

Geography To Go

A Guide to Planning and Having a Geography Family Fun Night



The North Carolina Geographic Alliance
Department of Geography and Planning
Appalachian State University

NCGA Website: <http://geo.appstate.edu/ncga>

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*The **North Carolina Geographic Alliance** is a non-profit organization dedicated to improving geographic education in North Carolina classrooms through in-service teacher workshops, summer institutes and publications.*

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Introduction

Parent involvement in our schools is an important component of a successful school. There are many ways to foster parent involvement, but one of the most effective is paring that involvement with activities that involve learning with students. A **Geography Family Fun Night** does that. It brings parents and their children into the schools for an evening of learning and fun. Many schools have math nights or evenings that feature technology or literature, but there is something about geography that spurs interest and curiosity among parents and students.

A **Geography Family Fun Night** is one way to make parents and students aware of the role geography plays in their everyday lives. There are four reasons why geography is important.

1. Like other states, North Carolina plays an important role in the world economy. There are very few truly local businesses; most have connections with the world. Knowledge of the world and its cultures is important for students and parents as participants in the global economy.
2. On the news and other media, parents see and hear about many places making news in the world. Knowing about people, cultures and regions is important for citizens in a participatory democracy.
3. We continually hear about climate change and other environmental issues. Knowing how people interact with their environment is necessary to understanding and solving the environmental challenges we face.
4. Geography is a visual and compelling discipline. It captures the imagination and stimulates curiosity about the world; its diverse inhabitants and places, as well as about local and regional diversity. It serves as a “window on the world” allowing students and parents to learn more about it.

Geography To Go has suggestions for planning and having a parent night with a geographic emphasis. The tips and activities are based on the experiences of teachers in the North Carolina Geographic Alliance who have hosted parent nights at their schools. You can use and adapt these activities to suit your grade level and school community.

Good luck in planning and hosting your **Geography Family Fun Night!**

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Organizing a Geography Family Fun Night

When to have a Geography Family Fun Night?

If your school already holds family nights in other subjects, take this into consideration. You will want to hold your Geography Night at a time that does not conflict or come too close to other events. *Geography Awareness Week*, a national emphasis on geography, falls during the third week of November. It is an ideal time to host a Geography Family Fun Night. If that week is not available at your school, select another week. Avoid weeks that have other events scheduled that require parents to be at the school (parent conferences, PTA meetings, etc.) or days of the week that have activities important in your community.

Grade level or school-wide?

Do you want to involve the entire school or focus on one of two grade levels? This depends on the level of involvement and the amount of prior planning you choose. A school-wide Geography Family Fun Night requires more space, a wider range of age appropriate activities, and the involvement of teachers in the entire school. Narrowing it to one or two grade levels reduces the space you need, reduces the number of activities to develop, and involves fewer teachers and staff planning and carrying out the event. For example, at the elementary level having a Geography Family Fun Night for grades 4 and 5 would require three or four activities that would be appropriate for that age student and their parents. A multi-purpose room, cafeteria, or gym would accommodate the size group. Likewise for grades 6 and 7 at the middle school. On the other hand, a school wide event at the elementary level would require grade level planning of different activities and probably use several classrooms and common areas.

Get Support

Be sure to discuss you plans with your principal. You will need the support of your school administration and the teachers at the grade level(s) you will be reaching through the event. Discuss with your principal any school or district policies on using facilities after the school day. Make arrangements for custodial support and to have the building open during the hours of the event. You want to be sure that automated systems such as heat and air conditioning are operational. If you use common areas such as a multi-purpose room, cafeteria or gym, make sure other events aren't already scheduled. If you plan on using a computer lab or AV devices, you may want to ask tech support at your school to be available.

While every teacher may not need to be involved with the planning, each teacher at the grade levels concerned should be asked to support and help promote the event. Determine who will be responsible for different aspects of the evening's program. A person may be designated as chair of the event, but the best programs are ones that tap into the talents and skills of several teachers.

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Funding

You don't need a large budget to have a successful Geography Family Fun Night. You can control expenses by first determining the size and scope of the event (see *Organizing*, p. 4) and whether you serve food and provide prizes. Unless your school policies require you to pay for custodial services, overhead costs should be low.

There are some sources of funds you might be able to use. Check to see if your school has money budgeted for parent nights or parent outreach. You might also see if there is district-level money available for school-community outreach. Money may also be budgeted for grade level use.

If there is no money budgeted, try asking your local PTA/PTO organization. These groups are usually willing to fund small projects at the local school level. Check also with any local educational foundation at your district level. Sometimes small grants are awarded for outreach efforts such as parent nights.

Finally, don't forget about community foundation grants. One source is Bright Ideas Grant sponsored by North Carolina's Electric Cooperatives (<http://www.ncbrightideas.com/>).

If you are going to seek money from other sources and apply for grants it might be a good idea to propose a series of parent nights to be held during the school year rather than one stand-alone parent night. This will show the grantor a commitment on your part to having parent nights as a part of the school year.

Publicity

It goes without saying that if you don't publicize they won't come. Advance publicity is key to a successful Geography Family Fun Night. One advantage of pre-planning is having a set date for the event. Once it is on the school calendar, you can begin the publicity.

Generating enthusiasm is key. Get your students excited about Geography Family Fun Night. Build anticipation and get them talking about it. If students want to come, they will get there with their parents. It is a good idea to make clear from the beginning that the emphasis is on *geography* and *family*. Parents should understand that they cannot drop off their children while they go to Starbucks or the grocery store for a couple hours. The idea is to bring parents and students together for a fun evening of learning and discovery.

If you publish a classroom newsletter, begin publicizing the event there. Make a flyer to send home with students. (An example is in the Appendix). Have the event publicized in the school newsletter, website, and if possible, on the marquee. If you regularly email parents, send an invitation and follow-up with a reminder before the event.

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Students often respond favorably to a reward, so you might consider some extra credit or a homework pass if their family attends. Be cautious and judicious with this by first checking to see if school policy allows for it. Also, think about an alternative for extra credit for students who are unable to attend because of transportation or other constraints on the family.

In publicizing your Geography Family Fun Night consider also who to invite. Your principal and other school administrators should be invited. At the district level think about inviting curriculum coordinators and specialists, the superintendent and other district administrators. You will be advancing geography education and its importance by extending and invitation. If the event is held as part of Geography Awareness Week, you could ask your city mayor and council to attend. With enough advance planning you can ask the mayor to make a proclamation recognizing Geography Awareness Week (see example in Appendix).

Alert the local paper about your event and invite a reporter and photographer to attend. Positive press about schools is welcome and appreciated by everyone. Have information about Geography Family Fun Night and your school available for a reporter. You may want to designate a school staff person to take a few pictures during the event.

In the follow-up section of this publication you will find tips and resources for a press release on your event.

Themes and Activities

As you begin planning your Geography Family Fun Night you may want to identify a theme for the evening. If you have the event during Geography Awareness Week in November then the theme for that year would be most appropriate. If your event is another time during the year, a theme may be an area of study, a region your class is studying, or a project your students are doing. Anything related to geography works.

The structure of the evening is entirely up to you. Here are some practical tips that teachers have suggested.

1. Registration - Have a place where parents and students can sign in. You will have a record of who attended, and if you are giving any type of reward for attending. You may opt for nametags, but this is an additional expense.
2. Welcome – Formally welcome everyone to the Geography Family Fun Night. If there are invited guests, now is the time to recognize them. (Don't forget your principal and superintendent if they are present.)
3. Icebreaker – The first activity should be fairly short and active. A "Find Someone Who..." activity is one that immediately gets people up and interacting. (An example is included in the Appendix.) In this activity everyone has a sheet with 15 questions. The task is to get 15 different people to answer and sign the questions. This activity gets everyone

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interacting and provides a focus on the theme for the night. After 10-15 minutes call time and review the answers.

4. The Main Activity – This is the activity that gives students and parents time to focus on a specific topic and do some geography. It can be a time students share a project or demonstration or it can be an activity that involves parents and students in a hands-on learning project. A list of suggested activities can be found in the Appendix.
5. Closure – Review the theme of the evening. Ask a few questions, and then thank parents and students for attending. You can award prizes if you are giving them. If you are providing food, you can invite everyone to stay for that.

Food

Most food has a point of origin; therefore it is geographical. Serving food at you Geography Family Fun Night can add to the geographic perspective. It can also be a drawing card, after all who can resist food? If you do provide food, keep in mind that there will be a cost that you will need to budget for. You don't need to provide a full meal; a few simple snacks can be "dressed up" to be geographical. You will also need extra help in setting up, serving, and clean up.

Note: *many school systems have policies on the sources of food served to students and on serving peanut products. Check on your local policy before having food served.*

Check to see what ethnic foods are available or popular in your area. There may be foods that fit the theme of the evening. A "Taste of Germany" or another region can provide a sampling of regional foods.

If you are on a low budget, simply give geographic names to common snacks or name a country or region for the main ingredient in the snack. Fruit punch, cookies and something salty like pretzels or chips are economical and easy to serve. Be creative and name them for a famous place or source of the main ingredient. Store brand vanilla crème cookies can be identified as "Madagascar Vanilla Crème Cookies since Madagascar produces 59% if the world's vanilla.

Prizes

Most who attend a family night do not expect a prize. If you do give prizes you will need to identify how many to give and what criteria will be used to award them. You can seek donated prizes or order prizes from a catalog for a low price. Country flags and other trinkets are possible prizes.

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Follow Up

Acknowledge any donations with a thank-you note. If any of you invited guests attended a thank-you note is also appropriate. If you had photos taken select a few to display in the classroom.

If the local newspaper was present follow up with a phone call and offer to answer any questions. If the newspaper did not send anyone, you can send a press release about your family night.

The North Carolina Geographic Alliance would like to hear about your Geography Family Fun Night. Use the reporting form to let the Alliance know about your event. (See Appendix)

Geography Family Fun Night



Monday November 16, 2009
7:00 - 8:30 PM
Canyon Middle School
Multi-purpose Room

Our theme will be Celebrate Geography!
Come celebrate Geography Awareness
Week and learn about the world and our
place in it.

- Geography Activities
- Refreshments
- Prizes
- Lots of fun for the Family

Students must be accompanied by a parent.
RSVP with your teacher by Thursday, November 12

PROCLAMATION

WHEREAS, Geography Awareness Week is November 15-21, 2009; and

WHEREAS, Geography Awareness Week became a congressionally mandated week in 1987 celebrating geography education in our nation's schools; and

WHEREAS, Geography Awareness Week encourages the participation of thousands of students and hundreds of schools throughout North Carolina; and

WHEREAS, Geography Awareness Week promotes geographic literacy and is an essential part of a 21st century education and is critical for success in a world marketplace; and

WHEREAS, This year's theme "*Get Lost in Mapping: Find Your Place in the World*" encourages students to discover maps and their uses through technology and understand how maps help us interpret our world; and

WHEREAS, Congress indicated the importance of geography education by designating geography as a part of the United States educational system's core curriculum; and

WHEREAS, The National Geographic Society and a coalition of major national partners have created *My Wonderful World*, a campaign to increase geographic learning at home, in school, and in the community.

NOW, THEREFORE, I, _____, Mayor of the City of _____, _____, call upon all citizens of _____ to observe the week of November 15-21, 2009, as

Geography Awareness Week

IN WITNESS WHEREOF, I have hereunto set my hand and caused the seal of the City of _____, _____, to be affixed this ____ day of November, 2009.

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North Carolina Geographic Alliance
Appalachian State University
Department of Geography and Planning
Rankin Science West
Boone NC 28608
Steve Pierce, Coordinator

Let us know about your Geography Family Fun Night

School: _____

Address: _____

City: _____ State: _____ Zip: _____

Teacher(s): _____

Grade Level(s) _____

Date of Geography Family Fun Night: _____

How many attended? (Include students and parents) _____

Did you use any resources from the NCGA in planning and/or during the event?

_____ Yes _____ No

Will you schedule another Geography Family Fun Night the school year?

_____ Yes _____ No

Comments: _____

Thank you for letting us about your Geography Family Fun Night. You can mail this form to the address in the letter head, fax it to the NCGA, 828-262-3067, or email to stevepierce@charter.net.

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Activities for Geography Family Fun Night

Tear-It Map Activity

Divide the parents and students into seven working groups. Each group will be given a large sheet of bulletin board paper (approximately 3 feet by 4 feet) and seven sheets of colored construction paper (9 by 12 and 12 by 18 inches) and some glue sticks.

The task is to create a map of the world by tearing out the continents from the construction paper and gluing them in position on the bulletin board paper. The resulting world map is based on their collective mental maps, so the groups should not use any reference materials. Since groups are tearing the continents from the construction paper scissors are not needed.

After sufficient working time, display the maps and allow each group to “defend” their map.

For detailed instructions and follow up activities see

<https://netforum.avectra.com/temp/ClientImages/NCGE/75b7a2e3-f787-45e4-8ab9-9847c29e4f74.pdf>

Food for Thought

Food for Thought is a spatial graphing activity that uses the participants as part of the graph. The activity helps students develop a feeling for the similarities and differences between populations. Many measures are used for comparison including population, population density, population growth rates, energy consumption, CO₂ emissions, and more.

There is quite a bit of preparation for this activity so read it thoroughly and gather the materials you need well ahead of time. You can pick and choose the parts of the simulation you want to use to fit your time frame.

The complete lesson plan can be found at the Population Reference Bureau website

<http://www.prb.org/pdf07/foodforthought.pdf>

U.S. Interstate Highways

This activity is about interstate highways that connect places in the United States. Begin with a brief overview of the U.S. Interstate Highway System. Solicit some U.S. highway maps from your local AAA office for use by groups.

You might want to start with a “U.S. at Night” satellite image to have the group notice large cities and the strings of light that connect them. Use a highway map of the United States to identify some of the interstate routes nearby and the ones that cross the U.S. coast-to-coast and border-to-border. Provide background on the interstate numbering system.

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Divide the parents and students into groups and assign each a different east-west or north-south interstate highway. Have each group list the major cities along their route and any major attractions, national parks, or cultural landmarks on or near their route.

Have a bulletin board-size U.S. outline map (purchased or drawn on bulletin board paper) and provide some yarn, pushpins, and markers for each group. Each group will pin their yarn on the map to show the route of their interstate and use the markers to identify major cities along the route. If time permits, you can also provide some photos of major attractions and landmarks for them to paste on the map along their routes.

Complete instructions and background information can be found at <https://netforum.avectra.com/temp/ClientImages/NCGE/e253df0d-c838-4bb7-8dcc-d852029c880a.pdf>

The Home Team

You will need a large outline map of the United States (recycle the one from the activity above) and the logos of professional sports teams from Major League Baseball, the National Football league and the National Basketball Association. You will also need some franchise history for each of the teams. (Look up on Wikipedia for a quick source.)

This activity will look at the geographic basis for team names. Many teams are named because of a physical feature or a cultural reason. Complicating this is the fact that several teams have moved from their original location, thus transplanting the team name to a new location.

Have groups take a team logo and place it at the correct location on the outline map. Ask if the name fits the location. For example in Philadelphia the MLB Phillies and the NBA 76ers are named from the city (Phillies) and for the signing of the Declaration of Independence in Philadelphia in 1776. Other team names are misplaced, such as the Utah Jazz. Culturally jazz is identified with New Orleans, not Salt Lake City, Utah. The NBA Jazz however began playing in New Orleans before moving the team and the name to Utah. The Boston Celtics honors the Irish culture in Boston. One look at a map reveals there is not large lake near Los Angeles, so the Los Angeles Lakers must be named for a lake somewhere else. Indeed the Lakers began in Detroit and then moved to Minneapolis where they were named for the "Land of 10,000 Lakes."

One way to involve the students before the parent night is to have them research the team names and histories so they can provide the explanations of the team locations and confusing geographic names.

Your International Pencil

Use the narrative "Your International Pencil" to tell how pencils are made and where the raw materials that make up a pencil come from. A card for each part of the raw materials

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can be made up ahead of time. As the narrative is read, each raw material can be placed on a wall map of the world. Once the cards are on the map, yarn can be used to link the places with the raw materials with the United States.

End the activity by noting the level of trade needed for a simple object such as pencil is an indication of the amount of trade needed for all the products we use.

The narrative for Your International Pencil can be found on the NCGA Website under Resources in the main menu. Select Geography Action and Geography Awareness Week on the Resources Page.

http://education.nationalgeographic.com/education/activity/geography-of-a-pencil/?ar_a=1

Look You're Wearing Geography

This can be a quick warm-up or closing activity. Have families find out where the clothes - include clothing, shoes, and accessories - they are wearing are made. List these and show the locations on a map. Notice any patterns that the map shows. Where are most sneakers made? Clothing? Other items?

U.S. State Quarters – Physical and Cultural Features

You will need a set of U.S. state quarters for this activity. Each group will examine one of the state quarters looking for any geographic information about the state – landforms and physical features, animal and plant life, historic events, landmarks and attractions, economic activities, etc. You may provide a form for them to record their observations.

A more detailed activity guide and activity sheet can be found at

<https://netforum.avectra.com/temp/ClientImages/NCGE/e40e2439-2853-4737-a43a-513cbcb1e933.pdf>

<https://netforum.avectra.com/temp/ClientImages/NCGE/f64b02fa-b17c-427c-a16b-382e6d3ec965.pdf>

Additional Resources and Websites

NCGE Support for Geography Clubs

<http://www.ncge.org/geography-club-resources>

Twenty-seven activities that can be used with students and parents.

North Carolina Geographic Alliance

<http://geo.appstate.edu/ncga>

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Resources and activities as well as news and information from the North Carolina Geographic Alliance.

National Geographic Education

http://education.nationalgeographic.com/education/?ar_a=1

Classroom resources for teachers, parents, and students from the National Geographic Society

Geography Action!

<http://www.nationalgeographic.com/geography-action/index.html> Teacher Toolkits, resources and activities for Geography Action!

Outline Maps from the Arizona Geographic Alliance

<http://geoalliance.asu.edu/maps>

A good source for black line outline maps of the world and world regions.

People Search – Find someone who can answer and sign off on one of the questions.

A person can only sign **ONE** time. *Your Name* _____

1. Visited a U.S. national park in the last 6 months. _____ _____	2. Can name two city-states of Ancient Greece. _____ _____	3. What is the predominant religion in India? _____ _____
4. Name the oldest continuously occupied settlement in the United States. _____ _____	5. The Pillars of Hercules refers to the entrance of which strait? _____ _____	6. Ancient Egypt developed along the banks of what river? _____ _____
7. The Inca are associated with which present-day country? _____ _____	8. Cape Town, South Africa is located near what cape in Africa? _____ _____	9. What U.S. city is linked historically to automobile manufacturing? _____ _____
10. What event signaled the end of the Cold War? _____ _____	11. In which city will you find the Gateway Arch and the Jefferson National Expansion Memorial? _____ _____	12. What city is sacred to Jews, Christians, and Muslims? _____ _____
13. Name the trade route that linked China and the Mediterranean Sea region. _____ _____	14. Name two deserts in Africa. _____ _____	15. What founding document begins with “ <i>We the People</i>” _____ _____

People Search – Find someone who can answer and sign off on one of the questions.

A person can only sign **ONE** time. *Your Name* _____

1. Visited a U.S. national park in the last 6 months.	2. Can name two city-states of Ancient Greece. Athens Sparta	3. What is the predominant religion in India? Hinduism
4. Name the oldest continuously occupied settlement in the United States. St. Augustine	5. The Pillars of Hercules refers to the entrance of which strait? Strait of Gibraltar	6. Ancient Egypt developed along the banks of what river? Nile River
7. The Inca are associated with which present-day country? Peru	8. Cape Town, South Africa is located near what cape in Africa? Cape of Good Hope	9. What U.S. city is linked historically to automobile manufacturing? Detroit, MI
10. What event signaled the end of the Cold War? Fall of the Berlin Wall	11. In which city will you find the Gateway Arch and the Jefferson National Expansion Memorial? St. Louis, MO	12. What city is sacred to Jews, Christians, and Muslims? Jerusalem
13. Name the trade route that linked China and the Mediterranean Sea region. Silk Road	14. Name two deserts in Africa. Sahara, Kalahari, Namib	15. What founding document begins with "We the People. . . ." United States Constitution