

A TEACHER'S GUIDE TO CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES

On This Spot: An Expedition Back Through Time

by Susan E. Goodman, illustrated by Lee Christiansen

Greenwillow Books, Grades K and up

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On This Spot is a virtual time machine, transporting one spot—and its readers—through all of history. This nonfiction book begins in today's New York City where buildings soar and traffic zooms. Turn the page and time-travel back 175 years where, on that same spot, carriages bumped and pigs raced across cobblestones. Turn again and visit New Amsterdam. Again and see a well-used Lenape Indian trail. Traveling back over 540 million years, readers will see glaciers, dinosaurs, ancient creatures in a tropical sea, towering mountains, and much, much more. Through this journey, readers are invited to ponder changes in nature—and the very nature of change itself.

On This Spot is “brilliantly conceived” says *Child* magazine. *The Washington Post* named it one of the five Best Picture Books of 2004. The following exercises are designed to develop math and language skills and to build upon the themes of time concepts, historical research and accuracy, and one's place in the world and community.

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And, On That Spot...

Read *On This Spot* to your students. Its last page presents an open question to its readers: What will be on the moon in the future? Have your students imagine the answer and explain it either by drawing a picture on a large piece of paper or by writing a description. In either case, encourage detail.

Past, Present, Future

As part of a time study write the headings: “100 Years Ago,” “Today,” and “100 Years from Today” on the chalkboard or chart paper. Have students research lifestyles from the past, record contemporary lifestyles, and brainstorm about future lifestyles. Leading questions are: Where do people get their food? How much does a loaf of bread cost? How do people travel from place to place? What do houses look like? What kinds of clothes do people wear? What do they do for fun? What is important to them?

Dinosaur Math

Pterosaurs, fabrosaurs, ammosaurs, dilophosaurs, and other dinosaurs lived 190 million years ago. Show students the illustration on pages 16-17, and then try this activity to discover how big these dinosaurs were. Use an encyclopedia or dinosaur fact book to get the average lengths of various types of dinosaurs. Go outside and place a marker on the playground, then use a tape measure or yardstick to measure out the lengths. Place another marker at the end of each measurement to show the length. Have students stand at either end of each dinosaur to reinforce their different sizes.

Personal Times Lines

Have students look at the time line in the back of the book, which highlights events over a very long period of time (544 million years!). Define a time line as a map that represents information over time. Then have students draw time lines of their own lives. Using a long piece of paper have them create a time line divided into equal units to represent years. Students can then choose important events that have occurred throughout their lives and place them accurately upon the time line. They can document the events using words, photos, or illustrations.

A Time Line of Objects

If you didn't use the Personal Time Lines exercise, have students look at the time line in the back of the book, which highlights events over a very long period of time (544 million years!). Define a time line as a map that represents information over time. Then introduce a set of objects to the students and ask them to make a time line that places the objects in the correct chronological order. They may have to research to determine which objects come before and after others. If desired, you can also ask students to accurately calibrate the time line so that a dinosaur, say, is the correct number of units away from a model car.

Have fun collecting as many diverse objects as you like. A set could include, for example, two different dinosaurs, a car, a human figure, an Ipod, a Ginko leaf, an elephant, a piece of paper, etc. You could also chose objects that correspond to a unit you are studying—different kinds of plants or animals, different objects that use electricity, objects that represent different historical events, etc.

Community Time Line

This exercise was taken from directly from Carol Hurst's Children's Literature Site. To see the rest of Hurst's profile of Susan Goodman and other suggested activities for her books, visit <http://www.carolhurst.com/authors/sgoodman.html>.

It's a logical step to go from this book to your own spots. If you want to do a class investigation, choose a spot like your school or a landmark in your area and follow it back in time as Susan Goodman did. You can choose to make major leaps backward in time or take smaller steps, going back by decades. If you want individual research efforts, encourage the students to go backward from their home sites or make larger backward leaps by choosing a very different area somewhere in the world. You may start with local histories or a visit to the city clerk's office. Map studies are a must and topographical maps supplied by the US Interior Department may be a source of needed information. A class field trip to the nearest science museum could help. The U.S Geological Survey has a department on their website (www.usgs.gov) where students can get answers to their email questions. Presentation of the results of the research can take many forms including, of course, a picture book.

Contact Information

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