

1. A rationale for the proposed unit

This series of lessons will be taught as part of a Social Studies unit. The first part of the unit focuses on comparing student life in the present with student life in the past (focusing on the American one room schoolhouse). This next part extends the idea to have students compare student life across cultures. Students will already be familiar with the compare and contrast chart (similar to a Venn diagram) and will have used it in class previously. Students will also already have learned about the map, including the locations of the seven continents and four oceans. They will be able to locate California and the United States on a map and will be familiar with Asia before we begin. This series of lessons is particularly relevant for my many students whose parents are immigrants themselves. Students will learn that their own life experiences may be vastly different from the experiences of others, including their parents, based on where they are located. This unit involves sending pen pal letters to a class in Beijing. This will occur through a teacher I met on a language-learning app (Tandem), but other teachers can use the internet to find elementary teachers in China who are interested in exchanging letters. All exchanges are done through the teachers to ensure safety and privacy. This way students can learn about life in Asia through the eyes of students like them.

2. Skill and content objectives

Objectives:

- Students will view videos, images, and letters to compare everyday life across cultures and learn how their lives are similar and different to the lives of others
- Students will use a compare and contrast chart to record ideas.
- Students will work collaboratively to write a letter to an elementary school class in Beijing to find out more about student life in China.

California Social Studies Standards

1.2 Students compare and contrast the absolute and relative locations of places and people and describe the physical and/or human characteristics of places.

1.4 Students compare and contrast everyday life in different times and places around the world and recognize that some aspects of people, places, and things change over time while others stay the same.

California Language Arts Standard

- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.1.1
Participate in collaborative conversations with diverse partners about *grade 1 topics and texts* with peers and adults in small and larger groups.
- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.1.7
Participate in shared research and writing projects

3. Detailed lesson plan

Day 1 – Introduction

Hook (10 minutes)

- On the first day, I will remind students that we live in Los Angeles, California, in the United States. We will find it on a Google Maps. We will also use Google Maps to review the seven continents and four oceans.
- I will have them give me examples of other places they might know. I will record these answers. We will find some of these places on Google Maps and compare how long it might take to get to them.
- Finally, I will ask students what ideas they have about how life might be the same or different in other places for a first grader. I will record these answers so that we can return to them at the end of the unit.

Group Activity (15 minutes)

- First we will set a baseline by describing the students' everyday lives. I will have students discuss the following questions in small groups, giving questions one at a time:
 - How do you get to school?
 - What do you wear to school?
 - What activities do you do in school?
 - What kinds of things do you learn?
 - What rules are there in school?
 - What games do you play with your friends?
 - What do you like to do after school?
- After each question, groups will share their responses and I will record them. We will point out similarities between students as well as differences, showing that experiences can vary even within the same community.

Closing (5 minutes)

- Students will turn and talk with a partner to discuss: How are our daily lives the same? How is mine different from yours?

Day 2 – Life in Other Places

Hook – (5 minutes)

- I will post the following two images side-by-side and ask students what is the same about them – they are showing the same landmasses, the same location. Then I will ask them to list differences. We will focus on the fact that one says “Sea of Japan” and one says “East Sea.” I will ask students for their ideas as to why that is.
- I will explain to students that, while many people call this body of water the “Sea of Japan,” in Korea, students might learn to call it the “East Sea.”
- This is one example of how the things you learn in school can be affected by your location.





Whole Group (20 minutes)

- I will show the following video clips and images. For each one, we will discuss what looks similar and what looks different from the students' lives.

- Japanese language class (2020)



- Rwanda (2019)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VAm7h1N41Rs>

- Learning English in Italy (2014)



- A Day in the Life of a Costa Rican School (2014)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4IR741maDPw>

- We will discuss that not every school in each country looks the same (just as the students did not all have the same kindergarten experience in Los Angeles).

- We will discuss the reasons behind some of the differences (e.g. the Japanese students are learning characters different than our alphabet because that is the form of writing used in that country).

Closing (10 minutes)

- Students will write in their journals their response to the question: What is one way school is different in other countries? What is one way they are the same?

Day 3 – Student Life in China

Hook (10 minutes):

- I will ask students what they think of when they hear “China.” I will write down their answers as we activate background knowledge.
- We will go onto Google Maps and find Asia, then China.
- We will find the biggest cities in China, such as Shanghai, Beijing, and Chongqing.
- We will also look at photos of other parts of China, such as the Longsheng Rice Terraces, the Gobi Desert, and the Himalayas, to get a sense of China’s geographic diversity.
- We will then focus on Beijing. We will find out how long it takes to get to Beijing. We will look at photos of some of the most famous places in Beijing, including the Great Wall, the Forbidden City, Tiananmen Square, and the Temple of Heaven.
- We will discuss what we notice in the photos and how they compare to Los Angeles.

Group Discussion (10 minutes)

- We will watch the following video about student life in Beijing:
- https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=a_VbHhMrwtw
- We will discuss how the girl’s life is similar and different to the lives of the students.
- Key discussion points include:
- Similarities – trying to do your best in school, liking some subjects more than others, learning history, working with classmates on a project, having a tutor, feeling tired at the end of the day
- Differences – speaking, reading, writing in Chinese, learning Chinese history instead of US history, different extracurriculars, learning English in school, raising the Chinese flag

Writing Integration (20 minutes)

- I will introduce the concept of a pen pal as someone you write to who lives in another place.
- I will explain that we are going to write to a class of first graders in Beijing and be their pen pals.
- The class will brainstorm a list of questions we have for them. These may be very similar to the questions I posed to the students on Day 1.
- We will write a letter as a class, which will then be emailed to the class in Beijing.

4. A plan for assessing student achievement

Day 4 – Showing What We’ve Learned

- When we receive a response from the Beijing class, we will read it together.
- We will discuss what new information we have learned about student life in Beijing.

- Students will take out their writing notebooks and create a chart like the one below:

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Life in the USA	Both	Life in China

- We will begin filling out the chart together by coming up with one thing that is the same (e.g. We learn how to add and subtract.) and one thing that is different (e.g. We celebrate the New Year on January 1st. They celebrate Chinese New Year on a different day.)
- Students will be responsible for writing at least three more items in each box using complete sentences, drawing on their correspondence with the other class as well as the video from Day 3.
- When finished, students will share their ideas with the class and turn in the chart.
- We will revisit the chart we made on Day 1 about students' predictions on how life in other places might be similar to or different from ours.
- We will respond to our pen pals' letter and continue writing to them periodically for the rest of the school year.