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Dr. Jesse Palmer & Dr. John C. Davis

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Using Games and Folklore to Extend Children's Literature

JESSE PALMER and JOHN C. DAVIS

One of the many ways to teach children's literature is by using folklore to teach about world cultures. Folklore is a vehicle to transmit knowledge from older to younger generations. The survival of folklore over the centuries is an indication of its interest and importance to both tellers and listeners.

Folklore can make interesting lessons for children and can be easily adapted to educational games. By using these techniques, the creative teacher can focus on almost any aspect of a culture.

Folklore comprises a huge body of literature that has proven reader appeal. Most folk literature is presented in a direct and simple style incorporating action and colorful characters that appeal to all levels of readers. Folklore provides an exciting door to the heart of any nation's history and culture. A teacher can choose from thousands of well-written, illustrated works that focus on almost any aspect of culture.

Educational gaming is one of the methods introduced by educators such as Freidrick Froebel and John Dewey, both of whom postulated a learning-by-doing-approach. As an old Chinese proverb has it,

When I hear, I forget,
When I see, I remember.
When I do, I learn.

In this context, encouraging the use of games and folklore is a method of freeing children from standardized habits and patterns of thinking, putting learning at students' fingertips in an interesting and colorful manner. This method allows children to discover, generalize, conceptualize, observe, experiment, explore, tell, participate, interact, judge, synthesize, transfer, solve problems, socialize, analyze, and just have fun.

Abt (1968) stressed that the design of an educational game is different from that of a game that is strictly for entertainment. The main objective of the educational

game is to educate. According to Gillespie (1972), classroom games are based on the elements of choice, moves, and rules, and these elements determine what the students will learn from the game. Teachers need to determine if the game is interesting, if it can be played in a classroom setting, and if it has a sound knowledge base. Teachers can ask themselves certain questions to analyze and evaluate the game and determine its educational value:

1. What is the central problem presented in the game?
2. What choices are available to players?
3. What are the different moves or activities provided for players?
4. What are the rules for the game?
5. How is the game organized?
6. What summary activities conclude the game? (Gillespie 1972)

Learning through games has several advantages. First, students are actively involved in the learning process, which leads to a greater focus by each student on the subject matter. Second, the student is able to see the results of his or her actions, and the teacher's role becomes more like that of a coach than that of an instructor. Most educators would agree that quick feedback is a valuable reinforcement of learning. Third, if the game involves a combination of skill and chance, students of different abilities can participate and learn together (Coleman 1967). Finally, the greatest advantage of educational games is that they improve the students' motivation (Abt 1968). If educational games did nothing more than motivate the players that would be sufficient justification for using them.

The proper game can encourage synthesis and analysis when students consider various courses of action and analyze the relationships among the facts at their disposal. Games nurture an intellectual approach by encouraging students to apply what they have learned to a slightly different situation.

Once students have been introduced to subject matter by playing a game, they can be expected to continue to

Dr. Palmer is an assistant professor, and Dr. Davis is an associate professor, both in the Department of Curriculum and Instruction, University of Southern Mississippi.

be interested when the game is followed by conventional methods of teaching. The inclination to play is a natural urge for almost everyone, and that urge should be cultivated by an innovative teacher.

Folklore provides an exciting door to the heart of a nation's history and geography. An example is Samuel Goodrich's *Tales of Peter Parley about America* (1827). Goodrich, one of the most prolific authors of his day, was born in Ridgefield, Connecticut, in 1793. He was responsible for over 170 books, many of which dealt with social studies, during the years 1827 to 1860. Goodrich assumed the pen name Peter Parley from the French word *parler*, to talk, and wrote tales that have enchanted children over the years (Palmer, Smith, and Davis 1988). One of his stories is about the adventures of James Jenkins.

Off the coast of western America, in the northern Pacific, James Jenkins was saved from hostile Indians by a whaling ship. Jenkins had been captured by the Indians while on a trading voyage and held for eight months. He had no less than four arrows in him when he was rescued. Jenkins became part of the whaling crew, and the ship moved up into the Bering Strait. They harpooned some whales, melted the blubber, and continued to fish for eighteen months. Jenkins went ashore at the Kamchatka Peninsula in Russia while the ship stopped for supplies. When the ship moved south into warmer water, several of the men went into the ocean to bathe. Among them was James Jenkins. While he was swimming about, some of the men in the boat saw a shark near the surface, chasing Jenkins. They called out to him, and he swam with all his might toward the boat. He had just reached it, and they were pulling him in, when the shark seized one of his legs, biting it off.

The men managed to get Jenkins on board the vessel and did everything they could to save his life. But the poor fellow grew faint and gave his last wishes: "Go to my friend Peter Parley. If my good old mother is living, let her have what little property I leave behind. If she is not living tell Peter Parley to take the property himself." Jenkins then closed his eyes and died.

Several games were developed specifically to extend the folk literature of Peter Parley. The first game is Peter Parley's Tales of the Sea (figure 1). The purpose of this game is to develop skills in reading, writing, thinking, following directions, cooperating, using numbers, communicating, and answering questions about story content, as well as to build vocabulary. This game includes questions, bonus, and penalty cards that can easily be constructed by the teacher to address any specific topic that she or he chooses (for example, *Where is Kamchatka?*). Bonus cards can match this game specifically or a generic set may be used with games based on other stories. An example might read, *You escaped from a hungry shark; move ahead one space*. In the same manner, the penalty cards can be specific or generic (*The boat is beginning to sink—lose one turn*). The students use game markers to move around the board—anything the teacher chooses to use.

According to Sparks and Conoley (1980), when a board game is introduced to a class, the teacher should demonstrate by playing with a small group. The teacher should define the objective clearly, so that students will view the game as part of the regular curriculum.

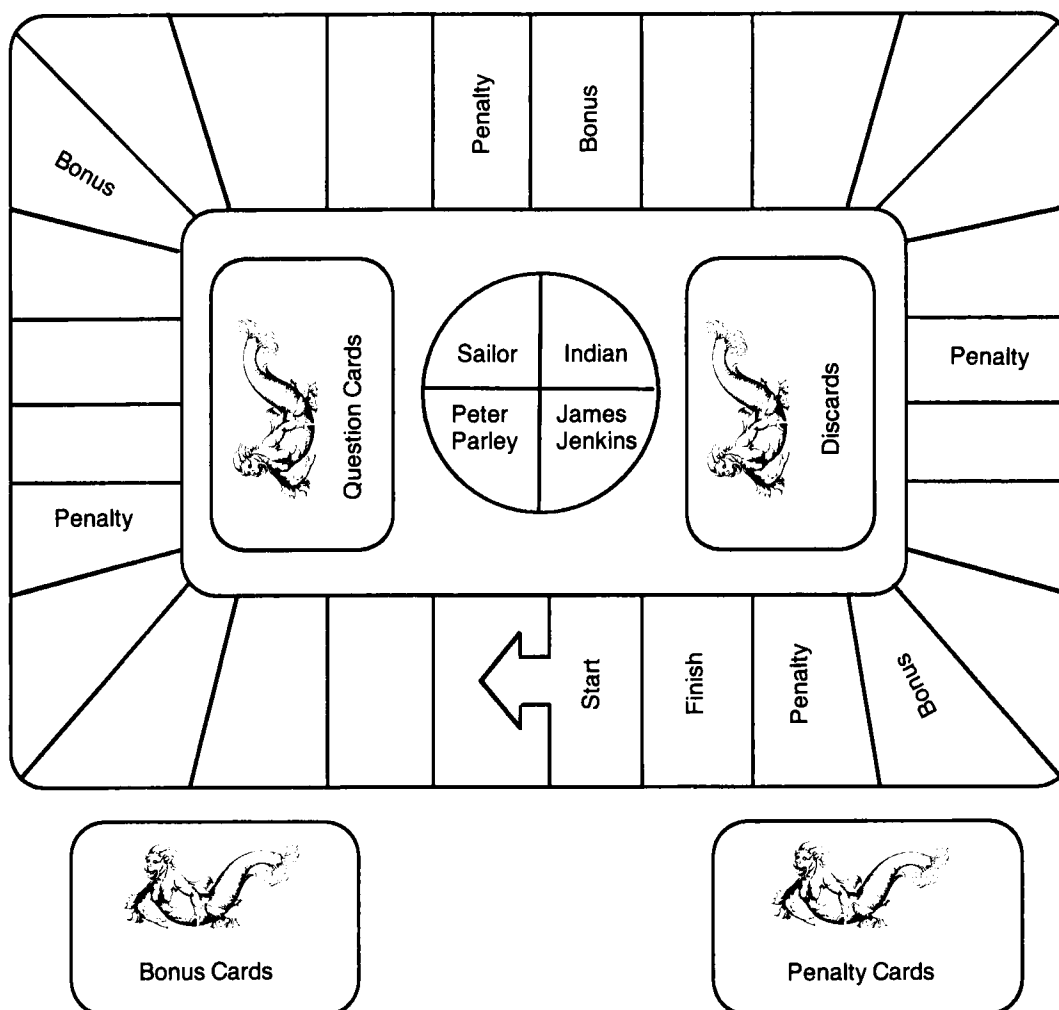
Another game specifically for Parley's tales about James Jenkins is the Ship Cross-Section Game (figure 2). The purpose of this game is to give students the opportunity to learn basic ship construction, enrich vocabulary, develop skills of listing and listening, demonstrate cooperation with peers, practice problem solving, follow directions, and answer questions about story content. In the Ship Cross-Section Game, a bit of velcro next to each number allows the students to attach the numbers to the board when they have answered the questions.

Folk literature can also embody other cultures' explanations of natural events. For example, the Australian aborigines have interesting folklore about how the sun came into being. This lore may be used to stimulate interest in the aborigine culture and lead to a study of Australia in greater depth.

Long ago the earth was dark, and the moon and stars watched over the birds and animals. One day, a quarrel occurred between two of the birds, a crane and an emu. One of the emu's eggs burst, and the yellow yolk caused a great fire. The animals were astonished because they were accustomed to darkness. The Good Spirit living in the sky thought the bright light was beautiful and believed it was a good idea to have a bright light every day. So every morning, the Good Spirit would send out a morning star to warn the animals and birds that the sky was going to brighten. However, this was futile because all the animals still slept when the morning star appeared. Looking for a way to wake the animals every morning, the good spirit sent the Goo-Goor-Gaga, the laughing jackass, to fly around and make loud noises so everyone could see the bright light shine each morning. The Goo-Goor-Gaga was told, "If you can't do this, then the sun will shine no more." He agreed to laugh every morning, and thanks to the Goo-Goor-Gaga, we have a sun that burns all day. If children try to mock his laughter, then the sun might stop shining, and you might grow an extra eye tooth (adapted from "How the Sun was Made", in *Australian Legendary Tales*, collected by K. Langloh Parker, Viking, 1966, selected and edited by M. Drake-Brockman).

From this folklore the students come to understand that day and night were important to the aborigines, who lived under the stars and survived through hunting and gathering food. The necessities of life for the aborigines were directly related to the passing of each day. To extend this tale and teach more about Australia, we developed several games. One game is called The Travels of Emu (figure 3). The purpose of this game is to help students use basic map skills, extend their vocabulary, develop skills of observation, develop the ability to follow directions, practice problem solving, and demonstrate cooperation.

FIGURE 1
Peter Parley's Tales of the Sea



Directions

1. Each player (4) chooses to be either James Jenkins, Peter Parley, a sailor, or an Indian.
2. The players roll the die to see who will move first.
3. The number on the die indicates the number of blocks the player will move along the board, but before the player moves, he must draw a question card and answer it correctly.
4. The penalty, bonus, and question cards should be shuffled and placed face down.
5. Players alternate drawing from the card pile. The player drawing from the card pile reads aloud the situation and/or question. Upon answering the question correctly, the player makes the designated move. If the question is answered incorrectly, the player must forfeit his turn.
6. The cards are returned to the bottom of each respective pile after the move.
7. The players continue to alternate throwing the die, answering the questions, and abiding by

the penalty and bonus cards until a player reaches the "Finish" square.

Extension

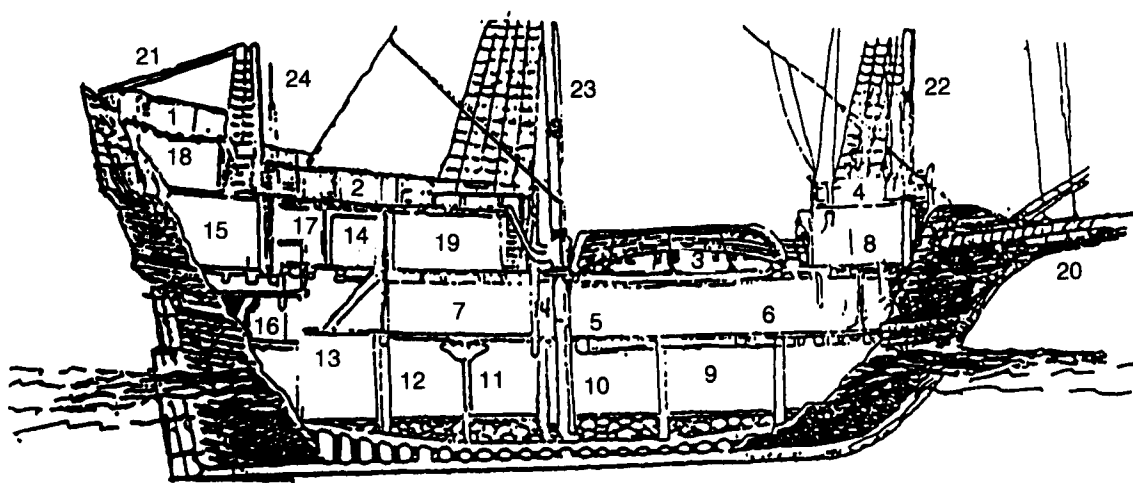
1. Construct new questions
2. Construct new game, story, or ending
3. Travelogs or class mural
4. Use music and write additional episodes
5. Construct a mural, mobile, or diorama
6. Make a theme poster
7. Do a research report
8. Share experiences
9. Make skit of adventures
10. Do illustrations
11. Could construct a navigation game
12. Could construct a navigation map
13. Could construct a pictorial map
14. Use reinforcement table
15. Pantomime
16. Play "What Character Am I?"
17. Make a gameboard or puzzle

FIGURE 2
The Ship Cross-Section Game

Directions

One to four people can play the game. A monitor with the answer pages directs the play. The students roll the die to see who will play first. The player has 10 to 15 seconds to take a number and place it in the cor-

rect location of the ship. If the player cannot place the number in the correct location, he does not get a point. The player with the highest number of points wins. (One point per correct answer.)



- | | | |
|--|---|--|
| 1. Stern deck | 10. Cargo | 18. Captain's Great Room Great Cabin (in the stemcastle) |
| 2. Quarter deck | 11. General stores | 19. Pens |
| 3. Upper deck | 12. Barrels of water | 20. Beak |
| 4. Forecastle | 13. Barrels of biscuit and flour | 21. Bowsprit |
| 5. Main deck | 14. Temporary cabin | 22. Foremast |
| 6. Crew's quarters | 15. Special cabins | 23. Mainmast |
| 7. Boatswain's store | 16. Tiller room | 24. Mizzenmast |
| 8. Galley, with cooking range | 17. Helmsman with whipstaff connected to the tiller | |
| 9. Main hold (containing cargo and supplies) | | |

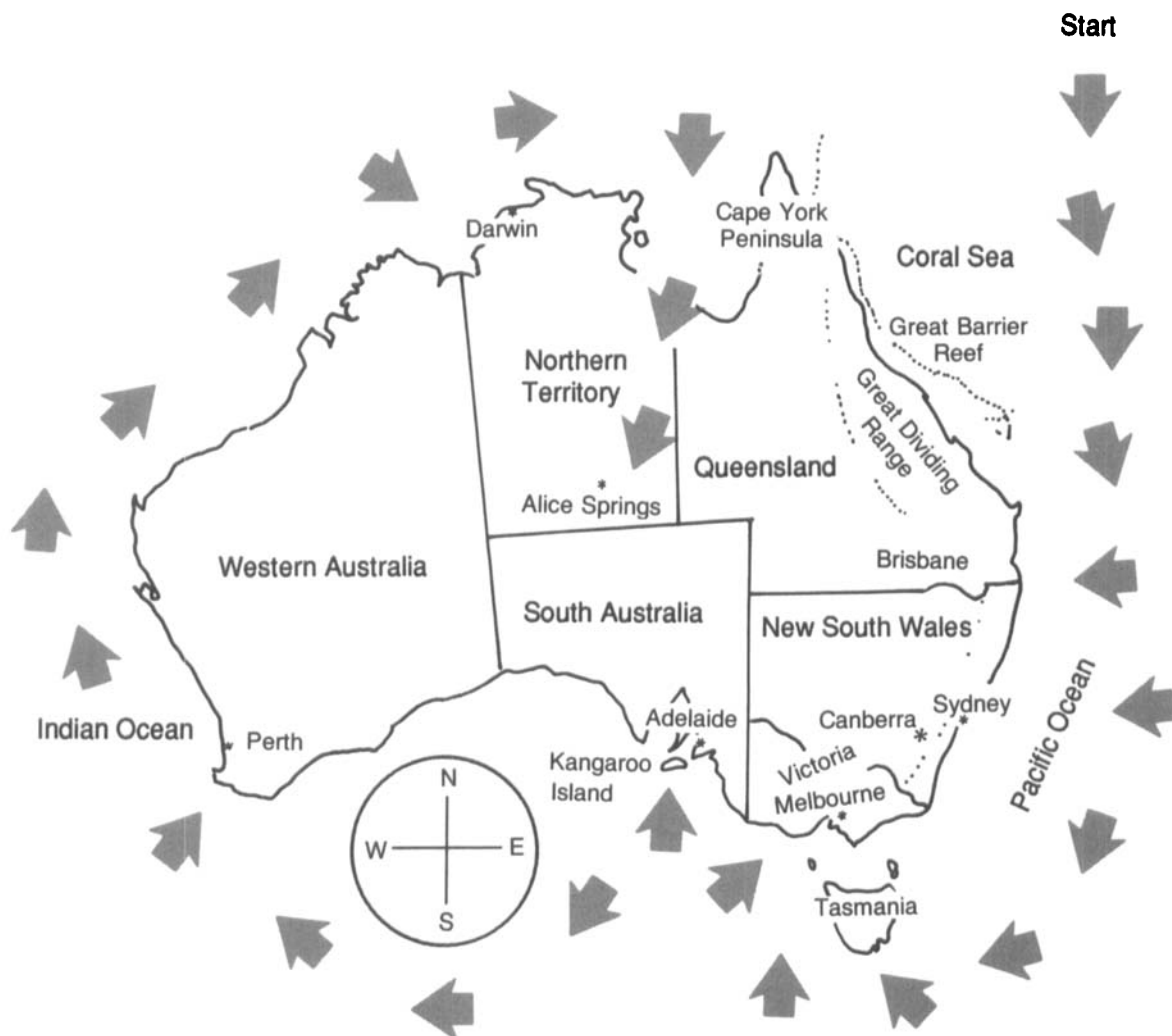
Extension

- | | |
|---|---|
| 1. Use related literature for extra reading | 6. Construct a ship puzzle |
| 2. Compare and contrast boats | 7. Do ship art activities that illustrate ships |
| 3. Play sailing music | 8. Make a skit about ships |
| 4. Let students redesign the ship | 9. Make a mural or diorama about ships |
| 5. Let students build ships | 10. Cargo |
| | 11. General Stores |
| | 12. Discuss water safety |

FIGURE 3
The Travels of Emu

Directions

1. Study the game board.
2. There will be four players or teams.
3. Spin the wheel to determine the order of play.
4. The number on the wheel indicates the number of spaces the player will move along the board.
5. The first player to reach a location removes the place name.
6. The next player to land at that location must name it to continue. If the location is named correctly, the name is returned to the board.
7. The player moves around the board as the arrows indicate.
8. The first player to reach Alice Springs wins the game.



Extension

1. Use related literature
2. Make new questions for game
3. Compare and contrast maps
4. Play Australian music
5. Use reinforcement table
6. Make up a play or skit about one of the cities
7. Construct a puzzle about one of the locations
8. Construct a mural or a pictorial map
9. Make a shoebox diorama about one of the locations
10. Write a research report on one of these sections
11. Make a mobile of the location
12. Construct a puzzle
13. Do art activities

FIGURE 4
Emu's Basic Map Skills

Directions

1. One to four people can play the game at once.
2. A monitor is recommended, but the game can be played without one.
3. If a monitor is used, he asks questions and monitors the time. (An inexpensive timer should be used, but a watch can be substituted.)
4. The players throw a die to establish the playing order.
5. Each player starts with 22 EMU CREDIT CARDS that are placed side by side on EMU'S CREDIT BOARD. The players' number (1-4) is written on the strips directly underneath EMU'S CREDIT CARDS.
6. The first player studies the map and the monitor asks a question from EMU'S LOCATION CHART.
7. The player is given 30 seconds to respond to the question.
8. If the player gives the correct answer, he will be allowed to keep his EMU CREDIT CARD.
9. If the player gives a wrong answer or cannot answer, he will lose one EMU CREDIT CARD from his credit line.
10. The next player who answers correctly gets to add the extra EMU CREDIT CARD to his line.
11. After 15 minutes, the player with the most EMU CREDIT CARDS is declared the winner.

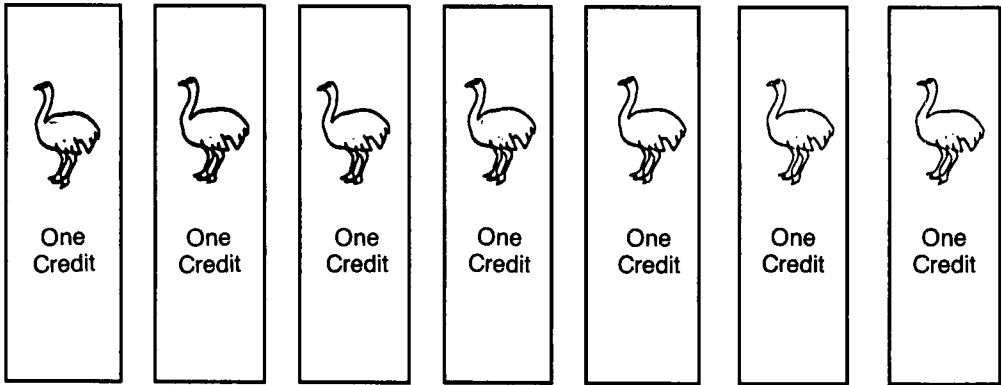
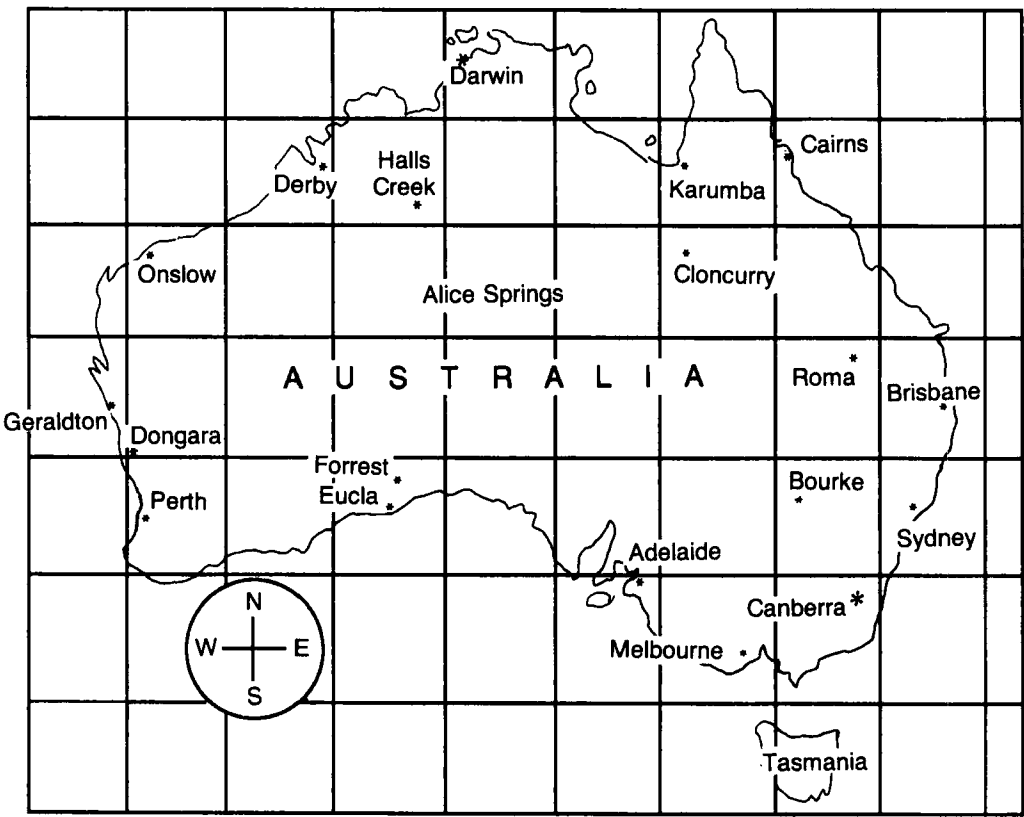


FIGURE 4—continued

Extension

1. Use related literature
2. Make new questions for game
3. Compare and contrast maps
4. Play Australian music
5. Use reinforcement table
6. Make up a play or skit about one of the cities
7. Construct a puzzle about one of the locations
8. Construct a mural or a pictorial map
9. Make a shoebox diorama about one of the locations
10. Write a research report on one of these sections
11. Make a mobile of the location
12. Construct a puzzle
13. Do art activities

The place names on the map of Australia should be removable. In addition, a spinner (or die) and markers for the students to move around the board are necessary. A few of the arrows on the board should have instructions that read: *You lose a turn*, or *Advance to Tasmania*. This game could be a springboard to teaching related literature about Australia, to listening to Australian music, and to researching more about the aborigine people of the country.

Emu's Basic Map Skills (figure 4), another game to extend aborigineal folklore, also promotes geographic skills. The purpose of this game is to teach longitude and latitude and to increase students' knowledge of Australian geography. Teachers can easily design questions for this game using the following format: If Emu walks _____ degrees north or south latitude and _____ degrees east or west longitude, in what city would Emu be standing? For example, if Emu walks 23 degrees south latitude and 134 degrees east longitude, in what city would Emu be standing? (Answer: Alice Springs.)

All the folk literature and games described here are simple strategies for extending children's literature. With encouragement, time, and available materials, children can invent more ingenious, challenging games than can be bought in a store. Also, teacher-made games tend to have more specific learning value than purchased ones.

Folk literature is informative reading for students that helps them move from boring textbook material to vivid and colorful stories about people, places, and things. Educational games allow children to become participants rather than spectators in the learning process. They are an easy way to clarify difficult concepts. The gaming process builds on the students' interest in

the folklore, allowing the teacher to motivate the class more easily. Educational games allow students to gain a better understanding of culture. They offer the students a slice of reality that will promote investigation. When teachers take their students on imaginative trips using folk literature and games, they are allowing the students to learn by activities that they can do for themselves. This approach offers a student the chance to become involved, to cultivate attitudes, and to see many implications that they may have missed by the traditional methods. The use of folk literature and educational gaming puts colorful and interesting material at the students' fingertips. Educational games are not a panacea, nor are they esoteric or frivolous. They do provide students with an innovative opportunity to learn.

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