org/cyberschoolbus
Bensguide.gpo.gov

Such activities can help children learn about social studies beyond their geography, history, civics, government, and economics classes. Families and schools can enhance a child's connection to the world by using dual language books to initiate and extend learning about the people and cultures similar to and different than themselves. By encouraging children to learn about people around the world, we help children build knowledge of and a love for social studies.

Heather Leaman is an assistant professor in the Elementary Education Department at West Chester University of Pennsylvania. She also spent eleven years teaching sixth grade social studies.

© Language Lizard, LLC. 2006

Did you miss part one of this article? If so, you can find it at
<http://www.languagelizard.com/newsletter1006.htm>.

Want to use this article in your e-zine or web site? Contact Language Lizard President and Founder, Anneke Forzani, at info@LanguageLizard.com.