



Photograph by Joycelyn Cole, [www.tour-new-orleans.com](http://www.tour-new-orleans.com)

# *Le Vieux Carré:* A Field Trip to a New Orleans Parish

Craig Howat

**One thing that was obvious** to the school children in the southeastern United States during the beginning of the 2005 school year was their geographic location. Whether they were displaced by hurricanes or had to adjust to other children—hurricane refugees—being assimilated into their schools, thousands of students learned about the significance of the importance of place, climate, and government assistance in a time of crisis. The Vieux Carré (French Quarter) of New Orleans was spared the massive amounts of flooding and damage that affected much of the city because it was founded on a rise of land on the east bank of the Mississippi River (Sidebar 1). Elevation is an important factor in coastal geography; the Vieux Carré is full of such geographic lessons to learn.

## **Geocaching in Our Back Yard**

The popular reality television show “Amazing Race” involves participants searching for clues and completing tasks as they progress on a journey all over the world. We have incorporated some of the tasks from “Amazing Race” with geocaching (pronounced “geocaching”), a game in which participants use a Global Positioning System (GPS) receiver to seek containers (called “geocaches” or “caches”) or other items of interest hidden within a neighborhood, a park, or a global landscape. After applying (but not being selected) as a contestant on the show, I was inspired to create an interactive, geocaching field trip for our fourth grade students to explore and learn about our local treasures in Le Vieux Carré (literally, “The Old Square”). Our own “amazing race” consists of our students searching for 20 landmarks located within the perimeter of the French Quarter.

In addition to teaching geography skills, one of the goals of this project was to teach about the history of New Orleans. After the field trip, one student said, “I learned that the French Quarter has many old places like the St. Louis Cathedral, a statue of Joan of Arc, and Andrew Jackson.” I build on my students’ limited experiences with the living history and their real life experiences of the French Quarter. Another student reflected on that point in the school’s Internet blog, “I had lots of fun today. I saw things that I would never see in Hahnville. That’s what I like about New Orleans. It was very hot, but I did

# Le Vieux Carré — A Creole Neighborhood in New Orleans



Rip Russell

Hugging the bank of the huge, swiftly moving Mississippi River and lying barely above sea level is the Vieux Carré (*view-ka-ray*) or French Quarter, in New Orleans, Louisiana. Buildings crowd each other and the narrow streets. Cast-iron and wrought-iron balconies overhang the sidewalks, providing shelter from hot summer sun or sudden downpours. Cool, inviting courtyards can be glimpsed down narrow alleys or carriageways, and the smells of shrimp remoulades and seafood gumbos waft from hidden kitchens. Cathedral bells, jazz trumpets, and ship horns serenade residents and visitors. The Quarter is the heart and soul of modern New Orleans and serves as a continuous reminder of the city’s Creole, colonial past.

—National Park Service  
[www.nps.gov/history](http://www.nps.gov/history)

not mind because I knew for me this was a once and a life time thing.”

In this article, I will address how to set up the geocaching field trip and describe how we incorporated a cross-curricular approach into the activity. The beauty of this type of field trip is that it allows teachers to include material from the language arts and math curriculums while addressing technology standards and the social studies standards.

## Planning the Adventure

The Vieux Carré was the perfect site for our geocaching. It represents more than 200 years of history, and can be explored entirely on foot in one afternoon. For each coordinate, an envelope is prepared with instructions and tasks for each of the students.

A good bit of preparation is needed before the field trip; however it is well worth every minute as every student is engaged and working together to learn the subject matter. If your school has an instructional technology specialist, enlist their help with programming the waypoints, charging batteries and training the students on the technology equipment. Students should be trained beforehand using the digital cameras, IPAQ handhelds, MP3 players, pedometers and GPS. Because GPS (Global Positioning System) is the only mandatory technology needed, the students should learn about latitude and longitude as they locate waypoints around campus. A low-tech version of this activity could also work very well (Table 1).

A few weeks prior to the field trip, the teacher should locate approximately twenty historical landmarks or destinations and mark their coordinates using GPS. These

coordinates will be programmed into the students’ GPS receivers.

## Student Tasks

Separate students into groups of four and assign the jobs of Navigator, Cartographer, Journalist, and Photographer. These jobs rotate after each set of tasks at a destination are completed, ensuring that all students cooperate, handle the materials, and learn equally. Students also develop a sense of responsibility to each other as they work throughout the project. The roles for each job are as follows:

► **NAVIGATOR:** Uses GPS to lead the group to the destination coordinates. The navigator also uses a pedometer to mark the total number of steps.

► **CARTOGRAPHER:** Upon arrival at the destination, opens the destination envelope, reads instructions, and places the star on the map when instructions are completed. The cartographer also uses the MP3 player to interview people.

► **JOURNALIST:** Uses handheld I-Paq to record the answers to the prompts in the destination envelope. The journalist also uses handheld I-Paq to record the number of steps in the pedometer.

► **PHOTOGRAPHER:** Uses the digital camera to document the historical sites and images received from the envelope.

Using GPS, each group of students will locate several of the caches under the guidance of an adult chaperone. Have chaperone’s cell phone numbers handy. Provide them with a small cheat sheet that has all of the destinations marked on a map. The adults usually have more anxiety over following the GPS than the students do! The destination envelopes (each holding a list of tasks to be completed at

Table 1  
**Geocaching Equipment**

High Tech	Low-tech Equivalent
I-Paq handheld	Clipboard with pencil
MP3 player	Voice tape recorder
Digital camera	Disposable camera
GPS	Street map, compass, ruler

a specific location) will be carried by the chaperone and given to the cartographer when the destination is reached. A typical set of tasks is shown in Figure 1.

The students spend one full day exploring these waypoints and completing the tasks that are assigned in the destination envelopes. Every student was engaged in learning because of the rotating job tasks. At the conclusion of the field trip, the teacher reflected aloud on the experiences of the day and reviewed the various caches and tasks completed by the students.

### Interviews

At each of the locations that the students visit, they are required to interview an individual using the voice recorder function of the MP3 player. Whether it is a local businessperson or a tourist, this interview provides the students with a unique, personal experience while also challenging them to practice communications skills.

Students learn about basic interview techniques in the classroom and role-

## Online Resources

Social Studies Curriculum Standards  
[www.socialstudies.org/standards/strands](http://www.socialstudies.org/standards/strands)

National Educational Technology Standards  
[iste.org/inhouse/nets/cnets/students/pdf/NETS\\_for\\_Students\\_2007.pdf](http://iste.org/inhouse/nets/cnets/students/pdf/NETS_for_Students_2007.pdf)

Using Photostory 3  
[microsoft.com/windowsxp/using/digitalphotography/photostory/default.mspx](http://microsoft.com/windowsxp/using/digitalphotography/photostory/default.mspx)

Jordan Fundamentals Grants  
[nike.com/jumpman23/features/fundamentals/overview.html](http://nike.com/jumpman23/features/fundamentals/overview.html)

Google Earth  
[earth.google.com](http://earth.google.com)

play brief interview scenarios. General instructions for the interview are listed in Figure 2.

Many of our tourists we interview are from other nations. Our students ask tourists questions such as, “What makes you visit New Orleans?” and “What do you love about New Orleans?”

Upon returning to class, I create a simple KML file using the free GoogleEarth soft-

ware, marking the home countries, states, and provinces of the tourists who were interviewed. This provides students with an easy visual representation of the global connections within the Vieux Carré.

One student noted in her blog reflection, “Today at the French Quarter I learned that people from all over come to see New Orleans! I can prove it. Today at the French Quarter our group interviewed some Russians and they came just for the French Quarter...”

Students learn to rely on each other, and they understand that other students are relying on them. They learn their strengths and weaknesses, and work together to complete the tasks and reach the common goals that are expected of them.

### Final Project

To incorporate math skills, students create a graph in Microsoft Excel using the pedometer data. This activity is to be explored in greater depth with the math teacher. These graphs will be inserted into Microsoft PowerPoint along with photos and the information that was typed into the handhelds. Each slide in the PowerPoint will be saved as a JPEG file. Using free software from Microsoft called Photo Story, the students create movies of their exploration. All of the JPEG PowerPoint images as well as the photos from the digital cameras will

Figure 1

### Cache 001: Holy Smokes!

1. Read the sign located on the wall of the Cathedral to your group. What happened to the original building in 1788? Use a complete sentence and record the answer in your handheld.
2. Record the distance shown on your pedometer into your handheld.
3. Go inside the Cathedral and take a picture of artwork. How does this artwork reflect the culture of New Orleans?
4. Use your MP3 player and your interviewing skills to talk with someone nearby who is working in the tourism industry. Ask them whether business has returned to pre-Katrina levels? Do they love New Orleans? If so, why?
5. Place the star on your map, exchange job cards, and go to the next cache.



be used to create the final movies. The MP3 files containing the interviews and student reflections can be inserted into the final movie. These final movies can be uploaded to the school's website for publicity or for parents to view. They can be burned to a CD or DVD to be played at open houses or parent teacher conferences. To view some of our final projects using MS Photo Story, visit our website at [www.stcharles.k12.la.us/webpages/chowat/index.cfm](http://www.stcharles.k12.la.us/webpages/chowat/index.cfm) and click on projects, or try searching for them on [youtube.com](http://youtube.com) or Google videos.

If you really want to garner community support for your project and form a key business partner for future funding, inquire running about your movie in a kiosk set up at one of the marketplace locations (for example, at a law firm in an old historical building by the port or at a bank's branch office).

### Social Studies Connections

Whatever sort of community you live in, you will be able to find caches (field trip stopping points with rich teaching possibilities) that reflect these categories:

► *Religious Buildings:* Several caches focused on religious destinations, which have greatly influenced the culture of New Orleans, such as the St. Louis

### Figure 2 Conducting an Interview

1. Be friendly, polite, and courteous. Remember that this adult is giving you their valuable time!
2. Ask questions clearly and slowly. Examples: Where are you from? What work do you usually do? Why are you visiting New Orleans? What do you like best about your visit here?
3. Don't interrupt a person as they are answering.
4. Avoid yes/no questions. Rather, ask questions to inspire a longer conversation.
5. At the end, thank the interviewee for his or her time.

Cathedral or the Ursuline Convent. Other caches bring attention to architecture and buildings built during the Spanish and French periods such as the Pontabulo and Cabildo.

► *Market:* All groups visited a cache specifically in the market and were asked to take pictures of items that they thought might have been sold during the 1800s. These photos always reflect food items such as fresh vegetables, sugarcane, and jewelry.

► *Monuments:* Several caches focus on Civil War era destinations as well as Congo Square, where slaves were traded

two hundred years ago. All students are asked to reflect on how they would feel if they walked through the Vieux Carré and witnessed slaves being sold. This is always a very powerful reflection from the field trip.

► *Place Names:* Whether they are looking at the French fleur-de-lis patterns or the Spanish plaza and street signs, students get a feel of the heritage unique to the city. For example, the main park of the French Quarter facing the St. Louis Cathedral changed names several times over the centuries. Now known as Jackson Square, it was once named Plaza d'Armas under Spanish rule and was used as a military square.

► *Waterway:* One of the caches is located on the banks of the Mississippi River, where I teach students about the importance of the port of New Orleans. The Mississippi River flows from Minnesota and drains the waters of the Missouri River, the Ohio River, and others; thus, the city is a key port for the movement of exports (such as food) and imports (such as oil and gas) to other parts of the country.

► *Technology and Climate:* Science and technology lie behind the architecture of any city. The majority of the houses in the French Quarter were built up off the ground to protect them from seasonal flooding. They are built with tall ceilings and larger windows to provide cool drafts and are constructed out of hardy cypress wood, some of which has withstood rot and decay for 200 years.



Courtesy of www.famindiana.com

## Assessments

A rubric can be used to assess the students on the history and geography that they have learned during this project. Students can also complete self- and peer-assessments of their work within the group setting. Since young learners develop their personal identity within groups such as family, friends, and school classes, we decided to make each part of this project a group activity, from training, to geocaching, to creating the final report. Students are assessed on subject knowledge, but also on how well they work as a team. Students are held accountable on that measure by the other members of their group.

## Conclusion

In the Vieux Carré field trip, we engage students in a real life, interdisciplinary approach to learning that uses technology.<sup>1</sup> Every city and every town has its own interesting markets, public sites, and historic places. Whether it is the fish markets

of the west coast, the busy ports along the Mississippi and Ohio rivers, or the bustling harbors along the east coast, great teachers can adapt their marketplace to address social studies topics.<sup>2</sup>

### Notes

1. With funding from the Louisiana Heritage Education Association and matching funds from the Jordan Fundamentals, the Michael Jordan Foundation, and our business partner DOW St. Charles Operations, I have been able to integrate IPAQ handheld computers, pedometers, digital cameras and MP3 players into this geocache field trip project. I would also like to thank all administrators and colleagues for their support of the project.
2. If you have any questions or comments, please send an e-mail to [chowat@stcharles.k12.la.us](mailto:chowat@stcharles.k12.la.us). Also, visit [www.stcharles.k12.la.us/webpages/chowat/index.cfm](http://www.stcharles.k12.la.us/webpages/chowat/index.cfm).

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Courtesy of [www.funinlouisiana.com](http://www.funinlouisiana.com)



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