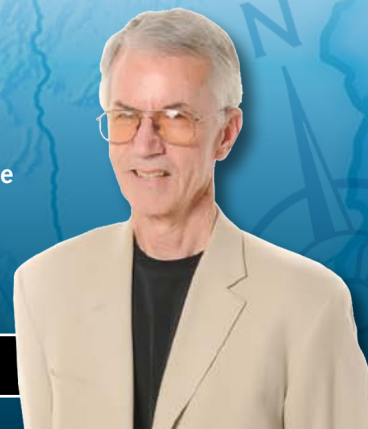


# Supporting Geography Learners with Texts

**A**s they study geography, students learn how to use a spatial perspective to think about the world and find out how physical settings influence people—and how people influence physical settings. They come to understand that knowing why a place developed where it did can help them interpret the past, analyze the present, and anticipate the future.

David W. Moore



Geography texts are major resources for middle school students, who are just learning to think and act like geographers. Print and digital texts tell about cultural and geographic phenomena that often are too big, too distant, and too complex for students to experience firsthand. These texts also contribute insights and ways of thinking that deepen understandings of phenomena that can be experienced directly.

Research reviews published during the 2000s (Carnegie Council on Advancing Adolescent Literacy, 2010; Kamil et al., 2008; Torgeson et al., 2007) point to effective ways to support middle school instruction using texts. Two principles derived from these reviews underlie National Geographic's *World Cultures and Geography* program: engage learners with considerate texts and engage learners in active processing.

## ENGAGE LEARNERS WITH CONSIDERATE TEXTS

Considerate texts are reader-friendly materials that learners find understandable and memorable (Armbruster & Anderson, 1985). A key feature of considerate texts is the way in which they present important relationships (Armbruster, 2002). At a global level, this means helping readers see how big ideas and overarching themes unify what is presented (Goldman & Rakestraw, 2000). For example, *World Cultures and Geography* regularly poses essential questions, such as “How has geography influenced cultures around the world?” These questions help students integrate concepts and bring structure to supporting details.

At a local level, considerate texts are well organized and clearly guide readers through their content (Goldman & Rakestraw, 2000). This means providing explicit main idea statements, introductory paragraphs, and headings and subheadings and combining verbal and visual information (Mayer, 2001). For instance, a

lesson in the program on China's early dynasties begins with an introduction to the concept of dynasties. The headings that follow indicate that each dynasty is presented one at a time. A time line is included to illustrate the chronology of the dynasties.

A considerate text is also appropriate for its audience: it connects with its readers' prior knowledge and interests (Armbruster, 2002). For example, a lesson in the program on Istanbul explains the ways in which the city's geographical location—similar to other cities students may be familiar with—has contributed to its position as a center of trade and culture. The lesson concludes with a discussion of current plans to build an earthquake-proof tunnel under the Bosphorus Strait for high-speed trains, an undertaking that may interest students on several levels.

As digital communication technologies have emerged, definitions of texts have broadened (Coiro, Knobel, Lankshear, & Leu, 2008). Today, tools such as video screens, Web sites, and podcasts are merging with and sometimes replacing books, paper, and pencils. Considerate digital texts offer readers the opportunity to combine information, including print and images. In line with these new digital resources, the *World Cultures and Geography* program provides videos, a digital library, online maps and graphs, and interactive whiteboard materials.

## ENGAGE LEARNERS IN ACTIVE PROCESSING

Considerate texts are crucial parts of instruction, but they are effective only when learners actively process them (Israel & Duffy, 2008; McNamara, 2007). For instance, learners actively process texts when they preview a lesson's contents, summarize what they have read, and synthesize what they have just learned with what they already know.

Texts can prompt learners to engage in active processing in several ways (Hartley, 2004). Interspersed questions are especially effective (Wood, Lapp, Flood, & Taylor, 2008). The *World Cultures and Geography* program uses several types of questions. **Before You Move On** questions, which are placed at the end of each lesson, guide learners to elaborate the main idea statement that introduces the lesson. **Critical Viewing** questions regularly prompt learners to interpret images. **Review** questions at the end of each chapter encourage active reconsideration of the chapter's essential questions, main ideas, and visuals.

Text prompts that involve learners in writing and discussion also engage learners in active processing (Newell, 2008; Nystrand, 2006). *World Cultures and Geography* provides regular opportunities for learners to write about texts through writing labs, structured reading and note-taking, and guided writing. The

program also offers regular opportunities for learners to write and talk about texts through active options based on cooperative learning strategies.

Finally, differentiated text prompts generate active processing by accommodating learners with different levels of academic preparedness and approaches to learning (Tomlinson, 2005). The program's Teacher's Edition includes instructional strategies appropriate for English language learners, gifted and talented students, inclusion students, pre-Advanced Placement students, and striving readers.

The two principles underlying *World Cultures and Geography* are complementary. Engaging learners with considerate texts goes far in promoting active processing, and engaging learners in active processing occurs best with considerate texts. As a result, the program provides middle school students with a meaningful introduction to geography.

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