

Studying Other Countries

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SOME people say that the world is growing smaller, and in a sense that is true. But in another sense the world is constantly growing larger. At the close of World War II there were approximately 75 countries on our globe. Since that time 25 new nations have been formed, bringing the number of nations in the world today to around 100.

This means that the effective social studies teacher must be able to move quickly and competently from Chile to Ceylon to the Central African Federation, or from Guatemala to Germany to Ghana, or from Mexico to Morocco to Malaya.

With so many countries to study now and with the expectation that there will be more within a few years, it is more important than ever before for teachers to consider effective ways of studying other countries, to start or to enlarge their small libraries of books and their files of current materials on the various nations of the world, and to reflect on the criteria by which countries should be selected for study.

This article singles out the problem of how to study the many nations of the world, leaving the reader to explore other writings on the materials available for the study of other lands and peoples, and the criteria by which countries should be selected for study.¹

SOME PITFALLS TO AVOID

Unconsciously and without malice towards other lands and peoples, most of us have fallen into ways of studying other countries which do a great injustice to their citizens and give a distorted view of them to our students. It might be well for all of us to examine our current practices to see if we have fallen into such traps.

Dr. Kenworthy, Professor of Education at Brooklyn College, has had a lifelong interest in the problem he here discusses. His extensive travels include a trip last year to the new and emerging nations of Africa, the Middle East, and Asia. His most recent book is *Introducing Children to the World* (Harper, 1956). This summer a volume on *Leaders of New Nations* (Double-day) will appear.

One pitfall is to present other countries as they existed yesterday, but not as they exist today. For example, we still picture the Mexican, with his serape, sleeping in the sun, with his sombrero at his side or tilted over his eyes. Or we portray Africans as naked, drum-beating savages living in mud-huts in hot, wet lands. We forget or we fail to stress the fact that all Mexicans never fitted that stereotype or that all Africans did not live as we have said. Furthermore, we tend to forget the vast changes which have taken place in these and other parts of the world, with the industrialization of so many nations and the development of large metropolitan areas like Mexico City, Casablanca, Leopoldville, Johannesburg, and other urban centers.

Or we devote two or three days to a country, treating it hurriedly and superficially, content that we have "covered" that part of the syllabus, little realizing that the residue of our study will be a few unrelated and probably unimportant facts. Like the men in the fable of the blind men and the elephant, our students will have discovered the trunk or the ears or the tail and not the whole animal—or country.

In our desire to arouse interest on the part of pupils, we often fall into the pitfall of stressing the bizarre and the colorful rather than the realistic, especially at the elementary school level. Hence we teach about the igloos of Alaska and the windmills of The Netherlands, leaving lasting misimpressions about these and other parts of the world.

Or we teach about a country as if all the people in it dressed alike, thought alike, and acted alike. We talk about *The French*, *The Japanese*, or *The Brazilians*, failing to stress the infinite variety within countries as well as between them. How can one gain a complete and accurate picture today, for instance, of Malaya without taking into account the large numbers of Chinese, Indians, and Pakistani as well as the larger group of Malays? Or how can one study Guatemala

¹ For material on the other two topics not treated here, see the writer's volume on *Introducing Children to the World in Elementary and Junior High Schools* (Harper, 1956) and his two chapters in Ralph C. Preston's *Teaching World Understanding* (Prentice-Hall, 1955).

without stressing the large percentage of Indians as well as the Spanish and mestizos?

Then again, we may like a country very much and present only the best aspects of it—or conversely, dislike it and present only the worst phases of it.

As historians and social scientists we need to have a single rather than a double standard for studying countries. This is especially true of countries like Russia and China. One result of presenting only their weaknesses has been the tailspin into which the American public has been thrown by its recent realization that Russians, like the peoples of other countries, do some things uncommonly well.

Another pitfall into which we often fall is that of judging others by our standards. Thus we condemn India, Burma, Ceylon, and other nations for being "independent" in their foreign policies, rather than trying to understand why they have taken such a stand. Or we ridicule the French because their plumbing is not as good as ours, often overlooking or minimizing the areas of life in which the people of France may equal or surpass us.

Finally, we often tend to equate knowledge about a nation with respect for it or an understanding of it. We amass an enormous number of facts, hoping thereby to promote an understanding of that country. As a result we produce, or try to produce, little walking World Almanacs or National Geographics rather than competent, well-informed, understanding world-minded Americans.

THE MANY WAYS OF STUDYING COUNTRIES

There are scores of ways of studying other countries, from which competent teachers can select the ones most appropriate to their classes or the ones which they are able to handle. The combined use of many of these approaches in the study of any nation can enrich the understanding of it and provide a variety of methods for building and maintaining interest on the part of pupils.

On a recent nine-months trip to the new nations of Africa, the Middle East, and Asia, the author of this article tried out several of these approaches and found them exciting and revealing. For example, one can enter a village or city and listen for all the sounds that he hears, tape recording them for future use. In this way the dimension of sound is added to that of sight to develop a well-rounded view of a country.

Or one can stand on the side of a major high-

way and learn much about a nation. In Pakistan, for example, the writer saw 12 different modes of transportation on one street corner, ranging from rubber-tired camel carts carrying cotton bales to the modern limousine of the Pakistan Airways.

A view of the hats of a country can help one to understand it, for they represent history, position, religion, rank, economics, and politics. A count, for example, of the number of old men wearing the fez in Morocco as opposed to the number of young men wearing them reveals the tremendous cleavage between generations in their acceptance of innovations, for the fez is still a symbol there of the old regime.

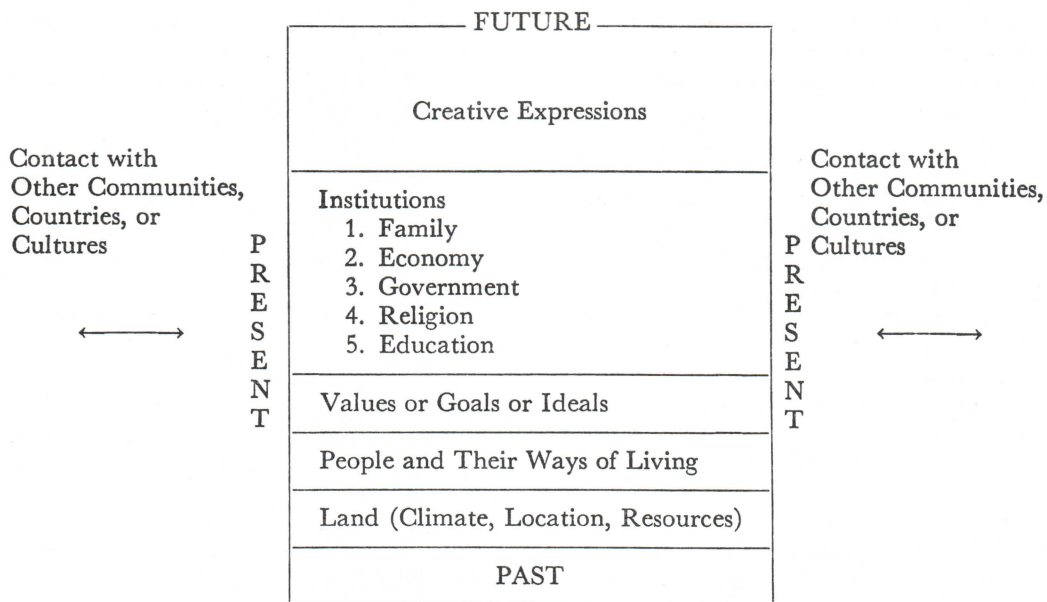
For those competent in music, the songs of a country can tell much about its philosophy and history. In a student group at Penn State University recently a highly qualified musician was playing a piece of Indian music. When she stopped playing, one of the students asked her if she had completed the song for it sounded unfinished to him. To this question she replied, "Does life always complete itself? Does one always return to *do*?" The group stopped and thought, and through the incident gained a much deeper insight into India and Indian philosophy than lectures and books had previously revealed.

Similarly, the study of literature, of language, of movies and plays, of holidays, of children's drawings, and of a host of other subjects and activities can help us as teachers and through us our students to get inside other countries and cultures.²

Taken alone, these methods may give a distorted view of a country; taken together they should give as broad and deep a view as is possible without close contact with the people themselves.

What is needed today in the study of any country or culture is a multidimensional, interdisciplinary approach, drawing upon the insights of history, geography, sociology, social psychology, economics, anthropology, government, psychology, psychiatry, literature and language, religion and philosophy, and the arts. As social studies teachers or social scientists, we should draw upon the many disciplines in our own broad field as well as upon many related disciplines.

² For a provocative study of many of these techniques, see Margaret Mead and Rhoda Metraux, *The Study of Culture At a Distance* (University of Chicago Press, 1953).



A POSSIBLE PATTERN FOR STUDYING COUNTRIES

There are always dangers in suggesting "patterns," for they may be meaningful to the person who has developed them and not prove useful to others. Or they may become merely "patterns" rather than teaching devices for better understanding. Over a period of several years the writer has experimented with the chart or pattern for studying communities, countries, and cultures which appears at the top of this page. It is hoped that this pattern will suggest to both teachers and students a logical way of looking at any country. Even after much of the mass of detailed information has been forgotten they may still have a method by which they can re-examine countries which they once studied in school or new nations which they have never studied. Or they can use this pattern to look at a new community or state into which they have moved in this period of high mobility in the United States.

The best point for starting any study of a country is usually with its geographic base. This is the stage on which the drama of human history takes place and it is of vital importance to any nation.

A look at the geographic base of Norway should reveal the mountainous terrain of that country and explain quickly why the Norwegians have settled largely in small communities along the fjords; have taken their livestock up into the cleared patches in the mountains; have gone to sea; or have emigrated to other parts of the world. Or an examination of Libya or Jordan's

geographic bases will soon show why their economies are not viable. The use of polar projection maps will explain to students why Russia feels surrounded by the various pacts of the Western World or why Cambodia and Laos and other Southeast Asia nations are cautious in their relations with China and Russia.

Then come the people—the actors on the stage which has just been examined. They cannot be portrayed in one simple tableau, for there is always an infinite variety within any given country, whether it be Kenya in East Africa, with its large African population, its small but economically and politically dominant white group, and its large number of Indians and Pakistani; or Brazil, a melting pot of Italians, Spaniards, Portuguese, Germans, Russians, Japanese, and others.

There is almost always an infinite variety in ways of living, too, within countries. This is far more true of the economically underdeveloped nations than it is of the countries of the Western World. But there is variety even in a country like France, with vast differences between the lives of the French farmers and the residents of Paris, Lyons, or Marseilles, making it ridiculous to study France by concentrating on Paris, as is so often done. How much greater are the differences in a nation like India, with the range of human activities covering the span from the most primitive life in an isolated village to the highly sophisticated existence of upper-middle class citizens in a city like New Delhi.

In moving from the geographic base to the

people, it is important in every country to see the relationships between these two factors, and to understand how the land has affected the people and in turn how the people have affected the land.

The values or beliefs of the people of any country are not easily understood by an outsider, but they are central to the study of every nation. How can one understand the institutions which have been created in any part of the world without knowing why these institutions developed? How can one understand the actions of any group of people without some knowledge of their values? Lacking such knowledge, the student will judge others by his own standards—a grievous mistake in the study of any country.

Thus any study of Southeast Asia must include at least an elementary knowledge of Buddhism, or any study of the Middle East a passing acquaintance at least with Islam. Students should also understand the belief in the importance of the larger family in most parts of the world today and of the values of tribalism in large parts of Africa. Any understanding of the Union of South Africa today must be predicated on at least some stress on the rigid, orthodox interpretation of Christianity on the part of most whites in that country, and any understanding of Russia must be based on at least an elementary knowledge of dialectic materialism, even if that phrase must be interpreted in the most elementary ways.

In every country in the world today there are deep rifts and conflicts between value systems which must be understood in order to appreciate current events in any country. Thus, in Ghana, one can only appreciate the political struggle if it is set within the frame of a titanic struggle between the tribal chiefs and the representatives of modernization and westernization, or between the various economic forces within the country. Similarly, one must appreciate the views of the zamindars in West Pakistan and of the mullahs as representing the power of Islam in order to probe below the surface of unrest in that part of the world.

In the chart on page 161, the section on values or beliefs precedes that on institutions because it is the beliefs of any group of people which have largely effected the institutions which they have created.

In all or almost all societies there are five basic institutions which people have developed. These are the family, the economy, the religion, the

government, and the educational system—whether it is formally or informally organized. Some attention needs to be given to each of these major forms of human organization, even at the elementary or junior high school level of instruction.

In the future it may be necessary to add other institutions, such as the mass media, but the five we have mentioned here are central today in all societies.

In studying each of these human institutions it is important for students to know that there are problems connected with them in each country. These range from the problem of internal security in Burma, Malaya, and Vietnam to that of governmental organization in France and Italy.

As an integral part of the study of any country, students should learn about the creative expressions of that part of the world. Students need to learn that people everywhere have created in the past and are still creating. And students need to understand that the future vitality of any nation or people is dependent in large part upon its creativity.

Such creativity may yield simple and beautiful products such as the kente cloth togas for the men in Ghana or the simple wooden stools in the homes of Kenya Africans, with colored beads attractively embedded in patterns in the soft wood. Or creativity may mean the development of new ideas such as the growth of parliamentary democracy in England or the public school system in the United States.

The emphasis in most studies of other lands and peoples should be upon the present, but the present cannot be understood without reference to the past. And no study of a country will be adequate without a look at its future. People everywhere are proud of their history; people in many parts of the world are pulled today by their hopes for the future. This pull of the future is especially apparent in the new and emerging nations of the world.

Finally, it is important to see that no country today is isolated. Each has its contacts with other parts of the world and affects and in turn is affected by other nations.

To include all these aspects of life in our studies of other countries means that we will need to study fewer countries, but to examine those few nations with far greater depth and with far greater breadth than we have usually done in the past.