

# **Educational Framework**

Maggie's Russian adventure helps raise awareness for the rich culture, vast land areas, and exciting animal species that are a part of modern day Russia. Maggie and friends visit an actual Russian village on the banks of the Rybinsk Reservoir. Our team's science advisor, Dr. Gregory Smith has worked for many years with the scientists who live in the village of Borok. He and his wife, Maggie's Creative Director, Kathy Hart Smith visited Borok to gather material for this mission. This scientific community was set up by the former Soviet Union, to study the effects damming and flooding had on the Volga River. These changes to habitat occurred in the late 1940's when Stalin wanted a passage from the Baltic Sea to the Caspian Sea. Entire villages were flooded and hundreds of people were displaced. The Beluga Sturgeon that used to migrate up and down the river is now the fourth most endangered animal in the world. Invasive species made their way deep into Russia. These ecological concerns are introduced in Maggie's Russian mission and are important ones for students to consider as many parts of the world are now facing similar issues.

Russian culture is explored as Russian favorites such as the matryoshka doll, take center stage in the educational material. This nesting doll is a perfect place to begin learning about Russian culture, past and present, along with providing a wonderful opportunity to perform meaningful multiplication exploration and to think critically

about logic problems. The samovar, another symbol of Russia, is explained and activities are presented. Be sure to send your students to our Postcard Section to find photographs of these Russian artifacts, along with many other printable pictures of Russian culture, places, and animals.

Our language arts offerings include a variety of material to support required goals and objectives. Lesson ideas to accompany the critically acclaimed novel, *Letters from Rifka*, bring together, not only many essential components of the language arts program, but also integrate other curricular areas into the study. This helps children see connections among curricular areas and helps busy teachers cover an expanded number of concepts and skills. For our primary teachers, we offer lesson ideas on the beautiful picture book, *The Littlest Matryoshka*. A variety of skill areas are presented to facilitate student learning. As in Maggie's African adventure, we again present folktales to increase cultural awareness. Follow up activities, based on multiple intelligence theory, are suggested. To increase motivation, encourage your students to listen as Maggie reads the first few lines of these folktales in the recorder located in her mission pack.

The educational division of Maggie's Earth Adventures believes that children should not just do math problems, but that children should be encouraged to explain the thinking that led them to specific answers. This helps to understand the process of mathematics and encourages children to become math thinkers – not just math “doers.”

We present several math activities designed to help your students do just this – and learn about Russia along the way!

Our social studies and science offerings exhibit the many ways in which land is connected to the way people live, the animals that inhabit the terrain, and the conservation issues that are faced. Because this is such a large country, students will learn about the biomes that make up Russia, along with exploring the animals and ecological issues faced in these biomes. Look for printable activities in the Teachers' Lounge and interactive activities in Maggie's compass. We are pleased to present a number of geography activities designed to encourage the development of critical thinking skills. Your students will be exposed to not only maps, but will think about how the country of Russia has undergone vast changes in the way it is presented on world maps since the fall of communism.

Our popular Field Guide, found in Maggie's mission pack, highlights Russian animals found around the area of Borok, Russia. These articles and animal pictures are sure to delight your students. Russian recipes are included in the mission pack to give you and your students a "taste" of Russian culture. You will also find an experiment designed to help students think about ways a new species can "invade" an environment. Use simple objects to get your students talking about this issue that is becoming an international problem.

We believe that Russia is a wonderful setting for this mission as it is a country struggling to hold onto its rich culture while undergoing vast changes. The lessons presented here are only a beginning. Our Suggested Reading offers many ideas for further exploration. We hope you and your students will enjoy your “trip” with Maggie to Russia and find this study meaningful.

We would like to thank the many residents of Borok who were so helpful in composing this story and assisting us with educational materials.