

INTRODUCTION

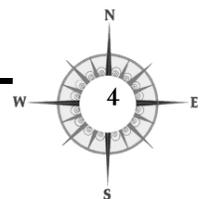
Virtual Voyages is an integrated thematic unit developed to weave together the academic strands of geography and literature into a single curriculum that fosters appreciation, awareness, and understanding of cultures around the world. The individualized research format meets the needs of gifted students to work within a particular area of passion, to work at an individualized pace, and to work with depth and breadth on projects that especially engage their interests. This unit can be used in conjunction with other educational materials that teach specific geography related and research skills. It is the goal of this interdisciplinary unit to inspire students to discover the rich cultural heritage of other countries and to enable them to build bridges of understanding around the world.

The format of planning a trip gives the unit a personal focus. Students frequently choose countries that are connected to the heritage of their families or a place that they are intrigued about visiting. Gifted students in particular relish connecting in meaningful ways with their own cultural traditions and exploring the exotic terrain of far away places.

Virtual Voyages was specifically designed for gifted middle school students. It allows for student choice and individual expression. Each student chooses a country and begins to plan a trip to their chosen destination. First students investigate ways to travel to the country and design a passport. They choose which cities to visit, create postcards of important landmarks, design a menu of traditional foods, visit the theater, historical sites, and plan a hike.

Sharon Creech's novel, *The Wanderer*, provides a perfect literary companion for this project. The "Dog Log" portion of the curriculum was created especially for this unit. Its goals are to provide students with another venue in which to make the virtual voyage personally meaningful as well as to enhance reading and writing skills.

"Virtual Voyages" allows students to express their learning and understanding in a wide variety of formats. The writing assignments can be adapted to individual learning styles. The requirements for projects, such as building a diorama and producing a painting in the style of an artist for the



country of choice, provide students with avenues of expression other than expository writing.

Poetry is a part of the “Dog Log” portion of the curriculum and many students who do not excel at expository writing find poetry to be an ideal venue for expressing themselves. The “Journey to the River” section provides another method for students to explore poetry as a form of expression and creativity.

The final product is only one measure of performance for this unit. Each individual piece should also be evaluated as well as the student's ability to work independently and with depth and detail.

