

What's That Place All About?

Lesson Overview

This lesson is designed to introduce students to human and physical characteristics of places.

Grade Level

Primary

Duration

1-2 40 minute periods

Geography Themes

Place

- Places have physical characteristics
- Places have human characteristics
- Places may be described or represented in different ways

Geography Standards

The geographically informed person knows and understands...

(#4) the physical and human characteristics of places.

Materials Needed

For Teacher:

- A physical map (wall map or several atlas maps)
- A picture or slide of a natural area (rainforest, desert, mountain, etc)
- A picture or slide of a human-changed area (city, neighborhood, etc)
- An apple

For Students:

- Magazines to find and cut-out pictures
- Large pieces of construction paper (a set of 3 per group)
- Pencils and glue

Main Objectives

Students are expected to:

1. distinguish human from physical characteristics of places.

2. demonstrate through role playing that people's perceptions of places and features of places depend on their experience and other influences.

Suggested Teaching Procedure

Opening the Lesson

1. Ask the students what a *characteristic* is. (It is a way of describing the features of something.) To demonstrate this, write "Characteristics of Apples" on the chalkboard. Hold up the apple and ask the students to describe its characteristics. Your list should include remarks about the apple's size, shape, color, and how it feels, smells, and tastes.
2. Ask the students to pretend they are a worm that makes its home in the apple. Have them describe the apple from the worm's point of view. Now ask them to pretend they are president of an applesauce factory. Describe the apple from the president's point of view.
3. Now pair up a "worm" with a "president" and have each try to explain their point of view to the other. Tell the students that even though the worm and the president are talking about the same thing, an apple, they both have different ways of describing it based on a particular point of view.

Developing the Lesson

1. Tell the students that in geography we describe two types of characteristics of places: human characteristics and physical characteristics.
2. Show the picture or slide of a place that has predominantly physical features (such as a rainforest, desert, or mountainous area). Have the students name all the physical characteristics they can see in the picture or slide while you list them on the chalkboard. When the list is complete, encourage the students to define the term physical characteristics (those created by nature).
3. Using the list of physical items from the picture or slide, display a physical map and have students find the physical features noted on the list. The map may also reveal features to add to the list.
4. Ask the students what they think human characteristics are. Show a picture or slide of a city or any other area that shows human characteristics. Make a list of human characteristics and display it next to the physical characteristics list.
5. Have the students use the magazines to find three pictures: one of a place with just human characteristics, one of a place with just physical characteristics and one of a place with both human and physical characteristics.
6. As the students struggle to find a place untouched by humans and a place untouched by nature, ask them if there are such places on Earth that are untouched. Ask them what evidence they could look for that would signal human characteristics in a physical environment. For example, you walk in a forest and think you are in an untouched environment then you notice some tree stumps. You would realize that this place also had human characteristics.
7. The students should paste all three of their pictures at the top of large pieces of construction paper. They should make a list of all the human characteristics they see under each picture, and a list of all the physical characteristics they see under each picture.
8. Have the students identify people who might have differing perspectives about the pictures they have displayed and suggest reasons for the differences.

Concluding the Lesson

1. Discuss how people's perceptions of a place may differ because of their experiences and other influences. Have the students role play the following: a 3 year old child and a weather forecaster viewing a thunderstorm; a lumberjack and a camper looking at the same forest. Have them notice differences in the ways each person feels about characteristics under consideration.
2. Pair the students and have them come up with a place and two different perspectives about that place. Some ideas are a nomad and an oil sheik in Saudi Arabia, an oceanographer and an off-shore oil rig company at the shoreline of the Atlantic Ocean, a landfill company and someone from a neighborhood that would be next to the dump, or a rainforest native and a land developer looking at a place in the tropical

rainforest. Make sure each of the role-players describes the physical and human characteristics of the place emphasizing his or her own points of view.

3. To demonstrate that often there are many (rather than only two) sides to an issue, ask students to consider the case of building a shopping center on a large piece of vacant land in the community. Help them to generate a list of several potential issues and groups that might be interested. Have the students play roles of group members and present their points of view.

Extending the Lesson

1. Have the students follow a local land use issue in the newspaper and clip the articles. Let them use the articles to find out about several sides in the issue. Guest speakers may be brought into the classroom to explain the issue. The students can create a video of a mock debate regarding the issue. If the issue is one that concerns children, such as a vacant lot being turned into a playground or a parking garage, they could actually get involved by writing letters to support their position or staging a rally.