

Atlas of California: A Changing State

Writing Activities

California Atlas Writing Activities
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Descriptive Writing

“I Am” Poem

Literature selections: *Mojave*, *Sierra*, *Death Valley: A Day in the Desert*, *Hello Ocean*, or any other book which portrays a particular place or region.

Help students generate lists of things that “the desert”, for example, might hear, see, touch, dream, etc. Next, students write an “I Am” poem from the point of view of a personified place or region, such as “I Am the Desert” or “I Am the Redwood Forest”.

I Am (the Desert)

I am
I hear
I see
I want
I am
I feel
I touch
I say
I dream
I am

“I Know” Poem

Literature selections: *Hello Ocean*

Other materials: postcards, calendars, paintings, or magazines

The “I Know” poem is similar to the “I Am” poem, but it is written from the point of view of someone who “knows” a particular place or region. Using images of places or regions, students work in groups to create a poem portraying the varied and contrasting aspects of a geographic area.

For an “I Know California” poem, each cooperative group of four students receives postcards or other visuals representing different aspects of California. Students create word webs of things they would see, hear, smell, and touch in several different regions of California, such as the desert, the coastal region, the mountains, the valleys, the cities, etc. Post these webs where students can refer to them.

For each sentence starter shown below, students write four sentences, one representing each of the postcards in order to show contrasts. Encourage use of adjectives and adverbs. The finished poem will have five verses, each ending with “I Know California”.

I Know California

I know California.

I see

I hear (sounds in the environment)

I smell

I touch

I hear (words you might hear people say)

I know California.

Letter Home

Literature Selection: *Kai’s Journey to Gold Mountain: An Angel Island Story*

Students write a “letter home”, describing a place through which they are traveling, a place to which they have moved, or a place that they are visiting. Students can use a thesaurus to help them describe the “sights they see”.

Word Sort/Found Poem

Literature Selections: *C Is for California: Written by Kids for Kids*, *G Is for Golden: A California Alphabet*, *Our California*, *California: Plants and Animals* and any other books that portray regions in California

Students sort words representing different regions in California, and use the sorted words to create a “found poem” about a particular region. First, display a mixture of words depicting different regions, taken from one of the literature selections, and ask students to identify words they recognize. As you read the selection, ask students to identify the words with which they were not familiar, and to discuss their meaning. Finally, students sort the words by region, select a region, and create a “found poem” using words from the selected region.

Masterpiece Sentences

Literature Selections: *Sierra*, *Mojave*, *Hello Ocean*, or any book which portrays a place or region in California

Students write sentences describing a place or region in California using the “masterpiece sentences” strategy, adapted from Greene, J.F. (1995). *LANGUAGE!: The effects of an*

individualized structured language curriculum for middle and high school students. *Annals of Dyslexia*, 38, 2587275.

Ask students to write a simple sentence describing a picture in the selected book, e.g. *Hello Ocean*, using an article, noun, verb: *The bird flew*. Ask students to “paint the predicate”, with “how”, “where” and “when”: *The bird flew slowly over the tide pools at midday*. Ask students to “paint the subject”, with “how many” and “what kind”: *The lone white bird flew slowly over the tide pools at midday*. Ask students to move the predicate: *At midday, the lone white bird flew slowly over the tide pools*. Ask students to use more colorful words: *At midday, the lone white seagull soared slowly over the tide pools*. Ask students to add finishing touches: *At midday, the lone white seagull soared slowly over the tide pools*.

Narrative Writing

Postcard

Literature Selections: *C Is for California: Written by Kids for Kids*, *G Is for Golden: A California Alphabet*, *Our California*, and any other books that portray regions, places, or landmarks of California

After learning about places and regions in California, students plan an imaginary trip through the state. They decide which places they will visit, find out where the places are located on the map, and develop an itinerary. Once the trip has been planned, students write a postcard, highlighting their experiences along the way.

Expository Writing

Geographic Features Book

Literature Selections: *All Around California: Regions and Resources*, *Uniquely California*, and any other books that portray geographic features in California

Students create a “four-square” book depicting landforms and bodies of water in California, as they learn about geographic features through literature, photographs, illustrations, videos, field trips, and hands-on projects. Each page of the book consists of four sections. In the first box, students write the name and definition of the feature. In the second box, students draw a picture of the feature. In the third box, students explain how the feature differs from another similar feature. For example, “A mountain is higher than a hill.” In the last box, students list examples of the feature from California.

Persuasive Writing

Travel Brochure

Literature Selections: *C Is for California: Written by Kids for Kids*, *G Is for Golden: a California Alphabet*, *Our California*, and any other books and brochures that portray places and regions in California

Students create a six-page travel brochure to encourage visitors to come to a city, a region, or to the state of California, highlighting the attributes. On the first page, students draw a map, showing where the place is located in relation to a larger area. On pages 2, 3, and 4, students describe and illustrate three physical attractions. On page 6, students describe at least two things to do, and explain why the place is ideal for a vacation.