

# Geography by Cargo Ship

Students at a California middle school learned about the Far East by tracking and communicating with a cargo ship bound for Yokohama, Japan.

**G**rizzly Hill School, a 4th through 8th grade campus of 150 students, is located in the foothills of the Sierra Nevada mountains in northern California, in a pine forest. The serenity of the surroundings has a profound effect on the children—they have learned to walk gently upon the earth.

Despite their concern for the environment, however, I felt the students at Grizzly Hill lacked a global perspective. Perhaps this was a natural conclusion, as I had just returned to the classroom after several years with the Merchant Marine. I wanted the children of this rural school to be able to reach out and touch the world.

Calling on my maritime background, I decided to use the theme "The Pacific Rim and Basin" as the focus for my gifted class last year. This theme allowed me to introduce topics as varied as economics, navigation, mathematics, literature, cartography,

environmental studies, oceanography, and multicultural exchanges.

Next I gained permission from the Marine Operations Department of

**That my students  
had actually seen  
the ship made this  
project very real  
to them.**

American President Lines to track and communicate with one of their ships, the *President Kennedy*. The class would follow the ship using their computer, their modem, and a satellite communication system they could link into with the *Kennedy*.

Then I took my class to the Port of Oakland, where Captain Rath gave them a tour of the *President Kennedy*. The students met the crew and saw their living quarters. They went up on the bridge and saw all the "state of the art" navigational and safety equipment. Then they went down into the engine room and saw the huge diesel engine with cylinders so big that a person can stand inside them. They saw the ship being loaded with containers and became very curious as to what was in those huge boxes. They found that the ships carry electronic goods, foodstuffs, clothing, raw materials, industrial machines, cow hides,

National School  
Conference Institute  
and the  
Network for OBE  
presents

# THE FIFTH ANNUAL NATIONAL OUTCOME-BASED EDUCATION CONFERENCE



featuring  
**William Spady**  
**Benjamin Bloom**  
**John Champlin**  
**Thomas Guskey**  
**Alan Cohen**

Beginning and Advanced  
"hands-on" training sessions

On-Site School Visits

*Special Bonus:* Site-Based,  
Shared Decision-Making  
with Accountability

**February 8-11, 1990**  
**Phoenix, Arizona**

For Conference brochure call or write:  
NSCI, P.O. Box 941, Rimrock, AZ 86335  
(602) 567-5507

By becoming  
familiar with the  
ship, my students  
came to understand  
a high-tech  
environment—one  
very different  
from their own.

lumber, automobiles, and paper and aluminum for recycling.

On January 14, 1989, the *President Kennedy* sailed from San Francisco Bay for Yokohama, Japan. The first communication the students received from the ship detailed the weather and the ship's course, speed, latitude, and longitude. The ship was being routed by a company called Oceanroutes that tracks the weather across the Pacific and suggests specific routes so that ships can avoid rough weather. On this particular voyage the ship was being sent north to the Bering Sea through the Aleutian Islands. The class tracked the ship and plotted its course on charts the American President Lines had given them. That they had actually seen the ship made this project very real to them.

I also contacted another American President Lines ship on a run between Japan and Korea, the *President Pierce*. Every two weeks, the purser, Fred Ketterman, would meet with 20 Japanese students in Yokohama who would give him questions to ask my students. Then Fred would transmit

their questions to us using his computer. My class would respond and then ask their own questions of the Japanese students. Thus the children got an idea of what life is like in Japan. Since the communicators were all young people, many commonalities were found. Discussing what people wear and eat and what the climate is like in Japan made that country a more understandable place to my students.

Weather was also a topic of discussion, including observation, interpretation, and forecasting. I taught about high and low pressure areas, the Coriolis effect, ocean winds, tides, currents, and storms.

I required each of my students to pick a topic related to the Pacific Rim and do a report plus a hands-on project. The projects and reports have been as varied as the students doing them. After learning that 130 maritime nations had signed an agreement not to dump plastics at sea, one girl studied the burning of plastics at sea. She asked the ship what they did with their garbage. The ship wrote back that they packaged it into bundles and took it back to shore, where it was shredded and sent to Taiwan for processing.

My students also learned that a ship at sea is a self-contained world. Steaming through the seas, making fresh water from salt water, producing electricity, a ship must be entirely self-sufficient. By becoming familiar with the ship and the many jobs that keep it going, my students came to understand a high-tech environment—one very different from their own.

Charting the *President Kennedy*'s track across the ocean and around Asia made the world smaller and the Far East more real to my students. Most important, they came to appreciate that, whether we live in America or in the Pacific Basin, we all live on the same small planet □

**Tony Mociun** teaches at Twin Ridges Elementary School District, P.O. Box 529, N. San Juan, CA 95960.

Copyright © 1989 by the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development. All rights reserved.