Friday, March 4, 2011

Authors use the geographic perspective when crafting novels, stories, or other works of fiction. The relationship between people and their natural and constructed environments is often a key part of a story’s plot, theme, or setting.

Here are some works of fiction that make good use of the geographic perspective, recommended by National Geographic staff.

**Young Readers**

*The Arrival*, by Shaun Tan. “Chronicles the alienation and strangeness of migration, all through pictures. Absolutely gorgeous. A man leaves his wife and child in an impoverished town, seeking better prospects in an unknown country on the other side of a vast ocean. He eventually finds himself in a bewildering city of foreign customs, peculiar animals, curious floating objects, and indecipherable languages.”
—Mary Crooks, illustrator

*The Life and Times of Scrooge McDuck*, by Don Rosa. “Following a young Scrooge McDuck through his harrowing adventures across the globe, this book uncovers his explorations in the incredible wilderness and frontiers in turn-of-the-century Africa, Australia and America.”
—Zach Michel, contractor (oceans)

—Caryl-Sue, senior writer/editor

**Young Adult**

*Dust*, by Joan Frances Turner. “A novel about the end of the world as it would look like in northwest Indiana, told from the point of view of a teenage zombie. Are the shores of Lake Michigan responsible for creating the walking dead?”
—Mary Schons, reporter

*Call of the Wild*, by Jack London. “Buck, a family pet, is stolen from his California home, transported to Alaska, and
forced to become a sled dog during the Klondike Gold Rush. Buck struggles to survive in the primitive environment of the Canadian wilderness. An American classic.”
—Nancy Wynne, educator reviewer

_The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe_, by C.S. Lewis. “A wicked queen casts a spell over an entire land, sending it into a climactic ice age, forcing animals and plants to adapt or die. Four British children—and a lion—save the day, returning the land to its balmy, happy state. If only real-world climate problems were this simple!”
—Sean O’Connor, project manager (educational maps)

_The Countess Below Stairs_, by Eva Ibbotson. “Anna Grazinsky has spent an idyllic childhood as part of a loving family in St. Petersburg, having picnics on the banks of the Neva River and skating there during the long winters. But revolution forces her family to flee, making their way to England, where Anna becomes a maid at a lovely English country home known as Mersham, located in Wiltshire. There she meets the young earl, home from WWI, to assume his responsibilities as head of the estate even though he long dreamed of accompanying one of his professors on far-flung archaeological expeditions.”
—Cathy Hunter, librarian

_True Grit_, by Charles Portis. “Fourteen-year-old Mattie Ross is a force to be reckoned with. When her father is murdered and the killer, Chaney, escapes into Indian Territory, she negotiates the hire of retired U.S. Marshal Rooster Cogburn to bring the scoundrel to justice. Together, the unlikely pair trail a gang of criminals across hills and plains, often followed by Texas Ranger LaBoeuf, who has his own reasons to arrest Chaney. From silver mines to rattlesnake dens, the geography of this particular time and place alters the choices and fates of the characters as they seek their ambitions.”
—Alison Michel, associate producer (educational media)

_The Alchemist_, by Paulo Coelho. “A young shepherd named Santiago ventures from Spain to Egypt in search of hidden treasure at the pyramids. He experiences different people and cultures as he passes through small villages, crosses a vast desert, and hunkers down in an oasis. A novel that reads like a fable, it's a story about the journey, not the destination.”
—Jeannie Evers, copy editor

_Maniac Magee_, by Jerry Spinelli. “This book follows the story of Jeffrey ‘Maniac’ Magee, a young orphaned boy in an imaginary town in Pennsylvania called Two Mills. Two Mills is divided along racial lines and ‘place’ plays a huge role in the story, as Maniac navigates his way around town, making both friends and enemies in his search for a family.”
—Samantha Zuhlke, contractor (oceans)

_The Wanderer_, by Sharon Creech. “Thirteen-year-old Sophie, her cousins, and her uncles sail 2,600 miles across the Atlantic Ocean from Connecticut to England. They travel up the North American coast from Long Island Sound to Martha’s Vineyard, through Cape Cod and the Gulf of Maine to Nova Scotia, and along the Gulf Stream and Labrador currents to Ireland, finally landing in Wales. There’s fun, adventure, laughs, and danger all along the way as they explore so many places, from deserted islands to the bustling city of London.”
—Kara West, copy editor

_The Collected Works of T.S. Spivet_, by Reif Larson. “Follow a twelve-year-old genius cartographer named T.S. Spivet on a journey from his Montana home to the Smithsonian! Awe at all of the amazing maps and diagrams that T.S. makes to help explain his story!”
—Andrew Turgeon, researcher

_Ten Cents a Dance_, by Christine Fletcher. “This is a historical novel of Chicago. The attempt of a teenage worker to escape her drudgery in the packing-house assembly line leads her to a secret career in the dance halls of the
depression. The time and place are what drive the plot and the characters' motivations. This story could not have happened anywhere else.”
—Mary Gilbert, librarian

_Treasure Island_, by Robert Louis Stevenson. “Obviously, it’s geographic because its main plot centers around a map! The story infuses human, historical, and economic geographic aspects!”
—Winn Brewer, researcher

_The Winter King_, by Bernard Cornwell. “A great King Arthur book! It takes place all over the British Isles, from Wales to Scotland to Britain; has historical basis for many of the battles; and descriptions of the landscape and how they are living in it. It's exciting, good reading, and is in a series of three.”

—Valerie Ostenak, artist

**Students**

_The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo_, by Stieg Larsson. "It is riveting! The main character travels throughout Sweden and Australia using geographic and photographic evidence to piece together the mysterious disappearance of a teenager from some 40 years earlier.”
—Annalisa Parnell, project manager

_East of Eden_, by John Steinbeck. “A classic for a reason! This book's introduction gives a cultural and natural history of the Salinas Valley to make you feel connected to the story while the meat of the book connects each character to the land.”
—Michelle Johnson, science teacher

_The Shadow of the Wind_, by Carlos Ruiz Zafon. “A mystery and a love story taking place in gothic Barcelona. The presence of the city is so strong, it is practically a character in itself. This story has you guessing until the end.”
—Elizabeth West, senior administrative assistant

_A Game of Thrones_, by George R.R. Martin. “Using multiple points of view and storylines, Martin creates a world that spans from the frozen north to deserts and the sea, and includes kings and queens, lords, knights, rebels, commoners, nomads and other beings. Customs and lifestyles vary by region, but everyone is either involved in or impacted by the struggle for the Iron Throne and the threat that winter, which can last for decades, is coming.”
—Kim Dumke, reporter

_The Pillars of the Earth_, by Ken Follett. “Anchored around the tale of cathedral-building, the book provides a fascinating look at time and place in 12th-century England. A wealth of historical detail blends politics, history, societal mores, and a true sense of place. Throw in intrigue and likable characters and you have wonderful work of historical fiction.”
—Kim Hulse, director (geographic education programs)

_Let the Great World Spin_, by Colum McCann. “In the summer of 1974, ten ordinary people collide in this fascinating New York story. Their world stands still as a man defies gravity and dances on a cable between the towers of the World Trade Center, 110 stories above. This one moment becomes the nucleus of the story and the overlapping of these ordinary, yet very distinct, New Yorkers.”
—Jamie Bosley, event specialist

_Cannery Row_, by John Steinbeck. “This 1945 novel begins: ‘Cannery Row in Monterey in California is a poem, a stink, a grating noise, a quality of light, a tone, a habit, a nostalgia, a dream.' The novel’s setting, within a section of Monterey that used to be home to the region’s sardine canneries, is detailed and as fully realized as the small book’s cast of colorful characters. While the real-life Cannery Row has been transformed into a tourist destination,
places detailed in Steinbeck’s book like Doc's lab—which was the marine laboratory of Ed Ricketts—can still be found, proving that the old Cannery Row was more than just a dream.”
—Stuart Thornton, reporter

**VOCABULARY**

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<th>Part of Speech</th>
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<td>author</td>
<td>noun</td>
<td>person who writes.</td>
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<tr>
<td>environment</td>
<td>noun</td>
<td>conditions that surround and influence an organism or community.</td>
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<td>fiction</td>
<td>noun</td>
<td>media, such as books or films, that are imaginative and not true stories.</td>
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<td>geographic</td>
<td>noun</td>
<td>a way to understand a topic or area using spatial features and relationships.</td>
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<td>perspective</td>
<td>noun</td>
<td>fictional narrative or story.</td>
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**For Further Exploration**

**Websites**
- American Library Association: Notable Children’s Books
- Modern Library: 100 Best Novels

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