

EarthTrek: a Global Adventure in Learning

By Shelley Cook and Cynthia Alves

Imagine a school day that transports you to countries all over the world! EarthTrek, a math/science/reading/social studies curriculum supplement for Grades 3 to 5, allows students and teachers to discover the world beyond their own borders, all from within the classroom.

Student teams participate in a virtual race around the globe, visiting eight different countries on six continents during a school year. Teams might use toothpicks to measure and build the Leaning Tower of Pisa, or write a story using Aussie slang, or explore forces and friction through English soccer. They work together to complete hands-on academic tasks that incorporate the culture and landmarks of each country they visit.

"We watched in amazement at how students learned to solve problems as a team with incredible maturity," reported designers Shelley Cook and Cynthia Alves, master teachers who saw results that went beyond their expectations the first year they used EarthTrek in their classrooms. "We witnessed gifted students, children diagnosed with dyslexia, as well as children who spoke very little English, succeed in very complex activities because they worked cooperatively. Teams who lost were supportive of those who won, and most importantly, the children began to really believe in themselves and understand that if they worked together they could succeed."

In EarthTrek exposure to the customs, traditions, and geography of each country not only keeps interest levels high while strengthening math, science, reading, and social studies skills, but showcases the diversity of the world to the students as well.



Each grade level travels to different countries, so by the time a student completes Grade 5, he/she will have experienced 24 different countries. Meanwhile, the competitive element encourages teams to solve the challenges of working together, as well as to discover the strengths of each team member.

The EarthTrek program has a high-cognitive load because Cook and Alves both believe that education that is relevant and exciting, and that focuses on higher-level thinking skills, will enhance the learning process and increase long-term retention. Because it is objective-driven, it is designed to fit into any curriculum.

Parents, teachers, community leaders, and administrators have been the biggest supporters of EarthTrek, because they see how excited the students are and how these skills will translate to adult life. Tom Shearer, former superintendent of the American International School of Lagos and his staff were the first international school to pilot EarthTrek. Teachers and students have embraced the program, and have found that it has added to students' appreciation of cultures around the world and contributes to their understanding of the world as a global community.

Uchenna Agu, winner of the award-winning CBS show *The Amazing Race*, is an integral part of the team. Uchenna gives motivational speeches to schools, and has spent many hours working with EarthTrek in the classroom. ●

Visit <http://www.earthtrekgames.com>, or stop by our table at the 2011 EARCOS Leadership conference in Bangkok, 29 October-1 November, as well as other international conferences throughout the year.

Take your 3-5th graders on a virtual race around the world! Earthtrek is an exciting hands-on learning program that targets math, science, reading, language, and social studies objectives. EarthTrek promotes global diversity and encourages students to work cooperatively as they trek around the world.

www.earthtrekgames.com
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