

1C – Themes of Geography

MCCC SS060104 and SS060105

6th Grade Social Studies Network – 2015-6
Part C of Unit 1 – Foundations of World Geography

GLCEs: 6G131 use the fundamental themes of geography; 6G21 and 6G22 characteristics of places

1. Setup Activity: Where is my community? What are the conditions at this place? How is this place connected to other places? How can I organize this geographic information?
(10 minutes – a quick brainstorming activity, not a comprehensive analysis – that could take months!)

2. Activity: The Five Themes of Geography (a clickable poster and a key wording change)
(10-30 minutes, depending on the number of examples you cite).

The *Themes* presentation outlines the structure and terminology for the five themes:

Human-Environment Interaction – an overriding objective, for many academic disciplines

Location – the “entrance ticket” to a geographic inquiry

Place (Conditions) and **Movement** (Connections) – the “facts” of geography

Region and other ways of organizing geographic information (i.e., modes of spatial thinking)

There has been a huge volume of brain-scanning research done in the decades since “the five themes” were first published. The five themes are still very effective when used as intended (i.e. as underlying structure that helps focus inquiry and hold lessons together), BUT as used in many books and internet lessons, they can be discriminatory against a sizeable fraction of students.

Here’s why: The human brain has several “hard-wired” networks to organize spatial information.

Region is just one of perhaps 7 or 8 different organizational “a priori” in our heads.

There are individual differences in student ability and preference for using these modes of reasoning.

How should these facts influence how we teach geography? Here’s a key idea about spatial reasoning:

Preschoolers do all the modes naturally, but grad students can still learn how to do them better.

6th 1C Themes of Geography Handout Pair

6th 1C Jargon Translation Dictionary

6th 1C FIVE THEMES presentation

clickable Themes Poster

For background in using this “spatial vocabulary:”

6th 1D Spatial Reasoning Basics - Brain Networks

6th 1C1 Wake up Call presentation

6th 1C2 Books on 9 Tables presentation

6th 1C4 Spatial Reasoning presentation

3. Scaffolding Activity (if needed): A list of all my insides

As noted above, human brains are “hardwired” to organize spatial information in multiple ways.

Borrowing a bit of computer jargon, we could say that brains do this in parallel, at the same time.

Unless we consciously try to think about it, however, we are usually aware of only one of these organizing “schemas” at a time. Spatial hierarchies (things that are inside of larger areas) are processed through a brain network that is separate from the ones that do regions, sequences, etc.

6th 1Cx All My Insides (Spatial Hierarchies)

4. Scaffolding Activity (if needed): how is my community similar to the place in these photos?

Comparisons are another “hard-wired” way to organize geographic information in order to make it easier to remember. This Venn-diagram activity prompts students to do several different kinds of comparison. Like the other modes of spatial reasoning, comparison can be done with different degrees of sophistication, from noting obvious things like size or color differences to analyzing complex relationships.

6th 1Cx Comparing Places

Pages from MCCC

SS060104.doc “Exploring maps, scale and symbols” is useful for background

SuppMaterials.SS060105: Pages 1-3 perspectives; word cards

SS060105.Powerpoint

Takehome. Themes are organizing ideas that pervade lessons. They are not just terms to be memorized. They are guides to what is important. Themes work best when they are used together and inductively. Unfortunately, many textbooks use them separately and deductively; this reduces their effectiveness.