

## DADE COUNTY GEOGRAPHY BEE

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The 1985 annual meeting of the Florida Society of Geographers had as its theme the teaching of geography in secondary schools. A panel discussion at that meeting addressed the problem of geographic education in Florida. The consensus was that there is a lack of emphasis in geography instruction in our public schools. Since geography has been a special interest of ours, we vowed to do something to improve geographic education in the junior highs. We asked the assistant principal of our school (McMillan Junior High) to insert a geography course into our curriculum. This was agreed to for Fall, 1986.

Our "badgering" for a geography course revealed the sentiment that, although we didn't have geography as a separate offering, we did teach geography in some of our courses (civics, U.S. and world history). We explained that a University of Miami survey showed many U. M. freshmen had difficulty on a place name pre-test. Geographic education has been much maligned, we pointed out, even in the national news (Schultz 1985; Pupils can't find Europe... 1985). Apparently the schools were not doing enough. We demonstrated that our students had an interest in geography and convinced the administration that the best way to show that interest was by a competition.

We decided to write a proposal for a geography bee and send it on to our area office. Approval came back in just one week. In October we sent out invitations to all assistant principals of curriculum and department chairpersons in the forty-eight middle and junior high schools in Dade County. Eventually sixteen schools (one-third of those eligible) sent teams to the competition.

We realized that we needed a sponsor to help coordinate the event and cover the expenses of the competition. One of our Dade Partner groups was willing to help. Dade Partners are business and civic organizations voluntarily working with Dade County schools to promote excellence in education. The group which helped us was the Optimist Club of West Kendall.(1) Not only did they cover costs, they also provided much help to see that the First Annual Dade County Geography Bee ran well. During the two months prior to the contest they helped us establish competition rules and arranged for the trophies and the plaques that were awarded. The Optimist Club of West Kendall and their female counterparts the OptiMStics also provided refreshments during the event.

We wanted each participant to have something to carry away from the experience and our sponsor provided a professionally printed certificate of participation for each participant and a program that listed the participants and sponsors. Each runner-up in the final round received an individual plaque and their school also received a plaque. The winners and their schools received a first-place plaque and a traveling trophy that will be kept in their school until next year's competition.

Although our school hosted the event, we were only one of many schools involved. This was to be a Dade County Public Schools competition. We asked all participating schools to submit questions, which were screened by Pat Kixmiller, geography professor from Miami-Dade Community College (North Campus), and Simine Heise, an Area Office Social Studies Project Manager. Moderators at the event were professors from local universities and colleges.(2)

Because we had been involved in setting up the event, the team from our school had to prepare on its own. We provided interested students with research

to do and then tested them. Six were chosen, four seventh graders, one eighth grader and an alternate, a ninth grader. They were chosen just three weeks before the first round. After watching them during both sessions of the competition (February 13th and 27th), we realized that they knew more geographical trivia than we did.

The first round of the competition was held at McMillan Junior High, and the final round, also held at McMillan, took place in late February of this year. Sixteen schools started, and all but two, McMillan and Arvida Junior High, were eliminated. Little did we realize when we initiated this competition that our team from McMillan Junior High would dominate. They had been nervous going up against the Arvida team comprised of ninth graders but were ready for the challenge. We were thrilled when John Clarke, captain of the team representing McMillan Junior High, was handed the traveling trophy as a reward.

The First Annual Dade County Geography Bee was successful because much effort went into planning and implementing the competition. We are sure that there are many throughout the state who would like to duplicate this experience in their own county and would like to see this idea spread to other counties and eventually result in a state-wide or regional event. If anyone would like information about our model, please contact either of us at McMillan Junior High, 13100 S. W. 59 Street, Miami 33183. Plans are under way for a South Florida Regional Geography Bee to be held in Miami in March 1987. Several counties are planning on attending. We have also heard from several other states requesting information about this competition. We anticipate a national competition in the future.

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1. Many of the members of the Optimist Club were involved in the various phases of preparation, but three were essential to the experience: Matt Paris (president of the club), Joseph Gagliano and Frank Carpenter. Mr. Paris was involved in all phases from the beginning. Mr. Carpenter helped us with printing and with the format of the double-elimination rounds. Mr. Gagliano was our Competition Official who ran the two sessions.
2. The moderators were Dr. Thomas Boswell, University of Miami; Dr. Nancy Erwin, Florida International University; Professor Pat Kixmiller, Miami-Dade Community College (North Campus); Professor Paige Cubbison and Dr. Dennis Shaw, both from Miami-Dade Community College (South Campus); and Professor Gary Feinberg, St. Thomas University. We deeply appreciate their support and the time they spent in helping make this a successful event.

#### References

- Pupils can't find Europe with a globe. 1985. Boca Raton News, 25 March, pp. 1-2; reprinted in The Florida Geographer, 1985, 19(1):p. 3.
- Schultz, Ronald R. 1985. The meaning and importance of geographic knowledge. The Florida Geographer 19(1):1-3.