

Map Out a Road Trip!

There's nothing quite like the misery of a nine-year-old stuck on a car trip for hours on end. Never mind that nowadays kids can use iPods and portable DVD players. Never mind that cars themselves are more comfy than ever. And perish the thought that any destination—even the most Ultra Six Flags Water World-o-Rama—could pierce the consciousness of a really bored kid.

Indeed, if you've ever been a parent on one of those trips, you know you'd do just about anything to make it more bearable. And, as a matter of fact, you have an ally in your child's teacher. It so happens that in fourth grade, kids are learning important new skills in geography, social studies and math...and your family trip can be a fabulous time to reinforce them.

So here's a teacher tip: try harnessing some of that impatience. Use an ordinary map, highlighter, pencil and paper to turn your fourth grader into a Time-Traveler:



What You Need:

- Road map (the paper kind!)
- highlighter
- paper and pen

What You Do:

Route 95 to Elm Avenue	90 miles
Elm Avenue to Route 5	20 miles
Route 5 to Route 66	90 miles
TOTAL	200 miles

1. For this activity, be sure to choose a big one, with a clear key showing scale, types of road, and distance between intersections. (Rand McNally makes good road maps, as does AAA).
2. Before your trip, spread your map out on a table and talk about it. By the end of third grade, your child should be able to read and apply all parts of a standard map key. Check for understanding by asking your child to identify landmarks, roads, boundaries, and so forth. In particular, point out the "flags" and distance numbers that mapmakers use to show mileage between intersections and junctions.
3. Now get ready for fun. Start by having your child find your starting point and destination, and mark each one with a highlighter; then ask your fledgling travel buff to recommend an itinerary. When he or she has made a decision you can live with too, invite your kid to trace it with a highlighter.
4. If your fourth grader is on track in math, he or she should be ready for the next stage: calculating distance. Have your child set up and fill a simple chart like this, using the distances marked on your map. Tally up totals at the end:
5. Don't worry if each stage isn't perfect. What's important is that your child is using addition and estimation skills which are covered in second and third grade math but used throughout the grades.
6. Use division to estimate how long your trip will take. Give your child your estimate of your average speed per hour, and then ask him or her to divide total miles by speed. For the trip above,

for example, your child might divide 200 miles by the speed of 50 miles per hour to get an estimated travel time of 4 hours.

7. Don't be surprised when your nine year old points out that four hours in the car is still pretty intolerable. At that point, you can support your child's social studies learning with a little reference to the past. How long do you think it would have taken to travel by these methods?

OK, it's true: none of this brain-work may satisfy a really impatient fourth grade traveler. But put a map in his or her hand, along with the chart of the journey, and invite your child to watch for landmarks, keep track of distances, and tell you how many miles have passed. Together, ponder how a trip might have gone without the comfort of spring seats, windshields, air conditioning and rest stops selling cool drinks. Educators call this "historical empathy," and it's a key to grasping social studies. And maybe, if you're lucky, it may help provide enough distraction to get you there.

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