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Geography in the Common Core: Embedded Themes Of Space, Place, and Society in Children's Literature

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Abstract

This dissertation investigates the embedded geographic information inherent in a collection of children's literature – as set forth by the Common Core curriculum – intended for second to eighth graders. Qualitative and quantitative content analysis and a critical lens revealed a wide range of geographic themes and spatial information about space, place, and society. In addition to basic geographic building blocks such as diffusion, migration, Earth-sun relations, and physical and cultural patterns, discourse analysis revealed a diverse set of embedded geographic narratives ranging from geographies of race, gender, and exclusion, to complex interactions between humans and their environment. These themes also vary quantitatively and qualitatively across the grades. As the concepts' complexity scaffolds and evolves, they develop from brief mentions in the early books to multifaceted interactions set within larger societal issues in the middle school books. The wealth of geographic information contained in these works of fiction has implications for how we construct our identity as Americans and how we view the world around us. Additionally, these findings demonstrate an important opportunity for expanding geographic education utilizing the literature already being taught

in classrooms as a tool for spatial learning. Geographers and public school teachers can locate the geography inherent in the existing curriculum and build bridges connecting subjects, creating a powerful technique to help students become more geographically literate

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