

What Works in the Geography Classroom

Local Geographies: The First Layer

"Often the object is simply for pleasure but usually there is a definite object in view." Arthur P. Irving

The skills involved in acquiring geographic information include activities such as locating and collecting data, observing and systematically recording information, reading and interpreting maps and other geographic representations of space and place, interviewing people who can provide both information and perspectives about places and issues, and using statistical methods. Students should read and interpret all kinds of maps. They should compile and use primary and secondary information to prepare quantitative and qualitative descriptions. They should collect data from interviews, fieldwork, reference material, and digital resources.

Geography for Life, National Geography Standards, Second Edition, Part II: 97, 2012

Through the process of acquiring geographic information in the ways described by geography experts, students can learn the practice of asking geographic questions and developing reasoned responses. Bringing local geographies into the classroom or taking students into the local environment offer multiple strategies for "doing geography" that are tried and true traditions for geographers and educators. Whether guiding students to actively collect their own data from a schoolyard or shopping mall or a demographic data sheet, teachers can lay the foundations for understanding geographic content and developing geographic skills.

Using the 18 National Geography Standards are a necessary resource for all teachers and a practical way to bring more geography into your teaching.

What are Local Geographies?

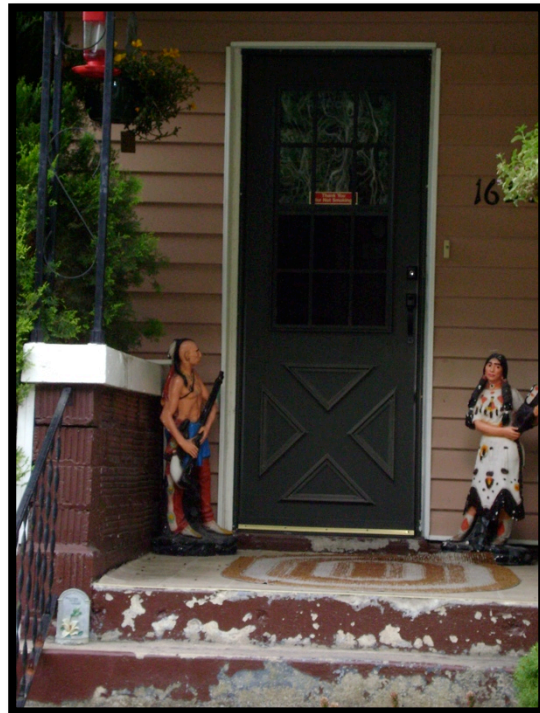
Local geographies are everywhere and can be classified and studied in countless ways. They are local environments that become local geographies when studied with a geographic perspective. They are the nearest people, places, features, landforms, interactions, indicators, evidences and artifacts to be observed, studied and interpreted by the geographic-minded. They define neighborhoods, cities, towns, villages, regions, and areas. For teachers and students, they are determined by proximity, perspective and significance. They can be the impulses for the observer's curiosity, ponderings and inquiry. They are the roots for growing regional, national and global geographic understandings and they ought be the first layer of many that make up a student's personal and academic geographies.

Studying local geographies gives students the chance to become more familiar with their local environment creating their own personal geographies. It also provides them with opportunities to apply the geographic concepts learned in classrooms. When students develop the practice of being aware of and studying the geography of local human and physical features, they become better equipped to ask and answer geographic questions.



How does the Rappahannock River influence early settlement and the present-day economy of Fredericksburg?

With so much emphasis at the global scale, internationalism, and world citizenship, and frequent and easy international travel, it's common to lose sight of the local places that identify who we are and where we came from. We are much more mesmerized today by the sight of an Andean farmer with a wooden plow and an oxen or a Thursday morning indigeneness market than we are by the places we see everyday, the ordinary places. We can see videos on the world wide web of anything, anywhere, any time and not move one inch from the classroom. But our very own backyards are only a step away from local histories, processes, developments, events and human and physical features that demonstrate the geography of which we teach.



Wise County: What values, history, or traditions do these artifacts express?