The Kansas Geographic Alliance (KGA) is an organization of teachers and professional geographers who recognize the value of geographic thinking and who are dedicated to advancing geographic literacy in Kansas.

Coordinator’s Update by Paul Phillips

This year the Kansas Geographic Alliance is celebrating it’s Silver Anniversary. Many changes have occurred in those 25 years, but our mission of promoting and supporting geographic literacy remains the same. To accomplish our task we continue to need your help. Whether you are a pre-service, active, or retired teacher; or a citizen who cares about the importance of spatial literacy and geographic skills, you can help us develop a geographically literate Kansas society. That society will use its spatial and human-environment knowledge to support and maintain a healthy environment as a base for strong communities and a vibrant economy and to help the population make informed decisions as citizens of Kansas, the United States, and the planet.

Key to this process is promoting geographic curiosity, which involves the ability and willingness to ask and answer questions about the phenomena of the World: what is observed, where is it located, and why is it found there? Those questions will lead citizens to acquire and analyze geographic information, so as to be able to develop answers to satisfy their curiosity, and to become spatially literate.

Like a carpenter becomes competent and confident in the use of appropriate tools to accomplish the building a structure, a geographically literate person and society must become competent and confident in the use of maps, mapping, and spatial thinking. Spatial thinking is more that being able to program a navigational system and blindly following locational directions. Spatial thinking is the way we navigate the world and manipulate the space around us. It helps us get to work and where to shop; where to locate an urban center and how to allot our critical resources for optimal productivity. For the elderly, it can mean the difference between mental clarity and cognitive decline.

To help in the task of promoting geographic literacy, I was one of the founders of the Kansas Geographic Alliance. Now, I have become among the elderly. I retired from Fort Hays a couple of years ago, and it’s time for me to step down from a leadership role in the KGA. During the last two years my wife Pat and I have been to the base camp of Mt. Everest, and hiked the Inca Trail to Machu Picchu. I’m looking forward to many more years of exploring and navigating the world, honing my spatial thinking, and retaining my mental clarity.
The 2016 Kansas Geographic Bee took place in Abilene, KS at the Eisenhower Presidential Library and Museum. First place went to Avi Misra of Prairie Star Middle School, second place went to Manas Madhira of California Trail Middle School, and third place went to Karthik Kasarabada of Frontier Trail Middle School. We want to give a special thanks to the KGA, Fort Hays State and Kansas State student volunteers that make this possible.

Congrats again to all the student participants!

2016 Kansas Geographic Bee...

Kansas 3rd Grade Teacher to Attend National Geographic Summer Institute 2016

The KGA has awarded third grade teacher Kathleen Benton a trip to participate in a National Geographic summer institute July 2016 in Denver, CO. Benton teaches at Franklin Elementary School in Junction City, KS. At the institute, she will collaborate with other educators in the creation of resources, lessons, and materials for the Kansas State Map and begin planning the State Giant Travelling Map Initiative. We at the KGA are lucky to have one of our own represent the Sunflower State across the border to the Front Range.
P4: Plants, People, Places, and Patterns – a summer institute on Kansas Ecological Culture

The KGA will be hosting a week-long summer institute on Kansas ecological culture June 6-10, 2016. The institute will host 14 teachers on the Kansas State University campus to study the plants, people, places, and patterns of Kansas; two fieldtrips are also to be included as part of this institute. Funds for this event were provided by the F. Price Cossman Trust.

This five day summer institute for K-12 teachers will emphasize the importance of human connections to the natural environment and ecosystems for Kansans and for the economy of the state. Major topics that will be addressed include: the natural vegetation and climatic patterns of Kansas, the biology and geography of grasslands and ranching, the biology and geography of wheat, corn, sorghum and other agricultural crops, the importance of vegetative resources in influencing settlement patterns, an examination of how aspects of the natural environment are built into our cultural fabric, the services that humans obtain from ecosystems, and how human activities related to our ecological culture have changed over the years. We are very excited to start a new line of summer institutes!
School-Wide Big Read at West Indianola Elementary
Focuses on the Seven Continents

KGA member, Hildy Hrenchir as she sets up the map of activities for the school-wide big read. Students read books focused on the seven continents over a seven week period. They have small passports to fill out when they read books. On the night of the “Big Read”, there were many activities, including an drummer from the Democratic Republic of the Congo, drums for students to try from Africa, European Musical chairs, arctic ice activities with penguin cameras, food from North America (a local church brought authentic Mexican food), boomerangs in the gym and kangaroo sack races for Australia, and writing expressions in Chinese.

225 people attended the event!
Weird Maps: Cartograms

Maps do some freaky things to the shapes on our planet. They are created by humans, whose abilities to perceive the varying aspects of the world have their limits. Like the humans that create them, maps can underestimate the size and shape of some places, while blowing other places out of proportion.

Many folks would think of this as the negative side of maps; but not when it comes to cartograms. Map makers create cartograms with the intention of distorting them in order to show spatial data in unconventional ways. When used appropriately, this distortion can add new elements to the visual experience of spatial data, much like a sound effects pedal adds to the sound of a guitar.

Cartograms substitute areas of latitude and longitude with another variable, such as population size, income, political preference, and other types of data that involve numbers and statistics. All of a sudden, a map of Kansas showing population distribution for Kansas can look like a blue whale instead of a rectangle with a corner bitten off in the northeast part of the state.

As a teacher, you may think that cartograms remain simply a novelty. These weird maps are interesting, but difficult to find, create, or integrate into classroom content.

To dispel this myth, we conclude by providing you with two helpful web resources for adding a cartographic “effects pedal” to your teaching with maps. World Mapper (http://worldmapper.org/index.html) generates cartograms based on country data for the entire world. This map service can provide you with interesting visuals for the distribution of population, child rate, pollution, religion, language, housing, and food. There are plenty of maps to be used, as well as ways to use them!

For example, you could provide your students with a global perspective on how people are affected by disasters, both natural and human-caused events. The world cartogram displayed in this article shows that continent of Asia contains the most people affected by disasters like drought, flood, storms, and human conflict and war. Compared to places like China and India, North and South America look like dried up chili peppers. This cartogram could lead into a lively discussion on the reasons behind this disproportion and how they might have changed the way students perceive the consequences of disasters around the globe.

In addition, Dr. Joseph Kerski wrote an interesting blog post for the GIS Education Community for the mapping company, ESRI (https://blogs.esri.com/esri/gisedcom/2016/03/04/creating-regional-cartograms/). In the article, Dr. Kerski discusses the numerous possibilities for creating a cartogram of your own with ArcGIS Desktop software. He even created cartograms of Kansas population distribution as a case study example!

World Mapper and Dr. Kerski provide you with a starting point to incorporate intriguing cartograms into lesson plans. Our suggestion is that you select at least one cartogram to use in a lesson plan for next school year. If you choose to accept this challenge, you will contribute to the important task to “keep geography weird” in K-12 education.
KGA K-12 Student Atlas
By Matthew Allen

As part of organizing and leading this year's Kansas Social Studies Conference, the Kansas Geographic Alliance has begun work on creating an atlas of Kansas for use in the K-12 classroom! Atlas design is aimed at K – 7 audiences, and will include maps ranging from historical, cultural, physical environments, and civil rights issues in Kansas. The map provided below, Kansas Early Forts and Trails, is just a small taste of what is to come. If you have any questions or suggestions about material for the Kansas K-12 Student Atlas, please contact Matt Allen at mallen3@ksu.edu

Near the end of the summer of 2016, the KGA will take delivery of 3 copies of a large (20' x 24') map of Kansas designed for use in elementary school classrooms. The map is designed for students to be able to walk on them (with their shoes off!) and will come with classroom ready activities. We'll use the KGA listserv and the next issue of Insights to provide more information about scheduling a map for your school.
Teaching in a Time of Terrorism

Karen Murphy, international Director of Facing History and Ourselves, wrote a thought-provoking blog post on Facing Today: A Facing History Blog. Karen writes about how to address recent acts of global terrorism in the classroom and continue working to build an informed citizenry.

“Civil society requires an informed, empathic and engaged citizenry. But that doesn’t just happen. It requires the development of particular skills and behaviors. The adolescents in our classrooms are members of our societies and emerging citizens. They need the opportunity to thoughtfully engage the questions and concerns that terrorism raises. They must be part of creating a culture of prevention and peace.”

To read the full blog, go to: http://facingtoday.facinghistory.org/teaching-in-a-time-of-terrorism?

GAW: Theme—Power of Parks

Not sure what you’re going to do for Geography Awareness Week (GAW) this November? Put your worries “in park!” The KGA will be developing resources and lessons to help you celebrate geography and the 100th year of the National Park Service with your students.

2016 Kansas Social Studies Conference

The task of organizing the Kansas Social Studies Conference for 2016 has been assigned to the KGA! The conference will take place in Abilene on November 6 & 7 at the Eisenhower Presidential Library and Museum and we are grateful to have such a wonderful venue. In addition to scholarly sessions and exhibits, having the conference on the Sunday and Monday before elections should provide for plenty of interesting information and conversation.

Stay tuned to KGA webpage at http://www.k-state.edu/kgaw/ for more information about this year’s event!

Check out this fun human geography parody on the song Justin Bieber’s “Love Yourself.”

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rVrNzVsTP68&app=desktop
We are available to present at and participate in education functions, including professional development days, please contact us for more information at kansasgeoalliance@gmail.com.

If you would like to become more involved, are interested in our available resources, would like KGA members to engage in professional development activities for in-service or pre-service teachers, please contact the KGA at kansasgeoalliance@gmail.com or check out our website: www.k-state.edu/kga/

We are looking for column suggestions. What topics would you be interested to see in Insights? Tips and resources? Technology? Please share your thoughts and please let us know if you would like to contribute a column.

Contact Tommy Larsen at tblarsen@ksu.edu.

KGA Insights is looking for:

- News items,
- Lesson plans,
- Book review,
- Professional development opportunity, or
- Any item of interest

Please send items to Tommy Larsen at tblarsen@ksu.edu