

## 2.3 LET'S LEARN



### FOCUS QUESTIONS:

- How are schools similar and different in their traditions and structure?
- What can we learn about the German people and their values based on the elementary education system?

### STANDARD #5 INDIVIDUALS, GROUPS AND INSTITUTIONS.

#### LESSON OVERVIEW:

This lesson is focused on the educational system of Germany, in particular, the elementary school or *Grundschule*. The organization of schools in any country is established to meet the needs of the society. Using an original short story based upon interviews with elementary teachers in Berlin and Bremen, the activities and extensions are designed to give students a look into the traditions and structure of the German school system. The students will be able to compare their own school setting with that of contemporaries in different parts of Germany.

#### TEACHER BACKGROUND INFORMATION:

As in all nations of the world, German students are challenged to meet higher academic standards in order to be more competitive in international measures of performance. The structure of the traditional elementary school in Germany differs significantly from that of the United States, both in the length of the school day (school usually ends by 1:30 pm), the composition of the classes (children may be looped from grades one through three), and teacher assignment (unlike most American elementary teachers who are usually generalists, German elementary teachers often teach only two different subjects). Before beginning this lesson, the teacher may want to become more familiar with the German educational system by reading some of the teacher resource materials (**Handout 2.3 A on Resource Disc**).



#### TIME:

3 (45-minute Class Periods)

## INSTRUCTIONAL RESOURCES:

- German Education Instructional Resources (**Handout 2.3 A on Resource Disc**)
- Karl's First Day of School (**Handout 2.3 B on Resource Disc**)
- Karl's First Day of School Questions (**Handout 2.3 C on Resource Disc**)
- The Secret of the First-Grade Candy Cone and *Schultüte* Template (**Handout 2.3 D on Resource Disc**)
- German School Schedule Handout (**Handout 2.3 E on Resource Disc**)
- Calculators
- World Map
- Art Supplies (colored construction paper, scissors, tape etc.)

## PROCEDURE:



### DAY 1:

- **Anticipatory Set:** To activate students' background knowledge and introduce the topic, the teacher should ask the students to share their memories of their first days of kindergarten. Do they have similar experiences? After students have shared their experiences, the teacher should ask if there are any first day of school traditions in their culture. They also should indicate any special family "ritual" associated with that day or gifts they received.
- Distribute Karl's First Day of School (**Handout 2.3 B on Resource Disc**) and Karl's First Day of School Questions (**Handout 2.3 C on Resource Disc**). The teacher should explain to the students that this story is similar to those read to young children in Germany as they prepare to start school at age 6. The reading should give students an understanding of how children and families prepare for this big event in the child's life.
- The teacher should divide the students into groups of three to read the story and complete the questions. A modification is to allow students to work independently. Also, if the Internet or world map is not available, the teacher may omit these questions. Since this is an interdisciplinary activity that includes math, the teacher may need to review the use of the calculator.
- After the students have completed the reading and questions they should be able to participate in a teacher-led discussion comparing school traditions, program, and organization.

### DAY 2:

- The teacher should distribute The Secret of the First-Grade Candy Cone and *Schultüte* Template (**Handout 2.3 D on Resource Disc**) and have the students read the article aloud.
- The students should then begin to make their own *Schultüte*. On the first day of first grade, German parents give their children a large paper cone called a *Schultüte*. It is filled with candy, pencils, erasers and other treats. The gift comes with a wish for the children to have a good and successful school year. The *Schultüte* preparation instructions are listed on the template.
- As a modification the students may use construction paper and design the outside of their own *Schultüte* themselves, reflecting their interests.
- Students should present their final *Schultüte* to the class. These may be displayed around the room.



**DAY 3:**

- Holidays and vacation days are always of interest to students. The teacher should distribute the German School Schedule Handout (**Handout 2.3 E on Resource Disc**). First, the teacher should instruct the students to list the holidays and vacations observed by their school. [The teacher should have the official school calendar available as a reference.] The students should star the legal holidays. This is an excellent opportunity for students to review their knowledge of American federal and state holidays. Then, the teacher should divide the students into groups of three. Using the Internet, each group should be assigned to research the traditions of 3-4 school holidays and vacations found on the German school calendar. They should try to discover why the day is celebrated, how it may be celebrated in school and out of school, and if it is a legal holiday, a religious holiday, etc. During their research students may discover other holidays and traditions that they may add to the list.
- Each group will orally present their findings to the class. The following is an excellent site to suggest to students as they start their research.

[http://www.germany.info/Vertretung/usa/en/04\\_\\_W\\_\\_t\\_\\_G/01/\\_Holidays\\_\\_Traditions.html](http://www.germany.info/Vertretung/usa/en/04__W__t__G/01/_Holidays__Traditions.html)

**WHOLE GROUP REFLECTION:**

- What can we learn about the values of the German people based on the elementary education system? Which school traditions and structures do you like best? The students should share their opinions.

**MODIFICATIONS:**

- Students may complete the reading and the questions independently.
- After completing the *Schultüte* students may fill them with candies and present them to younger students in the school.

**EXTENSIONS:**

- After discussing the various holidays and vacations of a typical German school, the teacher may pose the following question for students to answer: Germany grows more diverse as its Turkish Muslim population increases. What effect might this have on the German school calendar in the future? The students should research Muslim holidays and traditions in order to answer this question.
- The teacher may distribute the structure of the German school system (**Handout 2.3 A on Resource Disc**) and explain the basic organization. Students may then write an essay comparing/contrasting their educational experience with that of a German child.