

Celebrating Geography Awareness Week

by | Jennifer Ward

• Keep 'em Reading •

Grades
K-2, 3-5

An Exploration on Land, Undersea, and into Space

Geography Awareness Week takes place annually during the third week of November throughout North America. Established by Congress in 1987, Geography Awareness Week aims to draw attention to what geography is and the many reasons why it is important, including:

- Children benefit from engaging in geography-related education that prepares them to participate in global pursuits and activities
- Geographical awareness deepens children's understanding of the world, which allows them to make educated decisions about the people, places, and environments with which they share the planet.

Geography is, in part, the study of the Earth's landscapes, people, places, environments, and regions--and how they all vary in their unique physical characteristics. Children's authors, myself included, have created a vast resource of geography-themed books that can provide a springboard for inquiry, discovery, and awareness of the world around us. Use the titles suggested in this article to

Get them thinking...

Before a unit of study, question students to get their perception of what they believe a region or biome is like. You might be surprised at what you discover! Document their responses. At the end of your unit of study, compare their obtained knowledge (what was learned) to their original responses.



explore what is out there, by land, by sea, by space, by book! After exploring and studying various biomes with students, provide students with an opportunity (such as a Venn diagram or chart) to compare and contrast the biomes. Don't forget to discuss your own biome, and why it falls into the category that it does.

Land Ho!

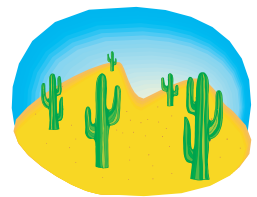
Biomes are the world's natural communities, each classified according to the vegetation and animals that live there. Land biomes include deserts, forests, grasslands and tundra.

Can You Say Dry?

Deserts cover approximately one fifth of the Earth's surface and rainfall is minimal. Plants and animals in desert regions have specialized physical characteristics and behaviors that help them survive in such harsh conditions where water is minimal to almost non-existent. Deserts can be hot and cold.

Suggesting springboard reading for learning about deserts includes:

- *A Desert Habitat: Introducing Habitats* by Kelley MacAulay, illustrated by Bobbie Kalman (Crabtree Publishing Company, 2006). Colorful photographs introduce readers to the flora and fauna of the Sonoran Desert.



Keep 'em Reading

- *A Walk in the Desert: Biomes of North America Series* by Rebecca L. Johnson, illustrated by Phyllis V. Saroff (Lerner Classroom, 2001). This book is appropriate for students ages 9–12, providing ample information and facts about the flora and fauna of deserts, while also helping students gain understanding that deserts are places that team with unique wildlife.
- *Cactus Hotel* by Brenda Z. Guiberson, illustrated by Megan Lloyd (Henry Holt, 1993). The amazing ecosystem of a saguaro cactus is explored in this classic book set in the Sonoran Desert. Students of all ages will gain awareness of the saguaro's 200 year life cycle, and the many animals that depend upon it (mammals, birds, reptiles, amphibians, insects and arachnids). This book is ideal to include in a study on desert biomes and also with a focus on animal classification. Accompany this reading with *Desert Giant: The World of the Saguaro Cactus* by Barbara Bash (Sierra Club Books, 1989) and *Deserts* by Gail Gibbons (Holiday House, 1999)
- *The Seed and the Giant Saguaro* by Jennifer Ward, illustrated by Mike Rangner (Rising Moon, 2003). Offers a glimpse at a food chain in the desert, beginning with a packrat who finds a piece of saguaro fruit on the ground. Unbeknownst to the packrat, it is spied by a rattlesnake, who is spied by a roadrunner, who is spied by a coyote. In the end, the cyclical cat and mouse chase ends with a new saguaro taking root in the desert. With its cumulative, rhyming text, this book is ideal for reading aloud and student recall/retelling, and makes a great supplement to units of study on the deserts.



Let's Get Leafy!

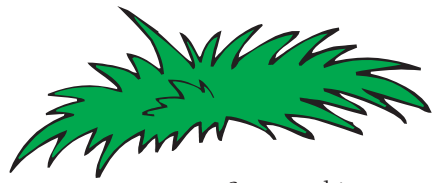
Forests encompass 30% of the planet's land area. Europe accounts for one fourth of total forest area, followed by South America and then North and Central America. South America has the highest percentage of forest cover, with almost half of its land area covered in forest. Asia has the lowest percentage of forest cover, with less than 20% of its land having forest (www.greenfacts.org). Some forest are tropical, some forests are boreal (cooler temperatures and trees with needle like leaves/evergreens), and some forests are temper-

ate, having distinct seasons and a true winter. Leaf through the following titles to give your students a better understanding about forests:

- *A Forest Habitat* by Bobbie Kalman (Crabtree Publishing Company, 2006) provides photographs and a basic understanding of a temperate forest and how the habitat changes along with each season. A nice introductory to temperate forests while offering a glimpse at plants and animals that many children in North America can identify.
- *Explore the Deciduous Forest* by Linda Tagliaferro (Capstone Press, 2007) is a chapter book geared for readers ages 9–12 that provides fun facts and much opportunity for research and data collection on forests for report writing.
- Provide students a glimpse at a forest habitat by day, and the same habitat by night, in the flip-flop book *Forest Bright, Forest Night* by Jennifer Ward and illustrated by Jamichael Henterly (Dawn Publications, 2005). Rich illustrations provide a backdrop for a single habitat over a twenty-four-hour period, and show how animals who live in that habitat behave throughout the span of a day.
- Tropical forests have the greatest diversity of plant and animal life and can be found near the equator. They generally have two seasons: a wet season and a dry season. Because of their proximity to the equator, the amount of daylight (generally twelve hours per day), varies little throughout the calendar year. Explore this rich biome with the book, *The Great Kapok Tree* by Lynn Cherry (Sandpiper, 2000), which depicts one tree and the many animals that depend upon it for survival. Accompany your study of the rainforest with Jane Yolen's lyrical picture book, *Welcome to the Green House*, illustrated by Laura Regan (Puffin, 1997), which offers a glimpse at the diverse wildlife, and colors, that inhabit this amazing habitat.

Grasslands

Prairies and grasslands are dominated by grasses, rather than trees and shrubs. When you think of these areas, you can picture the Savanna, which covers almost half the surface of Africa, as well as regions of Australia, South America and India.



Savanna biomes are drier and warmer than prairie biomes. “Home on the Range” (where the deer and the antelope play) is a song inspired by the prairie. Prairies are dominated by tall grasses, wildflowers and have temperate seasons. Very little of North America’s original prairie exists today (approximately 2%), as most has been converted to agricultural use and urban development.

Take a peek at these titles perfect for a study on grasslands:

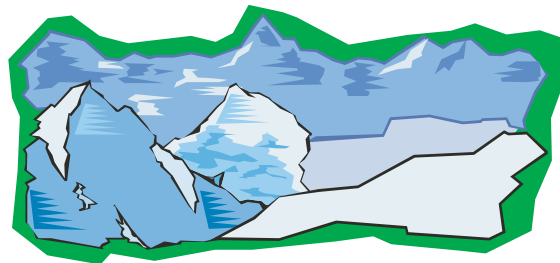
- *A Grassland Habitat* by Bobbie Kalman, (Crabtree Publishing, 2006) offers readers a look at the plants and animals that call the prairie home, and why the prairie is perfectly suited for the animals that live there.
- *Bringing the Rain to Kapiti Plain* by Verna Aardema and illustrated by Beatriz Vidal (Puffin, 1992), is a classic children’s book set on the African Savanna. In cumulative format along the lines of “The House That Jack Built,” children learn how a shepherd, Ki-pat, brings much needed rain to the grassy plain.
- *Explore the Grasslands* by Kay Jackson (Capstone Press, 2007) is perfect for older readers ages 9–12, and offers six chapters with vocabulary, photos, drawings, and rich content ideal for research papers and note taking.
- The timeless Little House on the Prairie series offers an authentic glimpse of history and settlers on the early American prairie. Independent readers are transcended to a time in American history where people lived off of the land. Now there is a picture book for younger readers, *A Little Prairie House* by Laura Ingalls Wilder, illustrated by Renee Graef (Harper Collins, 1999).
- Students will enjoy going on safari with a group of Maasai people as they travel across the Savanna in *We All Went on Safari* by Laurie Krebs, illustrated by Julia Cairns (Barefoot Books, 2004). In addition, children can practice counting from one to ten in English and in Swahili.

Brrrrr! The Tundra!

The tundra is the coldest of all biomes. It offers very little precipitation, a short growing season of approximately fifty days, and frost in its landscape.

The Arctic tundra encircles the north pole. Alpine tundra is found on mountains throughout the world where trees cannot grow.

- In *Arctic Lights, Arctic Nights* by Debbie S. Miller, illustrations by Jon Van Zyle (Walker Books, 2007), the author, who lives in Alaska, details the season of light and dark as those in the Arctic Circle experience them. Children will be introduced to a variety of wildlife in the area.
- For older and independent readers, *Explore the Tundra* by Linda Tagliaferro (Capstone Press, 2008) introduces students to tundra areas on a world map, as well as the plants and animals who live there. In this particular book, readers also meet an ecologist who is studying the tundra to learn more about climate change. Vivid photos with engaging facts and content make this book an ideal springboard for research and data collection.
- *This Place is Cold* by Vicki Cobb, illustrated by Barbara Lavalley (Walker Books for Young Readers, 1990), introduces readers to the plants and animals of the Arctic, while also introducing vocabulary relevant to the region, such as permafrost.
- *Way Up in the Arctic* by Jennifer Ward, illustrated by Ken Spengler (Rising Moon, 2007) is a colorful counting and rhyming book set to the original tune, “Over in the Meadow,” and perfect for younger readers, ages 4–8. Hidden numbers in each illustration make it a fun, visual read-aloud, while children also get a glimpse of the plants and animals that call the Arctic home. A glossary of facts is included in the back, as well as a musical score.



Exploring Oceans

Oceans, the huge bodies of water that dominate our planet, are the largest of all biomes. Dive into the following books to give readers a glimpse at this watery wonder:



- *Atlantic* by G. Brian Karas (Puffin, 2004) offers a unique narrator, the Atlantic Ocean, who speaks to children in its own child-like voice. This book offers young readers a geographic glimpse at the Atlantic Ocean and serves as an ideal springboard for units of study on oceans and the writing element, voice.
- *Down, Down, Down: A Journey to the Bottom of the Sea* by Steve Jenkins (Houghton Mifflin, 2009) begins just below the ocean's surface and takes readers down, down, down to the Marianas Trench—36,000 feet below the surface! A perfect top-to-bottom peek at the wonders below the ocean's surface.
- *Explore the Ocean* by Kay Jackson (Capstone Press, 2007) is geared for older readers ages 9–12, who will be introduced to the major oceans on a world map while as they learn about animals and plants in deep and shallow water. Humans' roles in the ecology of the ocean are also explored.
- For preschool and elementary ages, *Somewhere in the Ocean* by Jennifer Ward et al, illustrated by Ken Spengler (Rising Moon, 2000) invites readers to count through the ocean while being introduced to a variety of animals that call the ocean home. A glossary is included to offer additional facts about the animals presented in the book.
- *The Underwater Alphabet Book* by Jerry Palotta, illustrated by Edgar Stewart (Charlesbridge, 1991), introduces readers to a colorful coral reef, from A–Z.

Let's Race to Space!

- *If You Decide to Go to the Moon* by Faith McNulty, illustrated by Steven Kellog (Scholastic Press, 2005) is a travel manual must for classrooms studying space. The young narrator includes readers on the journey with him, while the text invites readers to ponder, wonder and imagine what such a trek might really be like. Toward the end of the book, as readers head back to Earth, they get a glimpse of Earth's geography, and all we have to be thankful for on our planet rich with life.
- *Looking Down* by Steve Jenkins, (Sandpiper, 2003), is a wordless book. Children will see Earth from outer space, and with each page turn they are zoomed in closer and closer, ultimately ending with a child's eye view of nature, a ladybug, through a magnifying glass.
- Starting at Earth, readers take a journey out into space, past planets, the sun, and out into the Milky Way Galaxy and beyond, while reading *Me and My Place in Space* by Joan Sweeney, illustrated by Annette Cable (Dragonfly Books, 1999). This simple book also offers space-related vocabulary.
- In *Postcards from Pluto: A Tour of the Solar System* by Loreen Leedy (Holiday House, 2006), a group of children travel to each of the planets in the solar system and write postcards back to Earth, sharing information about what they discover on each planet. Not only is the book packed with facts about each planet, but teachers may enjoy integrating letter writing and voice to their lessons about space, as this book provides a segue into those subjects, as well.
- *What's Out There? A Book About Space* by Lynn Wilson, illustrated by Paige Billin Frye (Grosset and Dunlap, 1993) offers readers a glimpse of stars, planets, moons, asteroids, meteoroids and comets. Our solar system is explored in an easy to read and easy to understand format.

Bibliography and Further Reading

- *A Desert Habitat* (Introducing Habitats) by Kelley MacAulay, illustrated by Bobbie Kalman. Crabtree Publishing Company, 2006.
- *A Forest Habitat* by Bobbie Kalman. Crabtree Publishing Company, 2006.
- *A Grassland Habitat* by Bobbie Kalman. Crabtree Publishing, 2006.
- *A Little Prairie House* by Laura Ingalls Wilder, illustrated by Renee Graef. HarperCollins, 1999.
- *Amazing Biome Projects You Can Build Yourself* by Donna Latham, illustrated by Farah Rizvi . Nomad Press, 2009.

- *Arctic Lights, Arctic Nights* by Debbie S. Miller, illustrated by Jon Van Zyle. Walker Books, 2007.
- *Atlantic* by G. Brian Karas. Puffin, 2004.
- Biomes of North America Series by Rebecca L. Johnson, illustrated by Phyllis V. Saroff. Lerner Classroom, 2001.
 - *A Walk in the Boreal Forest*
 - *A Walk in the Deciduous Forest*
 - *A Walk in the Desert*
 - *Walk in the Prairie*
 - *A Walk in the Rainforest*
 - *A Walk in the Tundra*
- *Bringing the Rain to Kapiti Plain* by Verna Aardema and illustrated by Beatriz Vidal. Puffin, 1992.
- *Cactus Hotel* by Brenda Z. Guiberson, illustrated by Megan Lloyd. Henry Holt, 1993.
- *Deserts* by Gail Gibbons. Holiday House, 1999.
- *Desert Giant: The World of the Saguaro Cactus* by Barbara Bash. Sierra Club Books, 1989.
- *Down, Down, Down to the Bottom of the Sea* by Steve Jenkins. Houghton Mifflin, 2009.
- *Explore the Deciduous Forest* by Linda Tagliaferro. Capstone Press, 2007. (Ages 9–12)
- *Explore the Grasslands* by Kay Jackson. Capstone Press, 2007. (Ages 9–12)
- *Explore the Ocean* by Kay Jackson. Capstone Press, 2007.
- *Explore the Tundra* by Linda Tagliaferro. Capstone Press, 2008. (Ages 9–12)
- *Forest Bright, Forest Night* by Jennifer Ward, illustrated by Jamichael Henterly. Dawn Publications, 2005.
- *Hottest, Coldest, Highest, Deepest* by Steve Jenkins. Sandpiper, 2004.
- *I See a Kookaburra* by Steve Jenkins and Robin Page. Houghton Mifflin, 2005.
- *If You Decide to Go to the Moon* by Faith McNulty, illustrated by Steven Kellog. Scholastic, 2005.
- *Looking Down* by Steve Jenkins. Sandpiper, 2003.
- *Many Biomess, One Earth* by Sneed B. Collar III, illustrated by James M. Needham. Charlesbridge, 2009.
- *Me and My Place in Space* by Joan Sweeney, illustrated by Annette Cable. Dragonfly Books, 1999.
- *Postcards from Pluto: A Tour of the Solar System* by Loreen Leedy. Holiday House, 2006.
- *Somewhere in the Ocean* by Jennifer Ward, illustrated by Ken Spengler. Rising Moon, 2000.
- *The Great Kapok Tree* by Lynn Cherry. Sandpiper, 2000.

- *The Seed and the Giant Saguaro* by Jennifer Ward, illustrated by Mike Rangner. Rising Moon, 2003.
- *The Underwater Alphabet Book* by Jerry Palotta, illustrated by Edgar Stewart. Charlesbridge, 1991.
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- *We All Went on Safari* by Laurie Krebs, illustrated by Julia Cairns. Barefoot Books, 2004.
- *Welcome to the Green House* by Jane Yolen, illustrated by Laura Regan. Puffin, 1997.
- *What's Out There? A Book About Space* by Lynn Wilson, illustrated by Paige Billin Frye. Grosset and Dunlap, 1993.

Further Biomes Reading for Adventurous Minds

- *Amazing Biome Projects You Can Build Yourself* by Donna Latham, illustrated by Farah Rizvi. Nomad Press, 2009. (Ages 9–12) The title says it all! Give young explorers the opportunity to create their own biome.
- *I See a Kookaburra* by Steve Jenkins and Robin Page (Houghton Mifflin, 2005) provides an I Spy exploration of six biomes around the world, including a map of their locales.
- *Many Biomess, One Earth* by Sneed B. Collar III, illustrated by James M. Needham. Charlesbridge, 2009.



Jennifer Ward is the author of numerous acclaimed children's books and parenting books, including the picture book, *The Busy Tree* (Marshall Cavendish, 2009), which won the 2010 Growing Good Kids Book Award—an award for children's literature that connects children to the environment, and *It's a Jungle Out There!* 52 Nature Adventures for City Kids. A former elementary educator, she now writes full time from her home in Illinois. Visit her on the Web at jenniferwardbooks.com.

