

In the Right Direction

Grades 3-5

In order to talk and learn about places, and to locate themselves and others in terms of place, children need to understand and be able to name geographic directions.

What You Need

Maps of your state, a globe or atlas

Blank paper and crayons or colored pencils

What to Do

* Sit with your younger child at a table or on the floor so that you can both see a map of your state. Point out where you live, explain the directional signs on the map: north, south, east and west. Mention several nearby towns or cities that your child has visited or knows about. Point to one of these and say, for example, "Granddad lives here, in Memphis. That's north of our town." Have your child use her finger to trace the line from your location to that place. Continue by pointing out places that are south, east and west of your location. When your child catches on to directions, ask her to point to places that are north, south, east and west of where she lives.

* For your older child, make the map activity into a game. When you have made sure that she understands directions, pick a place on the map and give clues about its location, for example, "I'm looking at a city that is west of St. Louis and east of Kansas City." (You can also name rivers, lakes, mountains or other geographic features that can be seen on the map.) When your child gets the right answer, have her choose a place and give directional clues for you to use to find it.

* As part of your child's study of national and world history, help her to use an atlas or globe to locate places mentioned in her textbook.

* Help to make directional words a part of your child's vocabulary by using them yourself in daily conversation. Rather than saying, "We're turning right at the next corner," say, "We're turning east at the next corner." Encourage her to use the words as well.

* Give your child blank paper and crayons or colored pencils and ask her to draw a map of your neighborhood showing important buildings and landmarks (churches, schools, malls, statues, rivers, hills and so on). Remind her to include an indicator of direction on the map. After she's finished, talk with her about what the map shows and have her give specific descriptions about the locations of various places on it.

Let's Talk About It

Ask your child:

Why is it important to be able to read a map or use a globe?

How can knowing something about locations help you in studying history?