

Reading Horizons

Volume 26, Issue 3

1986

Article 2

APRIL 1986

A Motivational Strategy for Teaching Locational Skills: The Name Game

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Abstract

Locating places is of great importance in our daily lives. Because it is crucial, we teach students map locational skills. Yet, merely asking students to locate the name of a city, mountain or river becomes quite boring if done without interest and variety.



A MOTIVATIONAL STRATEGY FOR TEACHING LOCATIONAL SKILLS: THE NAME GAME

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Your students are seated quietly, listening to your directions. Suddenly, a late student appears at the door, exclaiming "There's a big fire!" Immediately, this student and the fire become the center of attention. "Where's the fire?" the other students ask. Taking out a street map of the city, the teacher helps the students find the location of the fire. "That's near the hospital," interjects a student. "I hope it doesn't get out of control," says another student. "I wonder if my mom was able to get to work--she has to drive near the fire," from still another student.

Locating places is of great importance in our daily lives. Because it is crucial, we teach students map locational skills. Yet, merely asking students to locate the name of a city, mountain or river becomes quite boring if done without interest and variety.

"The intensity of our interest in an activity as well as the amount of effort that we expend on it depends on our feeling of personal involvement in that activity" (Kolesnik, 1978). Personal involvement may be increased by creating interesting materials and encouraging small group activities which involve students in planning, sharing and reacting.

As early as the 19th century, James (1890) viewed attention as being of primary importance to learning. In a survey in which college students kept a diary of the things they did for a weekend, McReynolds (1971) found that 43% of everything the students did was because of

the appeal of the activity, and 42% was to obtain a terminal goal. Wingfield (1979) wrote that personal motivation is a most important variable in attention. A person's interest will be heightened by stimuli which are relevant to his/her own needs, concerns or desires. These stimuli capture an individual's attention. If students want (desire) to engage in a learning activity, they will direct more attention to it.

Other studies on intensity of interest have been conducted by measuring children's attention, or the "holding-power" of toys, during play. Cockrell (1935) and McDowell (1937) found that different materials had different holding-power. Moyer and Gilmer (1954) found that the mean attention spans of children could be increased by increasing the holding-power of toys.

In a more recent work Shostak (1982) identifies specific skills which can increase student attention. These include: (1) "set induction" which involves getting students ready for a lesson by relating it to their needs and interests, (2) "stimulus variation" which includes varying movement, ways of presenting information and the actual teaching materials, and (3) providing a summary or "closure" to each lesson.

The unexpected (novelty) will attract attention (Wingfield, 1979). If you were walking along a beach on a hot summer day you wouldn't think anything of seeing people swimming. If, however, you were walking that same beach when it was covered with snow, you would be very surprised to see someone swimming. The unexpected would have caught your attention. When students locate places on a map using the same activities time after time, attention may well wander. Yet, when they engage in novel activities, attention increases.

If students are truly interested, they can selectively pay attention to the task and block out extraneous noises. Studies by Cherry (1953), Kahneman (1973) and Treisman (1964) illustrated ability to "turn off" outside auditory stimuli and pay attention to conversation of interest. Moray (1959) found people could identify their names when they came up unexpectedly in a room of different conversations. Novelty attracts attention.

The NAME GAME is a locational skill activity which is different from the expected "locate New York on your map." It uses novelty and creates a situation in which students become personally involved.

To play the game: (1) Provide your students with a list of descriptive phrases which stand for the name of a city (e.g., hot weather town - Summerville, Ga.; a chocolate candy bar - Hershey, Pa.). (2) Have your students read the list of descriptive phrases. Then using the list of cities on the map, try to find the name of a city which fits the description. (3) Once the name of the city is located students may then locate the city on the map and indicate its coordinates.

When students are familiar with the procedure, they can develop their own NAME GAMES. And imagine the vocabulary building which also goes on when constructing or playing at the game!

Here are a few to get you started--

Using the Pennsylvania state map, find the names of cities or towns that will fit the following clues:

1. A glittering city. (Gold)
2. A free city. (Liberty)
3. A fine china. (Lenox)
4. A chocolate candy bar. (Hershey)
5. A town in the center of things. (Middletown)
6. A small town. (Littleton)
7. A grass colored place where royalty lives.
(Greencastle)
8. A town that has wet roads. (Water Street)
9. A town that likes overnight hikes. (Camptown)
10. A town that didn't do less. (Dunmore)
11. A place that developed from a bud. (Bloomsburg)
12. A sleeping car. (Bedford)
13. A town in the middle of things. (Centerville)
14. A town that likes to build dams. (Beaver)
15. A place that isn't wide. (Narrowsburg)
16. The man whose job it is to open the front door.
(Butler)
17. The ocean to the east of the U.S.A. (Atlantic)
18. A city in Russia. (Moscow)
19. The lady who is married to the king. (Queen)

Using the North Carolina state map find the names of cities or towns that will fit these clues:

1. A place that is winter-white and steep. (Snow Hill)
2. A place that isn't poor or round. (Rich Square)
3. A place where cows and chickens live. (Farmville)
4. A place that isn't the roots of trees. (Pinetops)
5. A hog's leg that goes back and forth. (Rockingham)
6. A tribe of native Americans. (Cherokee)
7. A U.S. law officer, like Matt Dillon. (Marshall)
8. A place that gets hot and is painful to the touch.
(Burnsville)
9. Daniel's town. (Boone)
10. A stone that is breezy. (Blowing Rock)
11. Two trees just alike. (Twin Oaks)
12. A space between two mountains that is not shallow.
(Deep Gap)
13. A place that might steer a plane. (Pilot Mountain)
14. A place in which Adam and Eve might live. (Eden)
15. A group of trees that aren't sleeping. (Wake Forest)
16. A free town. (Liberty)
17. A city that doesn't want fewer skulls. (Morehead City)
18. A long necked graceful bird and 25¢. (Swan Quarter)
19. A young cat bird. (Kitty Hawk)
20. A town in the Far East. (Oriental)

Using the N.Y. state map, find the names of cities or towns that will fit these clues:

1. A town in the middle, not round. (Central Square)
2. A place that isn't high. (Lowville)
3. A town that likes boats that go with the wind. (Salem)
4. A place that wants to know if someone is ill and going down. (Hoosick Falls)
5. A city in Egypt. (Cairo)
6. A place that is not up. (Downsville)
7. A place where Eli might live. (Whitney Point)
8. A place that likes colored sticks. (Painted Post)
9. Water that doesn't flow. (Still Water)
10. Someone who wins. (Victor)
11. A place you need a key to get into. (Lockport)
12. A place where you might find dictionaries. (Webster)
13. The string in the middle of the candle is not soft.
(Hardwick)

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14. What you do with your money at the bank. (Deposit)
 15. A place where there are no old people. (Youngstown)
 16. A flower that has thorns on its stem. (Rose)
 17. A large animal that lives on the plains. (Buffalo)
 18. A town that is all wet. (Watertown)
 19. A city which has just been built. (New City)
 20. "Give me _____ or give me death." (Liberty)

Using the Ohio state map find the names of cities or towns that will fit these clues:

1. A round town. (Circleville)
2. A town getting well. (Fort Recovery)
3. A town that needs straightening out. (Crooksville)
4. A town for strangers. (Newcomerstown)
5. A town that likes people. (Friendship)
6. A town whose water is going underground or down.
(Sinking Spring)
7. A town known for bold resistance. (Defiance)
8. A country bumpkin town. (Hicksville)
9. A really hurting town. (Painsville)
10. A butterbean. (Lima)
11. A look at the water. (Lakeview)
12. People who fix cars live here. (Mechanicsburg)
13. The one who sailed the ocean blue. (Columbus)
14. Sparkling or extremely smart. (Brilliant)
15. A pasture that is not for women. (Mansfield)
16. Tiny stones. (Pebbles)
17. Acres and acres of trees. (Forest)
18. A town that must have a lot of soup. (Campbell)
19. What is seen at dawn. (Rising Sun)

You can expand or further develop the NAME GAME by providing your students with sentences containing missing words. In place of these missing words are map locations. Students must find these locations on their maps. They must then find the name of the city or town which fits into the sentence.

Using a map of New York, students might try completing the following:

They did not meet at the Statue of G--8. Instead, they met at the F--5 on D--10. D--4 handed E--5 his money to F--7 in the bank.

They did not meet at the Statue of Liberty. Instead, they met at the Painted Post on Cambridge. Webster handed Geneva his money to Deposit in the bank.

The NAME GAME provides students with the opportunity to integrate learning locational skills with semantic and syntactic development; and it capitalizes upon your students' attraction to novelty and interesting materials. You can create NAME GAMES for your students or you can give your students the opportunity to put their imaginations to work developing their own NAME GAMES.

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