Minnesota, what makes it unique?

Big Question Social Studies Unit
By Jess Wacek
**Title:** Minnesota, what makes it unique?

**Level:** Grade 3

**Estimated Time Required:** Five lessons—approximately 15 days

**Rationale and Overview:** This unit looks at specific characteristics of the state that my students live in, Minnesota. The unit allows for students to examine past and present culture, geography, and climate. Furthermore, the unit takes the students’ individual interests about their community and state into consideration. Students will explore the topography, climate, natural resources, and other characteristics of this region to answer the question: Minnesota, what makes it unique?

The unit is worth teaching, for it incorporates a selection of activities that are personalized and meaningful to the students. Some of the activities included within the unit are as follows:

- Field trip
- Guest speaker
- Presentations
- Visual arts
- Language arts

The lessons that are included in the unit allow students to work cooperatively as well as participate in lessons that are engaging and encourage student inquiry. The unit includes activities and presentations that promote positive classroom community, as well as teamwork and cooperation.

**National Standards:**
- NCSS III: People, Places, and Environments

**State Standards:**
- Geography—Concepts of Location
- Geography—Physical Features and Processes
Local Standards:
• Minnesota-Past and Present—Describe the climate, topography, and natural resources of Minnesota, and why Minnesota is classified as a Great Plains state.
• Minnesota-Past and Present—Describe how your region has changed over time.

Overall Goals:
1. The student will distinguish between physical and human-made features of places on the Earth’s surface.
2. The student will use directional and positional words to locate and describe people, places, and things.

Specific Objectives:
• The student will describe the location of people, places and things by using positional words.
• The student will use maps and globes to locate places referenced in stories and real life situations.
• The student will name and locate physical features of Minnesota, including places about which they have read.
• The student will name and locate major cities, the capital and their hometown within Minnesota.
• The student will describe the climate, topography, and natural resources of Minnesota.

Inquiry Questions:
What physical features does Minnesota have?
Are there feature that are unique to Minnesota?
What is the capital of Minnesota?
What is the climate of Minnesota?
What is topography? How does it relate to Minnesota?
How do you use a map? Globe? How do they help you?
How has Minnesota changed over the years? What are the changes?
Has Duluth changed? What are the major changes?
What characteristics are unique to Minnesota?

Resources:
Communities: Adventures in Time and Place textbook
Cardstock
Markers, colored pencils, crayons
Computers with Internet capabilities
Guest speaker
Poster board
Lined paper
Maps of Minnesota
Map of United States and World
Globes
Cardboard
Playdoh
Topographic maps of Minnesota
Climate chart
Paint
Paintbrushes
Digital camera
White paper
Lined paper
Notebooks
M is for Minnesota by Debra Chial
Minnesota by Dennis Brindell Fradin
Minnesota by A.P. Porter
M is for Minnesota by Dori Hillestad Butler
Minnesota by Erik Bruun
Lake Superior, wow!: A kid’s guide to 99 fun things to do in Duluth, Superior, and along
Lake Superior’s North Shore by John Murray
Minnesota by R. Conrad Stein
**Student Assessment Plan:**

**Lesson 1:**

- Physical Feature Map
  The map needs to be neat, easy to read, and colored. There must be at least ten marked and labeled features on the map. These features need to include the required pieces but other features may be on the map.

  **Score 5….4….3….2….1**

**Lesson 2:**

- Topographic Map of Minnesota
  This map needs to be neat, easy to read, and colored. There must be at least twenty marked and labeled features on the map. These features need to include the required pieces but other features may be on the map. The map should show proportionate elevation of the state. Students have to have used Playdoh and paint to create the map.

  **Score 5….4….3….2….1**

**Lesson 3:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1-Beginning</th>
<th>2-Developing</th>
<th>3-Accomplished</th>
<th>4-Exemplary</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Climate Chart</td>
<td>Zero to Five of the twenty</td>
<td>Six to Ten of the twenty</td>
<td>Eleven to Fifteen of the twenty</td>
<td>Sixteen to twenty pieces of</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>pieces of information have</td>
<td>pieces of information have</td>
<td>pieces of information have</td>
<td>information have been</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>been recorded.</td>
<td>been recorded.</td>
<td>been recorded.</td>
<td>been recorded.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Journal</td>
<td>One, two, or none of the</td>
<td>Three of the five journals are</td>
<td>Four of the five journals are</td>
<td>All five journals are completed.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>journals are completed.</td>
<td>completed.</td>
<td>completed.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Lesson 4:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1-Beginning</th>
<th>2-Developing</th>
<th>3-Accomplished</th>
<th>4-Exemplary</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Brochure</td>
<td>One, two or none of the five facts are included.</td>
<td>Three of the five facts are included.</td>
<td>Four of the five facts are included.</td>
<td>All five are included.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Road Map</td>
<td>There is no path.</td>
<td>Path is not clear or complete.</td>
<td>Path is clearly marked but not in color.</td>
<td>Path is clearly marked in color.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Directions</td>
<td>No directions were presented.</td>
<td>Directions are missing two or more instructions.</td>
<td>Directions are missing one instruction.</td>
<td>Directions are clear, accurate, and not missing any instructions.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Lesson 5:

• Paragraph
  This paragraph addresses the question, *Minnesota, What Makes it Unique?* The paragraph is at least five sentences long. It includes information that has been learned throughout the activities, guest speaker, Internet research, and discussions.

  **Score 5….4….3….2…1**

• Minnesota Fact Book
  This book needs to include a cover page, physical feature map, photo of topographic map, climate chart, climate journal, travel brochure, road map with path drawn, directions for road trip, paragraph about what makes Minnesota unique, and back cover. The contents need to be completed.

  **Score 5….4….3….2….1**
Lesson 1: What are the physical features?
Duration: 3 days

Introduction
• Students will gather on the carpeted meeting area. Ask students:
  1. What are physical features?
  2. Does Minnesota have mountains, lakes, rivers, etc.?
  3. Which physical features does Minnesota have?
• Using student responses as a guide for discussion make a list of the physical features that can be located on a map or globe. Then create a separate list of the features that can be found on a map of Minnesota. Tell the students that physical features include landforms, bodies of water, climate, natural vegetation and soil.
• Discuss the difference between the physical features of Minnesota and those of other states or countries?
  1. Which states or countries have mountains? Colorado? Nepal?
  2. Do certain features change how those residents live?
  3. How do Minnesotans use the physical features that are around them?
• When discussion is over have students return to their desks.

Learning Activities
• Students will work in cooperative groups. Each group will have a map of Minnesota that shows physical features. The class will list the major physical features of Minnesota. Each student will receive a sugar cookie in the shape of Minnesota. Students will then use frosting to create as accurately as possible the shape of the land. Once students have created the physical features of the land using green frosting they will add blue frosting to add major lakes and rivers to their cookie map. Popcorn will be added to represent corn, pretzels for trees, chocolate chips for coal, and goldfish for fish. Students will place these symbols on their cookie in the appropriate places.
• After students have created and digested their edible maps they will each be given a map of Minnesota on which they will identify the following:
  ✓ The capital of Minnesota: St. Paul
  ✓ The Mississippi river
  ✓ Duluth
  ✓ The Minnesota River
  ✓ Three major cities besides St. Paul and Duluth
  ✓ Three large lakes

Closing
• When the students have finished their edible map and their Minnesota map with all of the information outlined above then the students will have a chance to color their map as it will be part of their Minnesota Fact Book they will create throughout the unit.
• The class will put their finished map in their Minnesota folder which will be kept in a basket in the classroom. Each student has a folder where they will put all of the pieces for their fact book.
Minnesota
Lesson 2: Topography of Minnesota
Duration: 3 days

Introduction
• Students will gather on the carpeted meeting area. Ask students to recall the definition of physical features and provide examples. How are physical features described or shown on a map. Introduce topography to the students. Topography refers to the “lay of the land” and provides a detailed and precise description of a place or region.
• Show the class examples of topographic maps of Minnesota, the United States and other countries.
• The students will take notice of the different elevations and physical features of Minnesota.

Learning Activities
• Students will work in pairs. Each pair of students will be given a piece of cardboard that they will use to create their topographic map of Minnesota. Students will trace the shape of Minnesota onto their piece of cardboard. Then the pair will work together to create an elevated map using Playdoh. The students will be able to create low and high elevations using Playdoh. Students will be sure to be as accurate as possible when creating their map.
• Once students have finished with the Playdoh layer of their map they will allow the Playdoh to be dry. The pairs will paint their map. Each map should contain:
  ✓ Legend
  ✓ Compass rose
  ✓ Capital of Minnesota
  ✓ Duluth, MN
  ✓ Mississippi River
  ✓ Minnesota River
  ✓ Boundary Waters Canoe Area
  ✓ Five major cities
  ✓ Five large lakes
  ✓ Three State Parks

Conclusion
• Students will work in their pairs to finish this project. Once the pair has finished with creating the map and labeling all required parts they will allow the map to dry completely and then they will be displayed within the classroom or school.
Lesson 3: Climate
Duration: 3 days

Introduction
• Students will gather at the meeting area of the classroom. The teacher will begin the discussion about Minnesota’s weather and climate. What is the weather like today? What has it like yesterday? What season are we in? Does the weather stay like this? How does it change? How many times a year does it change?
• The class will prepare for their guest speaker or field trip by recording weather/climate data for a week prior to their visit. This will allow them to have some data to make conjectures about the climate of Minnesota before they meet the local meteorologist.

Learning Activities
• Place students in small groups. Allow time three times a day for one week. The students will take the temperature of the weather conditions outside. Allow them to take a reading once in the morning, noon and afternoon. After a week of gathering data, the different teams will relate their data with their classmates. The students can also relate other information about the climate conditions: rain, snow, fog, etc. The students will write their findings and comparisons in a journal. The students will graph and chart the information. Students will add a copy of their journal, graphs/charts and record sheet to their fact folder.
• The class will invite the local meteorologist to the classroom or plan a field trip to the local television station to meet the meteorologist. The meteorologist will share with the students the different instruments they use to measure temperature, barometric pressure, etc. The students will have a presentation about Minnesota’s climate from the meteorologist. After the presentation the students will have an opportunity to ask questions about the presentation as well as other questions relating to the topic.

Conclusion
• Students will finish their climate recording charts. After meeting the meteorologist they will write a paragraph about the climate of Minnesota and add both the paragraph and climate chart to their fact folder.
Climate Chart

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Monday</th>
<th>Tuesday</th>
<th>Wednesday</th>
<th>Thursday</th>
<th>Friday</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Morning</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Noon</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Afternoon</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Climate Guesses

1. __________________________________________
2. __________________________________________
3. __________________________________________
Lesson 4: Road Trip through Minnesota
Duration: 3 days

Introduction
• Students will gather on the carpet meeting area of the room. The discussion will review the previous activities of the unit. The teacher will then introduce the next activity. Has anyone been on a road trip? How did you know where to go?
• The teacher will explain the assignment while the students are on the carpet and then send them off to work with their partners.

Learning Activities
• Your family is getting ready to plan the annual summer vacation. You are not looking forward to the trip, because you are so sick of the booooring places your parents choose to visit. Surprisingly, this year your parents have agreed to let you plan the trip, if you can get your entire family to agree on your choice of travel. In order to promote your trip, you need to research and design a travel brochure for the destination of your choice within Minnesota.
• Students will work in pairs to create a travel brochure for their choice of destination, a road map depicting the path of choice, and a list of written out directions to the destination. The brochure requires students to pick a destination and list at least five activities or interesting facts about the destination. The road map requires students to draw out a route from Duluth to their destination. This path must be clearly marked in color. The directions need to be in list form and use proper terms like left, right, north, south, east, or west. Students will be given time to research their destination on computers with Internet capabilities as well as use resources in the library.
• The pair will be allowed to use the computer during both language arts and computer time so they might type their brochure and directions. The road map will show the path to the destination and may include side stops the students would want to take.

Conclusion
• When all groups have finished their brochure, road map, and directions they will present their trip to the class. Each group will have time to share with their classmates the destination they have chosen and information about it as well as other stops they think might be fun.
Lesson 5: Minnesota Fact Book  
Duration: 3 days

Introduction
• Students will gather on the carpeted meeting area. The group will discuss all of the previous lessons: physical feature map, topographic map, climate chart, meeting with meteorologist, and road trip assignment. The discussion should include the major ideas of the lessons and what students have learned about Minnesota through these activities.
• The student’s fact folders will be passed out. Each student has their work from the unit in their folder. The students will use this work to create a Minnesota Fact Book. This book will contain all of the work from the unit.

Learning Activity
• Each student will be provided with the materials necessary to make a book containing:
  - Colored and labeled physical feature map
  - A picture of their topographic map
  - Completed climate chart
  - Completed road trip brochure, road map, and directions
• The students will each write a paragraph answering the question, Minnesota, what makes it unique? The students will write a rough draft, have it edited and recopy the paragraph in their best cursive handwriting. Students will add this paragraph to their fact book. This paragraph needs to be at least five sentences.
• Each fact book should include:
  - Cover page
  - Physical feature map
  - Photo of topographic map
  - Climate chart
  - Climate journal
  - Travel brochure
  - Road map with path drawn
  - Directions for road trip
  - Paragraph about what makes Minnesota unique
  - Back cover

Conclusion
• When all students have finished their book the students will share their books with the other third grade class. Students will share their knowledge of Minnesota with their peers across the hall. Students will be allowed to ask questions and my class will answer the questions based on what they learned during the unit.