"Cruising Through the Atlas"

By Teresa Begley

OVERVIEW: The purpose or goal of this lesson is to help students understand the abundance of information available to them in the desk atlas. By walking or "cruising" through the atlas, students will learn about the multitude of graphs and the many symbols and how they are used. They will use different kinds of legends, scale of miles, diagrams, charts, compass rose, thematic maps and environmental and social issues. They will learn the difference between political (people use) and physical (land use) maps. Perhaps the most interesting feature of this lesson is the many opportunities for students to use thinking skills to find answers. Asking "why" is fundamental to learning geography.

Geographic Elements & Standards: (from Geography for Life, The National Geography Standards) 2nd Edition.)

1. How to use maps and other geographic representations, geospatial technologies, and spatial thinking to understand and communicate information
2. How to use mental maps to organize information about people, places, and environments in a spatial context

Geographic Themes: All of the five themes of geography are incorporated into this lesson: Location, Place, Movement, Regions, Human/Environment Interaction

Objectives:

1. Students will identity the different maps, symbols, legends, graphs, diagrams and charts used throughout the atlas.
2. Students will use the atlas to answer specific questions relating to different parts of the world or to different environmental or social issues.
3. Students will use the atlas to do some critical thinking activities as it relates to the different information found in the atlas.

Materials:

1. Copies of the Nystrom World Atlas, 5th Edition. (If using a different atlas, adjust the page numbers on the Lesson Plan to fit the atlas being used.)
2. Copy of the PowerPoint, "Cruising Through the Atlas"
3. Pen and paper for the students to write down the answers.
4. Copy of Warm Up Questions.

Procedure:

1. Distribute World Desk Atlases; students may work in pairs if not enough atlases are available.
2. Warm Up Activity: Use these questions to give students a chance to get acquainted with the Atlas. Ask the question, wait to see who can answer it first, then hear several answers before giving them the correct answer. Use questions as a basis for some discussion. "On what page will I find the answer to....."
    - How many provinces are there in Canada? (Ans. P. 32, 10 provinces)
    - What countries are there in Antarctica? (Ans. P. 104, 0 countries)
    - What are map projections? (Ans. P. 106, ways to show a round earth on a flat surface)
    - What is the difference between Europe, Land Cover Map and Europe Political Relief Map? (Ans. 68-71)
    - Find the map of the Ring of Fire? (Ans. P. 102, browse to find it)
    - What is Middle America? (Ans. P. 50-51, region between North & South America)
    - How many People per Car Comparison in the World? (Ans. P. 23)
    - About the many different types of maps, and symbols? (Ans. P 4-5)
    - Information about the Sahara Desert? (Ans. P. 65)

3. Use the PowerPoint to walk students through the research questions. Allow time for students to answer the critical thinking part of each question.
4. Ask one question at a time, allow for students to find and write the answer, and then solicit answers right away to allow for class discussion and interaction.
5. After completing discussion on each question, show them the suggested answers on the PowerPoint.
6. Discuss ways that this lesson can be made better.

Conclusion:

1. Go around the room and ask each student to name one new thing they learned in this lesson.
2. Ask how they might adapt this lesson to each specific classroom.