Learning Activity: Treasure Island

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(use in conjunction with GITN #635, Diamonds in the Rough:

Introduction

“While going through the possessions of a deceased guest who owed them money, the mistress of the inn and her son find a treasure map that leads them to a pirate’s fortune.”

*Treasure Island* [Unabridged], Dover Publications, Inc., New York, 1993

Like the diamonds discussed in Neal Lineback’s article, the search for treasure excites the imagination—especially in children. That search implies geography, which is “everywhere in children’s literature,” says Pat Oden.

Oden developed a methodology for analyzing the geographic content in children’s literature, and provided an annotated book list of almost 150 entries (Oden, 1992). He suggested using the five fundamental themes and “mapping a story” to gain geographic knowledge, understanding, and perspective. Further, Oden states, “that reading leads to discovery and to a better understanding of the earth and its people.” These ideas form the basis for the following geographic analysis of Robert Louis Stevenson’s *Treasure Island*.

**Grade Level:** 5-8

**Time Required:** varies with grade level according to depth of analysis and discussion

**Objective**

To extract, interpret, and discuss geographic terms and concepts found within children’s literature.

**National Geography Standards**

- Standard 1. How to use maps and other geographic tools and technologies to acquire, process, and report information from a spatial perspective.
- Standard 2. How to use mental maps to organize information about people, places, and environments in a spatial context.
- Standard 7. The physical processes that shape the patterns of Earth’s surface.
Bibliography


Getting Started

This learning activity is based on the children’s classic, *Treasure Island*. The book contains thirty-four chapters, each about four or five pages in length. It could be read in class over a six-week period. Middle school geography teachers in a team environment may arrange to have a literature teacher assign the book, then collaborate on a team unit when students have completed the reading.

After reading *Treasure Island*, students construct a chart using the five themes as headers: location, place, human-environment interaction, movement, and regions. This chart is used to compile the geographic terms and concepts appearing in the story. Oden states that a five-theme chart will help students “to organize random facts.” Upon completing the five-theme chart, students should locate actual locations using globes and atlases, and define terms using geographic dictionaries, geography textbooks, and other reference sources as appropriate.

*Treasure Island* and the place names associated with it, of course, exist only within the imaginary geography created by Stevenson. These imaginary locations are intertwined with such “real” locations as Bristol, London, and Europe. At the micro scale, students should plot the movements of the sailing vessel Hispaniola, or characters such as Jim Hawkins, Long John Silver, or others as they move in and around *Treasure Island*. For this activity, the teacher should provide students with an enlarged copy of the treasure map drawn by Stevenson.

On the macro scale, students should plot and trace the movement of Jim Hawkins and the Hispaniola from London to *Treasure Island* and back again.

One non-human character— Cap’n Flint, Long John Silver’s parrot— has traveled extensively on board various pirate ships (Chapter 10). Provide students with a blank outline map of the world and allow them to plot out the bird’s travels.
Answer Key

Five-Theme Chart

The following list compiles geographic terms and concepts from *Treasure Island* categorized by the five fundamental themes of geography. Students might find other terms overlooked by the author.

- **Location**: Treasure Island, Black Hill Cove, Bristol, Palm Key, Caracas, latitude and longitude, 62° 17’ 20” 19° 2’ 40”, map, London, Providence, Portobello, Skeleton Island, Haulbowline Head, Cape of the Woods, North Inlet, Spyglass Hill, Foremast Hill, Mizzenmast Hill, Capt Kidd’s Anchorage, Execution Dock, Rum Cove

- **Place**: mainland, shore, beach, island, cliff, cape, knoll, hill, peak, head, spit, sea, cove, harbor, inlet, bay, gulf, sounding, coast, river, stream, streamlet, spring, pool, bank, swamp, marsh, fen, live-oak, pine, fir, sand, soil, rock, slope, great mass of fallen rock (talus, see Chapter 24), cave, weather, climate, rain, cloud, fog, heat

- **Human-Environment Interaction**: hamlet, inn, stockade, dock, cemetery, washed away (describes soil erosion, see Chapter 19)

- **Movement**: north, south, east, west, current, tide, ebb tide, surf, sea breeze, wind, doldrums, distance

- **Regions**: Spanish Main, Spanish America, England, Madagascar, Malabar, Surinam, Goa, Europe

Mapping a Story

See map, page 9. Plotting the locations of Cap’n Flint’s travels illustrates the global threat pirates posed during the 1700s.

Comments and Extensions

- The instructor should structure lesson plans around the geographic terms and concepts compiled from *Treasure Island*. Support lectures with slides, for example, one showing a spit, cove, etc.

- *Treasure Island* contains numerous terms from physical geography. Note the range of words used to describe similar geographic features, for example, swamp, marsh, and fen or to indicate magnitude such as river, stream, streamlet, and spring. The orographic effect is alluded to in Chapter 12 and erosion is described in Chapter 19.
This book, therefore, could be easily adopted as supplemental reading to a physical geography course.

- Notice the latitude and longitude coordinates provided by Stevenson do not contain directional indicators (i.e., N or S for latitude and E or W for longitude). If one positions those coordinates in the northwest quadrant of the globe, this location would be just a degree or two south of Iceland. The position and size of Foremast Hill, Spyglass Hill (Mainmast Hill), and Mizzenmast Hill correlate with the fore, main, and mizzenmasts of a ship.

- The name of the ship, Hispaniola, is often used to refer to modern-day Haiti and the Dominican Republic.

- Stevenson’s Kidnapped and Daniel Defoe’s Robinson Crusoe are other adventure stories that lend themselves to studies in geography.

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