

THE AMERICAS:

Can you come on a Great American Road Trip?

Unit overview

In this unit the children, inspired by Johnny Cash singing 'I've been everywhere', travel the North and South American continents, and distinguish between the terms 'continent', 'region', 'country', 'state' and 'city' along the journey. Finding and using images and maps on the internet and in atlases, children will make notes on cities and record their countries and/or states. They will compare the built environments and settings of the cities and, through them, identify some key regions of the American continents. For the Big Finish children use the song 'Route 66' as the stimulus for creating an illustrated, labelled and annotated map of the historic route.

Knowledge, skills and concepts

In this unit, the children will:

- enhance their locational and place knowledge
- focus on North and South America, concentrating on their environmental regions, key physical and human characteristics, countries, states and (some) major cities
- understand geographical similarities and differences through looking at regions in North and South America
- begin to associate weather/climate with landscape and environment
- use maps, atlases, globes and digital/computer mapping
- learn to use the eight points of a compass.

Background information

The accolade of being the geographic centre of the United States of America (excluding Alaska and Hawaii) belongs to Lebanon, Kansas. However, this unit takes the not-too-distant Denver, Colorado, as the starting point. This provides an opportunity to focus straight in on the spectacular scenery of the world-famous region of the Colorado River, with its Colorado Canyon, as well as the Grand Canyon in Arizona. The geographic centre of the continent of North America is Rugby, North Dakota, USA. Similarly, the geographic centre of South America is Cuiabá, Brazil. These provide good starting points for reinforcing the eight points of the compass, N, NE, E, SE, S, SW, W, NW.

(The distance between Lebanon, Kansas and Denver, Colorado is 228 miles – not far by American standards!)

Cross-curricular links

- **English:** making notes, annotating and communicating findings.
- **Art & design:** learning about photos and paintings of dramatic landscapes, searching for 'paintings, the Prairies/the Rockies' and more.

You might like to look at the work of Hundertwasser, especially '175 An Almost Circle', comparing it with American city and local street patterns. The children can create their own work of art in the style of Hundertwasser by over-painting a black and white print-out (from Google™ Earth) of a street pattern, perhaps of the streets around their school, or of an American city (see *The Everyday Guide to Primary Geography: Art*, Mackintosh & Kent, GA, ISBN 978-1-84377-366-5).
- **Computing:** using Google Earth maps and satellite images; using search engine(s) to research American cities.
- **Music:** singing 'I've been everywhere' (Johnny Cash) and 'Route 66'; opportunity to create a geographical song or rap about North and/or South American cities, with sound effects to accompany it, basing their song on 'I've been everywhere' or 'Route 66'.
- **History:** exploring the history and changes along Historic Route 66, from Chicago, Illinois to Santa Monica, California.

The Big Finish

Children will create a classroom display of an illustrated map based on the song 'Route 66', as performed by Chuck Berry, the Rolling Stones or Nat King Cole (see itinerary for Route 66). Or, if this is inappropriate for your setting, base their work on a well-known or familiar national or local route (e.g. a UK motorway or even the shops along a local road).

The display could be accompanied by a recording of the children singing the 'Route 66' song, perhaps along with Chuck Berry!

Map work

There will be many opportunities to use atlas maps and Google Earth images, and to extract information from photographs. Children will also create their own class map of Route 66.

Fieldwork

If fieldwork in a city or town is a possibility for your school, children would benefit from carrying out a transect, from the outskirts to the centre and then out again, perhaps by a different route. This would help them to appreciate the relationship between a commercial city centre and the surrounding distribution of smaller shops, housing and local amenities.

Independent learning area

Children might enjoy following other famous routes in the Americas – for example the Pan-American Highway (19,000 miles from North to South, from Alaska to Argentina) or the Pacific Coast Highway (600 miles along California's coast).

Assessment

All children can:

- use a map to identify countries in North and South America
- use eight compass points to locate cities in North and South America
- name some North and South American cities
- use geographical language to describe some North and South American cities from photographs
- name some regions in North and South America
- follow a route (Route 66) on a map.

Most children can:

- use a map to identify states in North America
- relate 'continent', 'country', 'state' and 'city' in the context of the Americas
- describe settlement and road patterns of some North and South American cities from satellite images and photographs
- describe some regions in North and South America.

Some children can:

- describe and compare similarities and differences between some North and South American cities
- describe and explain the characteristics of some regions in North and South America.