A journey worth explaining

Help Olivia and Doudou fill an explorer's notebook. Collect clues from ten pictures, then make and explain a pretend place of your own.

A connected geography journey that moves from noticing places to explaining how land, water, maps and people fit together.

START WITH WHAT YOU HAVE

Paper and a pencil or crayon; the pictures can be viewed on a screen. No purchase or travel is needed.

A short visit

Choose one poster and one question for 5–10 minutes. Stop after one useful observation; return when the child wants to.

Four chapters

Use one chapter at a time over several visits. Open the related notebook page only when it helps the conversation.

A classroom sequence

Use ten 10–15 minute sessions, with extra time for the two foundation pages and the final map. Model first, try together, then let children explain in pairs.

MAKE ROOM FOR DIFFERENT LEARNERS

For ages 4–5, offer two choices, use two map symbols and co-draw. A pointed explanation is enough.

For ages 6–8, ask for a reason, a consistent key and a route another person can follow. Let the child revise a confusing clue.

Read prompts aloud. Accept speech, signing, pointing, eye gaze, drawing or adult scribing. Describe position and shape as well as color. Enlarge a page when helpful; hand control and spelling are not assessed.

PRINT AND USE

Choose A4 or US Letter at actual size. Print just the notebook pages you want, single-sided. Adult support and answers are separate. The notebook is primarily white, with outline diagrams; color is optional.

Keep the full posters on screen or printed separately. A small preview is an invitation, not a substitute for readable labels. These activities use pretend places; they do not require an outing.

Use invented places or the public examples shown. Do not put a child's home address, school or daily route on a map intended for sharing.

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Discoveries 1 and 2

01 From Our Street to Our Planet

Use one example to distinguish city, country, continent and planet.

Which picture shows a larger area: the street or the city?

The city view includes a much larger area. The pictures use different scales; they are not objects placed inside physical layers of Earth.

What is the name of the planet all these places belong to?

Earth. It is our shared home planet.

Notebook: Draw or describe a place from the poster. It can be the public street, the city or Earth.

Next: Paris belongs to a country and a continent. Next, find Europe on the wider world map.

Look for: Can the child distinguish France from Europe and connect Paris to both?

02 Our Seven Continents

Name or locate continents and compare their positions on a world map.

Can you find Africa and South America? What is between them?

Ocean water separates them. It is the Atlantic Ocean; naming it is an optional extension because the poster does not label oceans.

Can you find the continent that stretches along the bottom of this map?

Antarctica. It surrounds the South Pole. Pointing is enough before remembering the name.

Notebook: Use notebook page 2 to invent two land shapes with water between them. Keep your drawing separate from the real world map.

Next: A world map shows large shapes. Next, look closer at the shapes the land itself makes.

Look for: Can the child locate two named continents and indicate the water between Africa and South America?

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Discoveries 3 and 4

03 Mountains, Valleys, Plains & More

Identify and compare landforms by their shape and position.

Which two landforms look flat? How are they different?

The plain and plateau both have broad, mostly flat surfaces. The plateau is raised above the land around it. Accept pointing and 'this one is higher.'

What makes this piece of land an island?

Water goes all the way around it. Trace its shore with a finger or gaze.

Notebook: On notebook page 4, sketch or name one landform you want to remember.

Next: Low places and high places shape a landscape. Now follow water downhill through one.

Look for: Can the child indicate the plateau's raised flat top and identify water around the island? Accept gestures before technical terms.

04 A River's Journey

Trace downstream flow and distinguish source, tributary, bank, meander and mouth.

Which way does the water go? What helps you tell?

It travels downhill from the source toward the mouth. Follow the downstream arrows and the descending landscape.

Can you find a bend and the land beside the water?

A bend is a meander. The land along a river's side is its bank, not the water itself.

Notebook: On notebook page 4, draw a river flowing from higher land to the sea, with a smaller stream joining it. Add a downstream arrow.

Next: This river reaches the sea. Next, notice the different shapes along the shore.

Look for: Can the child show a joining tributary without tracing away from the main river?

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Discoveries 5 and 6

05 Where Land Meets the Sea

Distinguish an island and peninsula, and identify a bay and a strait from land-water relationships.

Which land has water all the way around it?

The island. Follow its complete shore without finding a land connection.

Which label names narrow water, rather than land?

Strait. The narrow passage connects the larger water areas on its two sides. The bay is water curving into the land.

Notebook: Return to notebook page 2. Trace water around an island. Add a peninsula that stays joined to a larger land shape.

Next: Land and water can separate places. Next, find something people build to connect them.

Look for: Can the child follow the island shore and identify the peninsula's land connection?

06 Nature & People Shape Places

Compare natural and human-built landscape features and describe how one built feature relates to nature.

Which labeled feature carries the road across the river?

The bridge. People built it to span the water.

How do a natural feature and a built feature meet here?

The bridge crosses the river; the road connects to it. Accept another accurate relation supported by the picture.

Notebook: On notebook page 5, help someone travel from START to the library on the other side. Draw a bridge or a ferry route.

Next: A crossing helps people move. Next, show a place clearly so another person can find that crossing.

Look for: Can the child identify one natural and one built feature and describe their relationship?

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Discoveries 7 and 8

07 How to Read a Map

Use a title, key and compass rose to interpret a simple map and follow a connected path.

What does the title tell us?

The map shows an imaginary practice park. It is for learning, not a real walking route.

How can you go from the star to the playground without crossing through the water?

Follow the path from START across the bridge, then continue along the path to the playground. Use the actual map path; it is not a real-world navigation instruction.

Notebook: Try the three views on notebook page 3. Then choose symbols and meanings for your own key on page 6.

Next: The key tells us what a symbol means. Next, use directions to say where it is.

Look for: Can the child use a key symbol correctly and keep the route on the pictured path?

08 North, South, East & West

Use four compass directions to describe the positions of places from one clear reference point.

What is east of the compass?

The flowers are east, to the right of the compass on this picture.

Which two directions are opposites?

North and south are opposites; east and west are opposites. Show a pair across the compass center.

Notebook: Use page 6: point north from the center, then show the opposite direction. Add a matching north arrow to your map on page 7.

Next: A map can show a route. Next, decide which kind of travel fits the land and water along it.

Look for: Can the child identify the flowers as east from the compass center and show one opposite pair?

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Discoveries 9 and 10

09 Ways We Travel

Sort six familiar vehicles by the environment in which they travel and explain a choice.

Which vehicles travel on water?

The ferry and sailboat.

What could carry people across this harbor without a bridge?

The ferry. A sailboat can also travel across water. Invite an explanation using the pictured water route.

Notebook: On page 7, make your pretend map using your key and crossing idea. On page 8, choose how a visitor will travel.

Next: You have a route and a way to travel. Next, choose a feature that will help the visitor recognize the destination.

Look for: Can the child sort a land vehicle and a water vehicle and explain a reasonable water crossing?

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10 Discover World Landmarks

Identify three destination features and compare their shapes and uses.

Can you find a tower, a bridge and a waterway?

The Eiffel Tower is in Paris, the Golden Gate Bridge is at San Francisco, and the canals are in Venice.

What is alike or different about these places?

Accept pictured evidence: tall tower versus long bridge, iron structure versus buildings beside water, or different ways of moving around. There is no single required comparison.

Notebook: Add a pretend landmark to page 7. Use page 8 to tell your route, your way across the water and what the visitor will see on arrival.

Next: Return to the first page. Show one detail you can explain now, and choose something else to wonder about.

Look for: Can the child pair one feature with its city and support a comparison with visible evidence?

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Notebook answer support

1. My explorer’s notebook

Any noticed place and genuine question are welcome. A child may point, sign, speak, draw or dictate; writing is not the goal.

2. Land and water

This is a made-up land-and-water drawing, not a world map. An island has water all around its shore. A peninsula remains joined to a larger area of land. Wave marks or spoken labels are enough; blue coloring is optional. The adult may read the five ocean names; recalling them is not required.

3. One place, three views

The house stays to the left of the tree in these aligned views. From above, we see its roof and the tree canopy; the side view shows the wall and trunk. On this practice map a square stands for the house and a circle for the tree. The key explains those choices. These are example symbols, not universal rules.

4. Collect land and river clues

Accept one recognizable landform or an accurate spoken description. The river runs downhill from higher land toward the sea in this chosen example, and the smaller stream joins it. The arrow follows the main river downstream. Other real rivers can end in lakes or other rivers; not all rivers flow directly into the sea.

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Notebook answer support

5. Help people cross

Many routes can work. A bridge spans the water and meets land on both sides, with a connected route from START to the library. A ferry route has a boarding place on each shore and a boat connection across the water. It does not need to be straight. A pencil line through water alone is not a land route; ask how the traveler crosses.

6. Make your map key

Accept any distinct symbols that are used consistently and have explained meanings. Two symbols are enough for a younger child. On the printed compass, N is at the top, E right, S bottom and W left. North and south are opposites; east and west are opposites. The compass, not the edge of a page or a person's left hand, defines the directions on the drawing.

7. My pretend place

There is no single correct map. Look for land and water, a connected crossing, consistent symbols, a distinctive landmark and a north arrow. Help the child repair one unclear relationship without judging artistic neatness. For younger children, an adult may draw the chosen features and the child can explain.

8. Tell your journey

The route should start and finish at identifiable places, use a plausible crossing and match the child's map. Ask why a chosen vehicle or way of moving fits each part. The landmark should help a listener recognize arrival. Accept oral, signed, pointed, dictated or drawn explanations; no score, speed or perfect recall is needed.

A USEFUL FINISH

Listen for an explanation, not perfect vocabulary. If a partner cannot follow the map, choose one confusing clue to revise together. Returning to improve a drawing is part of the learning.

Everyday extension: notice a familiar public landmark in a book, picture or ordinary accompanied outing. Talk about what makes it easy to recognize. No new trip is needed.

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Keep the distinctions clear

The world map uses the seven-continent convention. Some curricula group continents differently or use Oceania. Europe and Asia share land; continents are not countries. The flat map changes shapes and apparent sizes.

The Paris sequence shows larger areas, not physical layers inside Earth. Mainland France is the pictured example; France also has overseas areas. This does not establish Olivia's home or the child's address.

A bank is land beside a river. A mouth can enter another river, a lake or the sea. A strait is narrow water joining larger water areas; a peninsula is connected land.

A compass rose determines north on a map. Turning the paper changes where north appears on the page, not what its N means. Map symbols need a key; they are not all universal.

People can modify rivers, hills and woodland. "Natural" does not always mean untouched. The three landmark views are separate cities and are not a complete survey of world cultures.

Book connections: Olivia and Doudou in Paris includes a boat ride; Olivia and Doudou in San Francisco includes cable-car travel. The third book is titled Olivia and Doudou in Venise; English learning labels say Venice. The practice maps and landscapes are separate teaching examples, not additional book trips.

FACTUAL FOUNDATIONS

NOAA — One global ocean and its five named regions

USGS — Map Adventures: viewpoints, symbols and keys

USGS — Rivers, streams and creeks

National Park Service — Geologic landforms

Source links and the complete fact register are also in the local HTML guide. The ocean and viewpoint sources were checked October 10, 2026; other facts retain the reviewed poster source record. Exact source editions and original image hashes are in the handoff manifest.

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