



Brenda L. Whitsell
brwhitsell@aol.com

Sumner Academy
Tennessee Geographic Alliance

Convergence with *The Cay*: Exploring Geographic Concepts Wrapped in a Story 2006 CRAM/NCGE Award Lesson

“Tell me a fact and I’ll learn. Tell me the truth and I’ll believe. But tell me a story and it will live in my heart forever.”—Indian Proverb (Green)

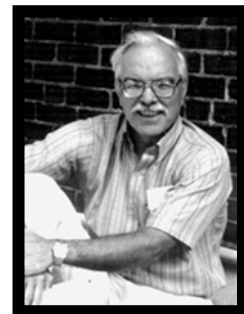
As you drop into the end of class on day three of this unit, students have just discovered that the boat was torpedoed two days after leaving Panama. The story is pulling them in to the discovery of valuable geographic concepts.

Earlier in the class small groups of student were busy using maps, charts and graphs to record information that compares daylight hours, temperature and rainfall; convergence of ideas; places mentioned in the book; story action on a bulletin board mountain; or life lessons from *The Cay*. And, the teacher led a discussion of ethnic groups in the Caribbean while students create a memory device for the topic by cutting and folding paper.

Small group work time, teacher lead mini lectures and discussions with graphic organizers, and time to read a compelling adventure story are the key elements of this exploration of geographic concepts wrapped in a story.

Origins of Teaching Strategy

This plan is the outgrowth of a conversation that took place during an outing that was part of a Tennessee Geographic Alliance Summer Program. I remember the moment since it was one of those change points in my teaching. During a lull in conversation, I ask Ted Schmulde, co founder of the Tennessee Geographic Alliance, what had inspired his interest in geography. While he mentioned several things, one stuck in my mind. He talked about reading adventure stories as a young child.



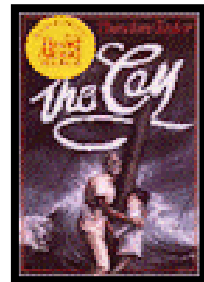
This comment began my search for adventure literature to add to my seventh grade geography class. I wanted something that the students could read easily (lower than grade level readability) but with strong geographic themes in a memorable adventure story.

After reading several books, I found *The Cay* by Theodore Taylor. It fills the bill. In fact, each time I teach the Caribbean unit using this book, I find new connections to geography. [This would make a great book for the introduction of students to geography and geographic concepts even if a Caribbean unit is not part of the course of study.] The majority of the students, even the reluctant readers, love the book and often the parents mention it in conversations with me.

Truly Ted was correct. An adventure story can “hook” students on places and geographic concepts and thus inspire them to enjoy the adventure of geography. And, all the time they are increasing their understanding and skills in reading.

The Cay

The Cay by Theodore Taylor is an award winning fictional adventure story set in the Caribbean during World War II. Eleven-year-old Phillip Enright lives with his parents on Curaçao. When Germans start blowing up oil tankers in the area, Phillip and his mother begin the journey back to Virginia. Their boat is torpedoed and Phillip finds himself blind on a raft with an old black West Indian, Timothy, and a cat. Eventually they find a small island (cay). Timothy dies during a hurricane and Phillip is rescued. The book includes several important life lessons including perseverance and the importance of dealing with prejudices.



The book is written at a fifth grade reading level and is available in paperback for under \$6 new and around \$2 used.

Grade Levels

The “Convergence with *The Cay*” lessons and related research is currently in use with 7th grade students. The basic ideas and procedures could easily be adapted for use with grades 3 through 9. Use of the overall idea and strategies, finding literature to teach geographic concepts, has application at any grade level.

Goals, Objectives and Concepts

The primary goal set for these lessons is to excite students about geography through a well written adventure story while using the story to teach geographic concepts. Through this experience, the students will develop the ability to bring the skills of seriously examining the setting to future reading of fiction and non fiction thus enhancing both their understanding of what they read and a variety of geographic concepts.

The Cay becomes the primary venue for exploring, teaching or reviewing the following geographic concepts:

- Cultural and other convergence
- Migration, diffusion and ethnicity
- Latitude and longitude
- Nature of place

- Ocean currents
- Weather (specifically rain patterns, tropical climate patterns and hurricanes)
- Economic interdependence (oil refining)
- Colonies, territories, and independence
- Island formation
- Sun angles, revolution, and rotation

Theoretical Background

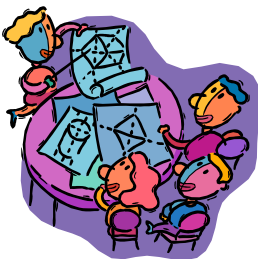
The activities provided by “Convergence with *The Cay*” are varied and thus meet several educational theory conditions for a positive learning experience.

High Level Thinking: While Bloom’s Taxonomy of intellectual behavior is not the only choice of classification, it is one often cited and serves as a valuable guide for examining lesson plans. While reading, examining charts, and creating graphs and other summaries of information students involved in this project participate in many of the Bloom levels. Students acquire **knowledge** and then demonstrate their **understanding** and **application** by reporting that knowledge in a variety of ways. **Analysis** and **synthesis** take place as students discuss group findings. At every step, from choosing which knowledge to present and how to present it, **evaluation** is involved. (Soto)

<p>Evaluation Synthesis Analysis Application Understanding Knowledge</p>

Learning Styles: Various learning styles are incorporated into the lessons as students hear information, discuss understandings, create visual aids, see other visual aids and presentations, and taste the coconut. If our students are to be successful in learning “we must provide a variety of learning approaches....” (Theroux)

Memory Aids and Constructed Meaning: The creation of graphic organizers helps students construct meaning, organize thoughts for understanding and remember those thoughts. “A graphic organizer forms a powerful visual picture that allows the mind ‘to see’ undiscovered patterns and relationships.” (Graphic)



Cooperative Groups: By working in small groups during a portion of the instructional time, students strengthen their ability to participate in cooperative learning groups that research supports as strengthening achievement and positive social growth. (Johnson)

Mini Lectures: The mini lecture portions of this program provide the students with content rich moments where discussion can enhance simple textbook learning. Again, research supports that lectures make a significant contribution to the learning experience especially when linked with other learning opportunities. Teachers offer students the opportunity to learn about a topic in a lively lecture manner that adds stories and visual aids. (Goldberg)

Power of Stories: As the narrative of *The Cay* unfolds the story provides a “powerful structure for organizing and transmitting information, and for creating meaning in our lives and environments.” (Green) The story provides memorable moments with a suspenseful unfolding narrative that “tends to have more depth than a simple example.” (Green)

National Geography Standards

The following *Geography for Life* Standards and Geographic Skills are strongly support through the use of these lessons:

- Standard 1: How to use maps and other geographic representations, tools, and technologies to acquire, process, and report information from a spatial perspective
- Standard 4: The physical and human characteristics of places
- Standard 6: How culture and experience influence people’s perceptions of places and regions
- Standard 7: The physical processes that shape the patterns of Earth’s surface
- Standard 9: The characteristics, distribution, and migration of human populations on Earth’s surface
- Standard 10: The characteristics, distribution and complexity of Earth’s cultural mosaics
- Standard 11: The patterns and networks of economic interdependence on Earth’s surfaces
- Skill 3: Organizing geographic information
- Skill 4: Analyzing geographic information

Materials

The Cay—copy for each student or single copy to read to the class

World outline maps

Outline maps of Curaçao, Netherlands Antilles and/or Caribbean

Rulers or straight edges

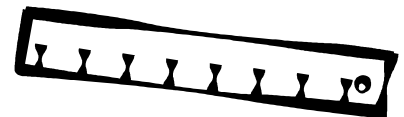
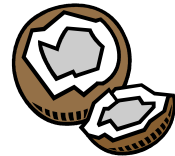
Fresh coconut

Materials for teams to use (See teams list and appendix)

Bulletin board for posting information

Optional Items

- Internet access for teacher
- Large drawn map of Willemstad
- PowerPoint production and showing capabilities for teacher
- Computer access for creating charts, graphs and labels for students



Student Preparation Prior to Unit Lessons

The activities surrounding this particular novel may be most effective when students have completed or are completing a unit on the Caribbean. However, *The Cay* presents opportunities to explore many general geographic concepts not directly tied to the Caribbean, so it has real value outside of any particular unit. In fact, the book could be

used as a spring board at the beginning of a geography course to introduce the many ways that geographers look at places.

Prior to beginning this set of lessons a pretest may be administered to assess student knowledge of the concepts that will be covered. This pre assessment will allow adjusting of the teaching and validate learning accomplishment at the end of the book. When this set of lessons was completed on October, 2005, students were given a pre and post test on the idea of *convergence*. The test asked students to explain the meaning and give four examples. On the pretest administration, the mean score was 0.31 out of 5 possible points. On the post test administration, the mean score was 4.0 out of 5 possible points.

Team Work Group Suggestions

Team	Activities	Materials Needed
Places	Color or mark all countries mentioned in <i>The Cay</i>	Large outline map and markers to color countries mentioned or large map with bright stickers to place on countries mentioned
Daylight	Chart information on daylight hours in Curaçao and local school area.	Large sheet of graph paper or computer graphing program and data; generalized information by major latitude lines can be found by searching online for “hours of daylight by latitude.”
Temperature	Chart information on average monthly temperature in Willemstad and local school city.	Large sheet of graph paper or computer graphing program and information to chart found at weatherbase.com and curacao-travelguide.com/weather/index.shtml
Rainfall	Chart information on monthly rainfall totals in Willemstad and local school city.	Large sheet of graph paper or computer graphing program and rainfall information found at weatherbase.com
Convergence	Recording on a large map every placed mentioned in the book that influences the Caribbean area (Curaçao)	Large outline map, yard stick for drawing lines, thin markers for lines, “sticky notes” to write what was brought (converged)
Story Action	Recording the main actions(rising, climax and falling) in the story	Drawing of a mountain outline on large “butcher type” paper or poster board, markers and large cards or computer access for making signs for story actions
Characters	Recording names and main identity of characters in story; as story progresses identify most important to story	Sheets of paper and markers for recording name and identification of each character or computer for typing
Life Lessons	Work together to decide on a life lesson learned from each chapter and report those lessons	Sheets of paper and markers for writing life lessons or computer for printing them

Additional possibilities for group work that fit well with *The Cay* include the following: petroleum, fauna and flora, and World War II.

Day By Day Procedures

The day-by-day procedures center on the book chapters. After the initial start up time, most days have a brief total class time, group work time, and general reading time. When used in a 45 to 50 minute class period the following guidelines have proved workable:

For Block Scheduling
combine 2 lessons per
block

1. The teacher presented total group time is easily accomplished with notes and/or a short PowerPoint type presentation. These times need to be carefully planned so that the time together is maximized and aids in the understanding of the story and the geographic principles involved. Searching for images under the Google image search can aid in finding charts, pictures, etc. that assist in understanding. Be careful to observe correct procedures in using the work of others. The teacher models intellectual honesty to students by citing sources of images and obtaining permissions. For some lessons graphic organizers created by students will aid in understanding and memory.
2. Group work time should take approximately 10 to 15 minutes.
3. This leaves the students 25 to 35 minutes of reading time. To maximize this reading time, it may be helpful to have students begin each class period by reading as soon as they arrive. Then, after 10 minutes of reading, the lecture and group work can take place. Following these items students return to reading. This general procedure has the additional advantage of not overwhelming the reluctant reader. Offer each student a “sticky note” to mark their reading so time is not spent trying to find their place.

Introduction and Chapter 1: Guided Reading, Convergence, Place Location, Economic Interdependence

1. Introduction lecture and discussion

Book

- Award winning nature of the book
- Fiction adventure

Author Theodore Taylor

- KKK encounter
- Work on a gasoline tanker during WW2

Setting (Beginning understanding of the place and time)

- Curaçao (koo ə sou) as part of the Netherlands Antilles and ABC islands, located close to Venezuela, ethnic background, oil refineries, capital and major port of Willemstad [Have students draw in and color Curaçao on world outline maps]



Warning

Do not get so wrapped up in the geographic elements that the exciting adventure is lost.

- Caribbean as a general area
- WWII time period from 1939-1945 with mention of Hitler, Germany, and Japan

Convergence

- Discuss and define culture, cultural convergence and other possible convergences; include the idea of diffusion

2. Read and discuss chapter 1 together

Read to class first 3 paragraphs of chapter 1

- Locate on large map Germany, Curaçao, and Venezuela
- Discuss what convergence is happening
 - German bringing the war and fear
 - Oil coming from Venezuela (Lake Maracaibo region)
 - Primary and secondary nature of oil
- Have students draw lines from German and Venezuela to Curaçao on their world outline maps and on a separate sheet of paper have them record what is coming to Curaçao from each place



Read next two paragraphs of chapter 1

- Discuss what has come to Curaçao from the Netherlands (Dutch)
 - Architecture
 - Fort
- Have students draw on their maps and add to their list
- Suggest that they leave room on their list for many different things from the Netherlands

Continue reading chapter 1 together while discussing the story, setting and adding convergence information to students' maps and lists

Chapter 2: Establishing Groups



1. Briefly review the main action in the story and characters introduced in chapter 1
2. Divide class into teams and handout team materials
3. Give teams about 20 minutes time on this first meeting day to get organized and begin work
4. Students read and work on chapter 2 on their own

Chapter 3: Ethnicity, Convergence, Diffusion, Prejudice

1. Establish pattern of students reading on their own as soon as they enter by meeting them at the door and asking them to begin reading and placing a sign about it on the board or overhead.
2. Lecture and discussion on ethnic make up of Caribbean area



Calypso and Carnival

Ethnicity

Help students construct a four part fold as a memory tool for Caribbean ethnicity

Explain about use of work “negro”

Ask students to think carefully about prejudice as they read this chapter

Review ideas of cultural convergence and diffusion

3. Break into group work
4. Students continue to read and work on chapter 3 on their own

Chapter 4: Colonies, Territories, Independence

1. Continue pattern of students reading on their own as soon as they enter by meeting them at the door and asking them to begin reading and placing a sign about it on the board or overhead.
2. Lecture and discussion

Ownership of Caribbean islands with explanation of words such as colony, territory and independence

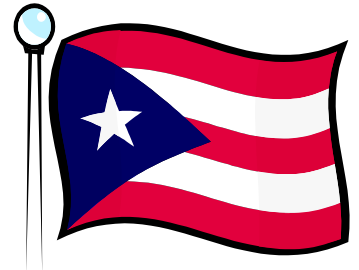
USA territories in Caribbean—Puerto Rico and US Virgin Islands

People are citizens of USA

Considered part of USA

Bring up question of possibility of Puerto Rico becoming a state

3. Break into group work
4. Students continue to read and work on chapter 4 on their own



Chapters 5 and 6: Groups Begin Presentations

1. Continue pattern of students reading on their own as soon as they enter by meeting them at the door and asking them to begin reading and placing a sign about it on the board or overhead.
2. Select 2 or 3 groups to report to class about what they have found
3. Break into group work
4. Students continue to read and work on chapters 5 and 6 on their own

Chapters 7 and 8: Latitude and Longitude

1. Continue pattern of students reading on their own as soon as they enter by meeting them at the door and asking them to begin reading and placing a sign about it on the board or overhead.
2. Lecture and discussion

Latitude and longitude

Relate to “15 North and 80 long” mentioned in book

Have latitude and longitude for local area

Discuss latitude as one climate factor

3. Select 2 or 3 other groups to report
4. Break into group work for any groups still needing time
5. Students continue to read and work on chapters 7 and 8 on their own



Chapters 9 and 10: Weather

1. Students begin class by reading on their own
2. Lecture, discussion and creation of rainfall pyramid

Wind patterns (trade winds, doldrums, horse latitudes, Coriolis effect)

Ocean current patterns—especially in the Caribbean

<http://oceancurrents.rsmas.miami.edu/caribbean/caribbean.html>

Construct pyramid of ways rainfall occurs—each student completes one as a memory aid device (frontal, orographic, convectional) [See appendix]

Use information to help students “discover” why islands in this story are dry and Curaçao lacks agriculture and water

3. Group work as needed
4. Students continue reading of chapters 9 and 10

Chapters 11, 12 and 13: Island Formation

1. Students begin class by reading on their own
2. Lecture, discussion and tasting of fresh coconut

Discuss coral to island sequence

What are cays?

Taste fresh coconut

Causes, problems and area of world where malaria exists

Haiti, West Indies, voodoo

3. Group work as needed
4. Students continue reading of chapters 11, 12, 13



Chapters 14 and 15: Hurricanes

On this day the pattern should involve only reading and group work. It is important NOT to have the geographic concept for these chapters presented until after the chapters have been read. Otherwise, you may spoil the suspense.



Chapters 16 and 17: Sun Angles, Revolution, Rotation

1. Students begin class by reading on their own
2. Lecture and discussion for both chapter sets (14 and 15; 16 and 17)

Hurricane formation discussion and alternate terms in other parts of the world (cyclone, typhoon)

<http://www.cotf.edu/ete/modules/sevweath/swhoware.html>

<http://observe.arc.nasa.gov/nasa/earth/hurricane/creation.html>

<http://science.howstuffworks.com/hurricane.htm/printable>

Angle of the sun and time of day

Revolution, rotation, 23 1/2 degree angle, where most direct rays and why)

3. Group work as needed
4. Students continue reading of chapters 16 and 17

Chapters 18 and 19: Wrap Up

Again, the pattern should change so that all reading is completed prior to final book discussions and group presentations.

Adjustments

A variety of ways are available to make adjustments for students who have special learning situations. The creation of the groups allows pairing of different styles and/or abilities. The book, *The Cay*, is available on audio CD so listening stations can be set up for those needing reading assistance. Prepared notes for the mini lecture/discussion times can be created to help those who struggle with lecture type learning. Pre folding and precutting the memory aid devices will allow students to create them with more ease.

This set of lessons could easily be used with students in grades 3 or 4 with the teacher reading the story to the class and modifications of the mini lectures. Students love to hear a good story, well read so this is a valid option for all grade levels.

Post Assessment

A variety of assessment strategies should be used following this set of lessons. During group presentations, the teacher should assess the knowledge and understanding presented by each group. A more formal assessment of the geographic concepts may also be helpful in determining knowledge acquired and concepts that still need strengthening.

Since this instructional set involving *The Cay* is imbedded in my unit on the Caribbean, the geographic concepts are usually covered in the Caribbean unit test with an additional test or test items for *The Cay* and its story aspects.

An easy assessment of the reading and literature of *The Cay* is available at Book Adventure (www.bookadventure.com). This online test is available free.

While many of the questions on end of the unit tests call for recall of information here are two sample questions involving higher level thinking for geographic concept assessment:

1. About 65% of the people in the Netherlands Antilles speak Papiamentu. This is a language that combines Spanish, Portuguese, Dutch and English. Use your knowledge of cultural convergence and explain this language situation.
2. You will now need to use what you know about the Caribbean to answer questions about the imaginary island of Kat. Kat is located in the Lesser Antilles and it is a coral, windward island. The windward side of Kat is to the east.
 - a. Is Kat probably closer to South America or Florida? Give a reason for your answer.
 - b. Is Kat more likely to be known for its agriculture or its tourism? Give a reason for your answer.
 - c. When Kat receives rainfall, is that rainfall most likely from orographic effect? Why or why not?

Improvements

Each time this set of lessons is completed, notes are made so that improvements will be implemented the following year. During the presentation in the fall of 2005, three items were noted for possible improvements.

First, those students who produced the best answers on the post test on convergence were those students who actually completed a map of these ideas. Therefore, the above lesson description includes all students completing this activity on a small map, while a group completes it in a larger version.

Second, while most students vastly increased their understanding of convergence, the idea of coming together with other ideas, events and things to make a new whole needs stressing.

Third, the group constructing the comparison charts needs to review these charts with the teacher prior to class presentation. One group created a chart that was clearly incorrect and embarrassment could have been avoided by a review and revision.

Conclusion

Initially, I reviewed published guides for using this book. I found that they gave almost no attention to the geography of the story beyond the place location. Since I also teach an honors section of literature for 7th graders, I have become aware that this is a problem with many published literature guides. The guides simply deal with the literature aspects and for the most part ignore the richness that the setting often offers. Geographers need to tap into the richness of settings both for their own classes and to aid in cross curriculum development. Geography classes could easily add exploration of the settings of items students are reading in literature classes.

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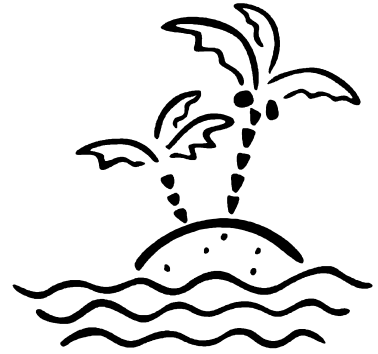
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Appendix Items

Background for *The Cay*

We will be reading and studying *The Cay* by Theodore Taylor as we complete our unit on the Caribbean. *The Cay*, winner of numerous literary awards, is an adventure story with many geographic links. Through this story we will look at geographic convergence, migrations, longitude and latitude, coral island formation, sun angle, tropical storms and hurricanes, ocean currents, and the nature and location of many Caribbean places. Beyond the geography, this exciting story shows conflict between man and nature, between man and man and between man and himself. I wonder which part you will like best and which action you will decide is the climax of the story?



Author

Theodore Taylor was born in North Carolina. A recent autobiography relates “my personal story began on a lonely country road in the darkest of nights as a round dozen Ku Klux Klan riders holding pineknot torches came by my house in North Carolina. I was four year old, I’m told. The horses and their silent, white-robed Klansmen terrified me.” (Taylor)

He began writing at the age of thirteen, covering high school sports events for a newspaper. At seventeen, he left home and began working as a copyboy for the Washington, DC *Daily News* making just \$11 per week. During WWII, he served as a seaman on a gasoline tanker and then as a naval officer in the Pacific. He also served in the Korean War. He ended his service career by participating in the atomic bombing of the Bikini Atoll.

He wrote *The Cay* in 1969 and has since written a prequel, *Timothy of the Cay*.

As you read *The Cay* think about how the life experiences of Theodore Taylor are reflected in the story.

The Setting

This story takes place in the Caribbean and specifically begins on the island of Curaçao. This island is a semiarid island that is long (40 miles) and generally flat. Curaçao is the largest of the Netherlands Antilles. It is part of the ABC islands (Aruba, Bonaire, and Curaçao) all located close to Venezuela in South America.

Curaçao was visited by European explorers in 1499; settled by the Spanish in 1527; and captured by the Dutch in 1634.

Oil refining is its most important economic activity. Curaçao has one of the world's largest refineries and receives oil from the reserves at Lake Maracaibo, Venezuela. A Shell oil refinery was started in Curaçao in 1916.

Most of the people on the island live in the capital and major port city of Willemstad.

The time period for this story is during World War II. World War II began in 1939 in Europe with Hitler invading and controlling one European country after another. The United States did not enter the war until Japan bombed Pearl Harbor in 1941. The war in Europe ended and later the war in the Pacific ended after the United States dropped atomic bombs on Japan in 1945.

Sources of Information

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***The Cay* Group Projects Information Sheet**

Each member of groups 1-5 should keep his or her own list as they read. When these groups meet, the lists will be share and/or combined.

Group 1—Record ideas of geographic convergence

List places named and what came to the area from that place

Examples: Germany—U-boats, fear

Lake Maracaibo—Crude oil

Netherlands—Language, customs, architecture

Your team will be marking these with lines and labels on a map.

Need—Large world map, yard stick, thin marker, sticky notes for labels

Group 2—Display all places mentioned

Keep a personal list of all places named in each chapter. Once you have listed a place in a chapter you do not need to list it for later chapters.

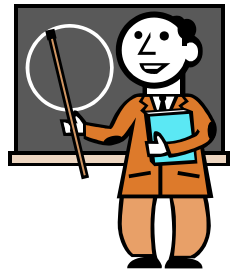
Your team will be coloring in all of the countries that are mentioned in some way.

Need—Large world map, atlas, markers

Group 3—Characters

Keep a personal list of all the characters in the story and a brief statement of who they are.

Need—Computer access to make an individual sheet for each character with the character's name and identification information



Group 4—Life lessons by chapter

At the end of each chapter you need to write down on your personal list one or more morals or life lessons from the chapter.

Your team will decide on one per chapter and create a sheet with that information.

Need—Computer access to make an individual sheet for each chapter that includes chapter number and life lesson

Group 5—Story Action

Keep a list of the major actions in each chapter.

The climax for this story probably takes place in chapter 15.

Your team will arrange the major story action items on a mountain outline showing the rising action, climax and falling action.

Need—Large “butcher type” paper to draw mountain outline and computer access to type out individual actions that are glued to mountain

Group 6—Comparison charts between Willemstad and local area

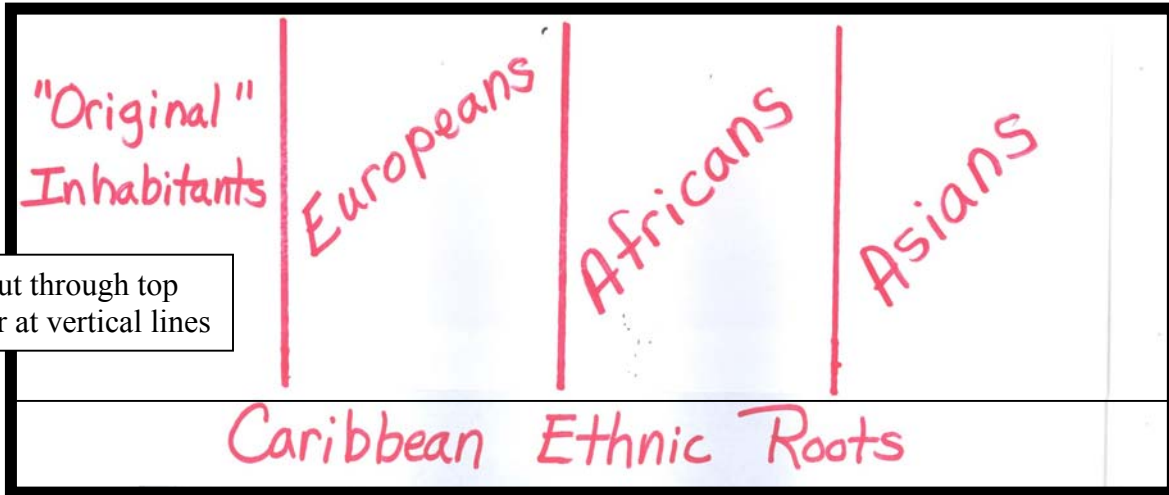
With data provided by the teacher, you will be making large charts showing the comparisons of daylight hours, rainfall and temperatures between Willemstad and the local area.

When you complete a chart be sure that it includes a title, your names and the source of the information. BEFORE you present the information to the class review it with the teacher.

Need—Large graph paper, markers or computer graphing program access and data

Construct Ethnicity Memory Aid

Fold paper leaving a lip below for title



Write information about each group after lifting up the group's flap.

Construct Rainfall Memory Aid

Square the piece of paper before beginning

Fold blank part under convectional section and tape to form pyramid.

