Expanding a Child’s World: Map Books for Children and Young Readers

by Marianne McKee

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www.washmap.org
Now when I was a little chap I had a passion for maps. I would look for hours at South America, or Africa, or Australia, and lose myself in all the glories of exploration. At that time there were many blank spaces on the earth, and when I saw one that looked particularly inviting on a map (but they all look that) I would put my finger on it and say, “When I grow up I will go there.”


I like children’s books. Most are brightly colored, attractive, and fun. Many have interesting and imaginative stories. And often I find I can understand a difficult concept or an issue better in this type of book than in a more scholarly tome. As the Washington Map Society proceeds in time and requires a younger participation, what better way to involve this group than to invite them in through a good book on or related to the subject.

Periodically, requests for such titles have come up on the MapHist listserv. Tom Sander gleaned several suggestions from a 2001 conversation, and I found one as well tucked in some old papers. When I revised a bibliography of printed map resources for the Library of Virginia in 2003, I included a small section for young readers, just in case someone was looking for such books.

This is the third such project following Joel Kovarsky’s “An Annotated List of Reference Books for the Beginning Antiquarian Map Collector” in the Fall 2005 *Portolan* (regularly updated on his website, http://theprimemeridian.com/bibliography.htm) and Bert Johnson’s article, “Recommended Publications from the Personal Libraries of the Washington Map Society” in the Fall 2009 *Portolan*.

As in Bert’s article, I solicited the membership beginning in February 2011, and I want to thank those who responded. I have some of the books (twenty-five years of visiting the Green Valley Book Fair just south of Harrisonburg allowed me to easily and economically pick up books on this topic), and I went to libraries and book stores (national chain and local independent) to see what was available. Of course, there is always Amazon, but although it helped in determining age appropriateness and description, I wanted to see the book, itself.

I wanted to see what would stimulate another generation to enjoy and appreciate maps. Maps tell many stories containing information, knowledge, imagination, and inspiration. Some maps are implied, some directional, some scientific, and, of course, they touch many other fields of interest, including history and art. New mapping technologies can and will result in new approaches as well.

Many of the books are non-fiction, which are easily identifiable with their facts and instruction. Then there is the fiction. The latter can be a single map serving as a guide to the book or the map or maps can be an integral part of the book, such as those in the books of J. R. R. Tolkien (*The Hobbit*), C. S. Lewis (*Narnia* Series), Kenneth Grahame (*The Wind in the Willows*), Robert Louis Stevenson (*Treasure Island*), and Ursula LeGuin (*Earthsea* Series). Deborah Kogan Ray writes picture book biographies of people like John Wesley Powell, Carl Douglass (dinosaur bone hunter), William Bartram (botanist), and Pablo Neruda (poet) and grounds her subjects with maps of their “territories.” They can also serve as the prime illustrations of a book such as the works of Peter Sis and Virginia Lee Burton (*The Little House*) that have an interesting spatial dimension as well as story. Construction of an edifice or even a city are, I believe, map-like enough to be considered, such as the works of David Macauley, or the series on fictional cities through time, such as the fictional *Umm Al Madayan* (North Africa), *San Rafael* (Central America), *Barmi* (Mediterranean), and *Lebek* (Northern Europe), recommended by Bert Johnson. And we can’t forget the lively “Marauder’s Map” in the *Harry Potter* volumes. For television, there is “Dora the Explorer,” always with a map in her hand. Many of these are not in the bibliography, but they are worthy of attention.
In a 1990 article (cited below), Jeffrey C. Patton and Nancy B. Ryckman, note that that there should be “more collaboration between children’s authors, illustrators, and cartographers.” Maps are often the only illustration in a book, and as they found out in their study, maps are highly valued illustrations in the well-known Newbery (for the most distinguished contribution to children’s literature) and Caldecott (for illustration) award books. They go on to say, “Why that should be so is not readily apparent, but perhaps illustrators like cartographers realize the unique and powerful ability of maps to bring something as large as a town, nation, or planet into the child’s view. Once brought into the field of vision the child is provided a framework for the comprehension of spatial relationship and for the understanding of place.”

There are many types of children’s books relating to maps. I have categorized them as follows: the history of maps and mapmaking; introduction to maps, using maps, historical atlases, fiction/picture books/maps as guides, workbooks/educational resources, other resources, and articles.

**CONTRIBUTORS**

A generous contributor to this project and a Washington Map Society member, Steve Fox writes:

> When my son was in elementary school, we had three placemats for the three members of the family: maps of the world and US (purchased at a toy store) and of DC (core downtown on one side, Beltway on the other; purchased on-line). By the time he was in second grade, he could close his eyes, run fingers down the edges of the US map to get the dimensions, and land a finger within half an inch of any state in the union I named. By fourth grade, he could find (eyes open) any country in the world and was the only one in his class (in 1994) who knew where Rwanda is and why it was significant, though the fact that we’re a Foreign Service family might have had something to do with that as well. We traced our travels around the world on maps and always had a *National Geographic* atlas at hand, but I never found an age-appropriate book on maps for him when he was growing up.

But it seems more of these books exist today, especially the workbooks, perhaps because of the popularity of home-schooling. It is also interesting to note that some books were first published in Great Britain or Canada.

If you want to check your library, the non-fiction books relating to maps are usually filed as 912 in the Dewey system (911 for war maps). Geography is filed as 910. The fiction books are usually filed alphabetically by author. Book stores appear to do the same with fiction, and this poses a problem as to locating an imaginative picture book or story book about or with maps. They can be found, but it can require either a search or serendipity. For out-of-print books, try Interlibrary Loan, through your local library, and websites such as AbeBooks and Amazon, eBay, and used book shops.

Thanks also to Fred DeJarlais. Speaking of *Children Map the World: Selections from the Barbara Petchenik Children’s World Map Competition*, Volumes 1 and 2, he says “These would be two books I’d like to have in any library for children.” The project is sponsored by the International Cartographic Association. A theme is provided and maps are created by young artists from 4 to 15.

Adele Haft mentions “Ursula LeGuin’s wonderful multi-volume coming-of-age *Earthsea* (now in movie form), but it’s certainly one of my new favorites as far as maps in children’s literature.”

Evelyn Edson remembers books by Louise Andres Kent in the “He Went With” series. “I remember particularly *He Went with Marco Polo* and *He Went with Christopher Columbus*. In these books Kent tells the story of a fictional young boy who goes along on these expeditions. Each book has a map inside the covers. These books are mostly out of print, but still available through Amazon.”

Tony Campbell and Imre Demhardt recommend interesting websites, respectively:

http://www.maphistory.info/teachers.html

http://lazarus.elte.hu/ccc/ccc.htm (International Cartographic Association, Commission on Cartography and Children)

What follows is a selected bibliography with a suggestion of appropriate ages (always just a guess, really) and, often, a brief description of the book. It is by no means comprehensive—not all the books mentioned above are included—and it is just to serve as a guide into this type of literature.

If nothing else, I hope this starts a conversation. Our young people, our young readers, are our future. For
many reasons, including our electronic connections, it is a smaller world today. It is important to expand their world. Maps can do that. They not only ground the history, geography, art, and science of this world, they allow us to look at the context in which so much happens on this blue planet.

HISTORY OF MAPS AND MAPMAKING


Morrison, Taylor. The Coast Mappers. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company/Walter Lorraine Books, 2004. With illustrations, bibliography, and glossary. Ages 9–12. Many of our Washington Map Society members are referenced in the acknowledgements. This book tells of the U.S. Coast Survey’s effort to map the west coast of the U.S. under the pressure of burgeoning maritime traffic following the gold rush of 1849. See also Civil War Artist by the same author, which documents the publishing of newspaper illustrations, the same process used for maps of the period.


INTRODUCTION TO MAPS


________. As the Crow Flies: A First Book of Maps. New York: Scholastic, 1991. Aladdin, 1993. Ages 4–8. These two books move from maps of the neighborhoods of a lizard, a jackrabbit, a roadrunner, a mule, and a deer, in the case of the first book, to a map of the whole area. In the second book, the maps belong to an eagle, a rabbit, a crow, a horse, and a gull. They are simple, yet very effective.

Leedy, Loreen, Mapping Penny’s World. New York: Henry Holt and Company, 2000. Ages 4–8. Lisa is given an assignment to draw a map of someplace familiar, and decides to draw her room as seen by Penny, her Boston terrier. From the bedroom Lisa goes on to draw maps of Penny’s favorite places. As Steve Fox notes, “Not least, the fact that it is written from a girl’s perspective will help bring in an audience that might be tougher to reach than the traditional ‘boys and a pirate treasure map’ genre brings to cartographic concepts.”


MAKING AND USING MAPS


Trumbauer, Lisa. Lost! Heinemann-Raintree, 2007. Ages 9–12. Using only step-by-step directions and traditional tools and skills, readers find their way from the Eiffel Tower to the Calais lighthouse. In a concession to what the child has probably been asking the read-along parent throughout the book, GPS is introduced on the last page.

FICTION/PICTURE BOOKS/MAPS AS GUIDES


_____. The Three Golden Keys. Frances Foster Books/ Farrar Straus Giroux, 1994. To show his daughter where he grew up, the author shows the city of his youth through a mysterious black cat leading him through the city to find keys that will lead him in to his childhood home.


_____. Tibet Through the Red Box. New York: Frances Foster Books/Farrar Straus Giroux, 1998. The story of the author’s father, a documentary filmmaker in the Soviet Union, who was forced to film a military operation, the construction of a road that would connect Tibet to China. Becoming separated from his group by a natural disaster, he

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found he was in Tibet and kept a diary of his experiences, some of which are depicted through elaborate mandalas, which are, in essence, maps. A Caldecott Honor Book.

HISTORICAL ATLASES

Historical Atlas of the United States. National Geographic Society (US), 1988 (Rev. 1993). Bob Moir writes that “replete with colorful maps, charts and graphics, this large format volume treks through the centuries from early European contact to late 20th century.”


WORKBOOKS/EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES


Other topics in the series Mountains and Our Moving Earth, Ecosystems, Food and Farming, People and Places, Rivers and Seas.


Wade, Mary Dodson. Map Scales. 2003. These are in the “Rookie Read-About Geography” series for beginning readers, published by Scholastic, which also features titles such as Looking at Maps and Globes, Types of Maps, and Longitude, along with many cartographic titles. They feature large type and a mix of photographs and bright, simple maps and diagrams to illustrate and walk the reader through basic concepts.

OTHER RESOURCES


The Global Puzzle. A Broader View, Inc. Atlanta, Ga. 2008. 600 pieces, many pieces shaped like the countries so they do not interlock.


ARTICLES

The articles are somewhat dated, but the information is interesting and helpful.


ABOUT THE AUTHOR

A graduate of the College of William and Mary and of the Catholic University of America School of Library Science,
Marianne M. McKee is co-editor with Richard W. Stephenson of Virginia in Maps: Four Hundred Years of Settlement, Growth, and Development. She retired in early 2005 from the Library of Virginia, where she worked full-time since 1982 and with the map collection since 1987. Her past contributions to this journal include “From contracts to copperplates: the making of the 1827 state map of Virginia, the corrections in 1859, and the copperplate printing project of 2004” (Issue 78 – Fall 2010) and a review of the below listed book The Road to There: Mapmakers and their Stories (Issue 60 – Fall 2004). The author much appreciates the assistance of Bert Johnson with this article.
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Mapping Penny’s World
Loreen Leedy

Mapping A Changing World
Yvette La Pierre

The Coast Mappers
Taylor Morrison

As the Crow Flies
A FIRST BOOK OF MAPS
by Gail Hartman • illustrated by Harvey Stevenson