

Countries Around the World™

United States

Program Summary

Meet 12-year-old Sasha. She and her family live in Washington, D.C., the capital of the United States. Join Sasha as she and her friend Bailey tour Washington, D.C. and the immediate area, starting with a walk through the city's Georgetown neighborhood. Next, Sasha introduces us to aspects of the history and government of the United States when she and Bailey visit some of Washington, D.C.'s most famous landmarks, including the Jefferson Memorial, the Washington Monument, the Lincoln Memorial, the Pentagon and the Capitol Building. Then, the girls tour the National Air and Space Museum and have some fun while learning about the history of the United States' space program. After Sasha and her mother see the White House and the Bureau of Engraving and Printing, experience some of the religious traditions of the United States when Sasha and her sister, Tori, visit the National Cathedral. Finally, Sasha and Tori sit down for a meal of old-fashioned, American fare in a diner.

Country Information

- **location:** North America, bordering both the North Atlantic Ocean and the North Pacific Ocean; bordered by Canada and Mexico. The United States also includes the island chain of Hawaii.
- **capital:** Washington, D.C.
- **official language:** no official language, but English is the primary language
- **type of government:** federal republic
- **total area:** approximately 9,826,630 sq km
- **climate:** mostly temperate, but tropical in Hawaii and Florida, arctic in Alaska, semiarid in the plains west of the Mississippi River, and arid in the Great Basin of the Southwest; low winter temperatures in the Northwest are ameliorated occasionally in January and February by warm Chinook winds from the eastern slopes of the Rocky Mountains
- **terrain:** vast central plain, mountains in the West, hills and low mountains in the East; rugged mountains and broad river valleys in Alaska; rugged, volcanic topography in Hawaii
- **major bodies of water:** Atlantic Ocean, Pacific Ocean, Mississippi River, Colorado River and the Great Lakes
- **natural resources:** includes coal, copper, lead, molybdenum, phosphates, uranium, bauxite, gold, iron, mercury, nickel, potash, silver, tungsten, zinc, petroleum, natural gas and timber
- **industries:** includes petroleum, steel, motor vehicles, aerospace, telecommunications, chemicals, electronics, food processing, consumer goods, lumber and mining
- **agricultural products:** includes wheat, corn and other grains; fruits, vegetables, cotton, beef, pork, poultry, dairy products, fish and forest products

Vocabulary

- U.S. dollar** — The currency of the United States.
- obelisk** — A tall, four-sided shaft of stone that is usually tapered and monolithic, and rises to a pointed, pyramidal top.
- Pentagon** — A five-sided building in Arlington, Virginia that contains offices for the Department of Defense and the United States military.
- Pierre L'Enfant** — (1754–1825) A French-born American architect and engineer who designed the basic plan for Washington, D.C.
- emblem** — A distinctive object or representation that functions as a symbol.
- Pilgrims** — The group of English religious separatists who founded Plymouth colony in New England in 1620.

Pre-viewing Discussion

- Inform students that they are about to embark on a video field trip to the United States that is presented from the point of view of a girl who lives in Washington, D.C. Discuss the concept of point of view and how the perspective of one person or place is not necessarily representative of the perspectives of other people and places. Questions to ask include: If you were asked to describe the place where you live, what would you say? What in your description would be fact and what would be opinion? How is your opinion related to the idea of point of view? Is your description of where you live a complete representation of what life is like in your country? Why or why not? How would you describe life in your country? How is that description different from your description of life in your community? Which elements are the same? As students prepare to watch the program, instruct them to watch for examples of the point of view. Afterwards, discuss how the point of view and subject of the program may or may not be representative of the entire United States of America.
- Lead a discussion about identity. Begin by asking students to share information about people, places and things with which they identify. How do these things represent you? What do they say about you? If you had to describe who you are as a person, what would you say? How is being a part of your community a part of your identity? How is being a resident of your region and country part of your identity? Have students watch for examples of American identity in the program.
- Lead a discussion about diversity. How does a society benefit by having a diverse population? How can diversity lead to a better understanding of other peoples? What would the world be like if everyone was the same? Can diversity help you learn something about yourself? Why or why not? How is learning about another country and culture related to diversity? What are some examples of diversity from your communities? How has diversity led to the formation of the culture of the United States?

Follow-up Activities

- Encourage students to make their own entries in the *Countries Around the World* series by planning and giving tours of their communities. Begin by having students generate a class list of topics to cover in their tours (e.g., food, music, clothing, pastimes, etc.). Then, have students work in groups to plan their presentations. If possible, have students use recording equipment to record their tours "on location." If video recordings are not a possibility, students can use props to give their tours in the classroom. After the presentations, students can discuss the similarities and differences among their depictions of life in their communities.

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- Students can discover some American tall tales, myths, legends and ghost stories by visiting www.americanfolklore.net/index.html. Then, have students recreate one of these tales in the classroom by acting it out. This can be done as a puppet show, a mime skit, a student play, etc. Divide the students into small groups and have each one prepare its own production by choosing a format and thinking about the story's elements of character, setting and plot. After each performance, conduct a question and answer session in which students explain why they chose to retell the stories in the ways that they did. As an extension, have students write, illustrate and share their own folktales based on the American ones.
- Invite students to write and illustrate "ABC" books about the United States. Each word used for a letter can represent an aspect of the United States, such as climate, history, people or food. For each page of their books, students can include an illustration and relevant facts on the topic selected for the letter of the alphabet. Students can take turns presenting their books to the class. As an extension, students can select a few pages from each book for inclusion in a class "ABC" book about the United States.
- In the program, Sasha buys a scrapbook to record her experience of living in Washington, D.C. and the United States. Invite students to create their own scrapbooks about what life is like in both their communities and their country. For each thing that the students add to their scrapbooks, have them write an informational caption that describes why they feel it is representative of life in their communities and country. Encourage students to share their scrapbooks with the class.
- Due to its highly diverse population, the United States is often referred to as a mosaic of peoples and cultures. Students can work together to create a classroom "mosaic" collage that represents the different racial, religious, ethnic and cultural groups that comprise the population of the United States. The collage can include, but is not limited to, pictures, illustrations and artifacts. Students can take turns presenting their contributions to the collage.
- Students will have fun creating flip books about their favorite sports that are played in the United States. The flip books can contain information about the sports, such as "how to" sections, biographies of famous athletes, outlines of the rules and histories of the sports. Visit www.readwrite-think.org/materials/flipbook/ for an interactive tool for creating flip books.
- While Washington, D.C. is home to several famous statues and monuments, great landmarks can be found all across the United States, from the Statue of Liberty in New York City to the Golden Gate Bridge in San Francisco. Students can choose landmarks of the United States, either natural or man-made, and draw pictures or build replicas of them, as applicable. Students can accompany their representations with fact sheets that contain information about the landmarks.
- Students will have fun dressing up and role playing as famous figures in American history for a classroom costume party. In preparation for the party, have each student select a historical figure and find facts about him or her. Then, students can inform the class as to whom they will be role playing so that the class can prepare questions to ask during the party. On the day of the event, students can give short presentations as the people they are mimicking that highlight the major events of their historical figures' lives. Encourage the class to "interview" the historical figure, asking about his or her accomplishments.
- Have students create a classroom atlas that features the 50 states. Divide the class into small groups and assign each group multiple states so that all 50 states are represented. Then, students can draw maps of their assigned states and their flags and design an accompanying page that contains information including state symbols, the year the state joined the Union, population, cities and landforms.
- Extra! Extra! Read all about it! Students can pretend that they are publishers at an American newspaper by designing and printing newspaper pages about the history of the United States. For an interactive page maker, visit interactives.mped.org/ppress110.aspx. Divide students into groups and assign each group a period of American history to cover. The newspaper pages can contain brief biographies of historical figures, maps and time lines. As students complete rough drafts of their papers, have them exchange with another group for a peer editing session. Once they've finished making their papers, students can print copies to pass out to the class and give presentations based on their topics.
- Since the United States is such a large country, it has various climate regions, from the frigid temperatures and harsh winters of Alaska to the warm breezes and year-round, sunny skies of Hawaii. Students can learn more about weather in the United States by collecting climate information for different regions. Assign each student a city in the United States and have him or her track the weather in that place over a period of time. Then, have students pair up and make charts that compare and contrast the weather in places the students were assigned to cover. As a culmination, students can work together to make a class almanac of weather in the United States and mark a map with different symbols and colors that represent the various weather patterns.
- Since its establishment in 1916, the National Parks Service has been in charge of maintaining and preserving some of the United States' most cherished wilderness areas and historic regions. Students can learn more about the different national parks in the United States by visiting www.nps.gov/. Then, have students pick their favorite parks and create brochures for them. The brochures can contain information about the parks, pictures or illustrations, maps and time lines. An interactive tool for making brochures can be found at interactives.mped.org/ppress110.aspx.

Suggested Internet Resources

- memory.loc.gov/ammem/index.html
This site, from the Library of Congress, presents detailed information on the history and culture of the United States.
- bensguide.gpo.gov/
"Ben's Guide to U.S. Government for Kids" features grade-specific material on the character and history of American government. Links to state pages for kids are also offered.
- library.thinkquest.org/CR0212302/america.html
Learn about the culture and customs of the United States from the perspective of a child who lives there! The students of Roosevelt School in Wauwatosa, Wisconsin present this award-winning site to teach people about different cultures.
- kids.dc.gov/kids_main_content.html
This fun website for kids, assembled by the government of Washington, D.C., presents information about Washington D.C.'s history, sites, sports and government.
- www.cia.gov
The CIA World Factbook web site presents detailed and up-to-date information on the United States and many other countries. Topics include geography, people, government, economy, transportation and communication. On the main page of the CIA site, click on the "World Factbook" link.

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Suggested Print Resources

- Ashabranner, Brent. *On the Mall in Washington, D.C.* Millbrook Press, Minneapolis, MN; 2002.
- Collins, Paul and Meredith Costain. *Welcome to the United States of America.* Chelsea House Publications, New York, NY; 2001.
- Hintz, Martin. *United States of America.* Children's Press, Danbury, CT; 2004.
- Munro, Roxie. *The Inside-Outside Book of Washington, D.C.* SeaStar Publishing, Des Moines, WA; 2001.

Teacher's Guide written by Brian Wales, Curriculum Specialist, Schlessinger Media

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