Taming the Mighty Dragon

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Country/Region: China

Purpose:
Students will incorporate the five themes of geography to study the Yangtze river region and analyze the possible effects of the three rivers gorge damn project on this area.

Skills:
Absolute and relative location, reading charts and graphs, sequencing, analyzing human/environmental interaction

Concepts:
Latitude and Longitude, Cardinal and intermediate directions, research analysis, debate and argument

Suggested time:
2-4 hours

Subject area integration:
Language Arts, Math
Top Secret Briefing Notes

The Yangtze (yang-see) is the longest river in Asia. The Chinese refer to it as Chang Jiang or Long River. It is also called the mighty dragon. To many Chinese the dragon has long symbolized a god of water. Many Chinese farmers believed dragons or water gods controlled rainfall, while herders prayed to the same gods while searching for lakes or rivers to water their animals.

The mighty Yangtze begins high in the mountains near the eastern edge of Tibet and empties into the East China Sea nearly 3400 miles to the east. It drains nearly 750,000 square miles of the Yangtze river basin where 70% of China’s rice is grown. Its waters irrigate the mighty Sichuan basin, which is responsible for feeding nearly half of China’s population. But along with the tremendous ability to bring life to those in its path comes the Yangtze’s fury as it often rises above its banks. In this century alone, flooding has taken the lives of nearly a half million people in its reach.

The Yangtze is the busiest waterway in Asia, with nearly 75% of China’s water trade traveling its path. It is also the proposed site of the largest dam the world has ever seen. The Three Rivers Gorge Dam project scheduled to be completed in 2009, would produce the equivalent of 12 nuclear power plants. The cost to the environment of such a project is the subject of a heated debate.

INSTRUCTIONS

As part of the Three Rivers Environmental research team it is your job float the entire length of this dangerous river keeping a detailed log of your findings. As always should you or any of your team be caught, this office will disavow any knowledge of your mission. Your team has been assigned to chart the mighty Yantze River, navigating its treacherous path. Because the upper reaches of the river are so dangerous, you call in your coordinates and departure time as well as logging your exact location in the journal you carry with you.

♦ Latitude______________(1 )    Longitude______________(2)
Province_____________(3)     Distance from Shanghai___________(4)
(As the crow flies)

♦ As you consult your briefing notes you notice that your trip on the river will be nearly _________ (5) as long as your earlier straight line calculations. How does this compare with the world’s longest river?
♦ (6)__________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________
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With your raft in the headwaters of the mighty dragon you begin your dangerous journey as the river drops violently through the narrow gorges. For nearly 1900 miles it will continue its descent at a rate as fast as the Colorado River rumbles through the grand canyon. Using your topographic cross section map, record the overall drop of the Yangtze from origin to sea level.

♦ _______________________(7)

♦ As you continue on, you travel the southern border of the ____________(8) province between 98° and 105° east longitude. Record its capital for future reference. __________________________ (9) This province is known as the breadbasket of China, producing over 10% of China’s grain and soybeans. It also has great mineral resources. Record at least two.

♦ _______________________(10) _______________________(11)

As you travel through the mountains of this mighty province, you are delighted to spot a Giant Panda. You interview some of the local people and learn about many of the factors threatening this gentle giant. These human/environment interaction facts are exactly what you are looking for. You quickly record them in your log.

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Your next stop is the city of Chongqing. The largest city in southwest China, it is an important industrial and educational center. China has few environmental standards, making Chongqing one of the most ______________________ (13) cities in the world.

♦ ______________________ (13)

You are barely able to see to navigate your raft out of Chongqing as you float on to the famous Three Gorges location at 31° N 111° E. Put a star on your map of China at this point.

♦ (14) Using your research material on the Three Gorges Dam project, you quickly write a letter explaining the pro’s and con’s of this project and send it off to your expedition sponsor. Just for safety you keep a copy in your journal.

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________________________(15-18)
After leaving the Three Gorges site, you arrive in Wuhan, the capitol of
♦ __________________(19)province. Anxious to arrive at your destination you record
the distance left on your trip to the sea.
♦ __________________(20)
You take time to record your thoughts and dine on some of the common food staples of this
region. You guessed it, your keeping track of your diet.
♦ ___________________________   _________________________(21)
Time is growing short as you leave Wuhan Your next city will be your last before reaching
the ocean. Record it and prepare to reach salt water._______________________(22)
Thanks to your expert navigation you have arrived three days early and decide to head for
Shanghai. You finish your journal with some of the sights and sounds of this great city.
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