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Climate

Ms. Marotta is a teacher education major who, in preparation for her student teaching next year, is now spending two hours every morning observing and assisting in a middle school geography class. At the request of her supervising teacher, Mr. Koehn, she's prepared a lesson about climate using the same interactive, question-answer format that she has watched Mr. Koehn use so effectively over the last few weeks. Ms. Marotta has just led the students through their geography textbook's chapter on climate and is now beginning to engage them in a follow-up discussion.

"How many of you have air conditioning?" she asks. About half of the students raise their hands.

"If you lived in Houston, how many of you would have air conditioning?" All but two of the students raise their hands.

Ms. Marotta glances briefly at her lesson plan. "Who can tell me what topic we talked about last Friday?"

"Temperature," says Germaine.

"Wind," says Marsha.

"Climate," says Tomas.

"Okay. On Friday, Mr. Koehn described several different things that affect climate. Who can tell me what they are? When the students remain silent, Ms. Marotta continues. "What's the difference between where we are and Long's Peak (a 14,255 foot mountain in Colorado)?"

"Long's Peak is higher," Marsha says.

"Oh, yeah-elevation!" shouts Caitlin.

"Right, Caitlin. Elevation is one thing that affects climate. What's another one?"

"Latitude," Maya responds.

"Right. What effect does living near the water have?"

Janina whispers briefly to the girl sitting beside her and then raises her hand.

"Cooler in summer, warmer in winter."

"Good, Janina. Water makes things cooler in the summer and warmer in the winter. All right, class, now open your books to page 48. Kevin, can you read the section called 'Polar Region' for us?"

Kevin is slow to find the section to which Ms. Marotta is referring. As he reads, he mumbles so much that hardly anyone can hear him. Too late, Ms. Marotta remembers that Kevin is one of the poorest readers in the class. "That's okay," she thinks. "The others can read the passage to themselves anyway."

"Who has good handwriting?" Ms. Marotta asks. "Okay, Jackson, you can be our recorder today." Jackson approaches the chalkboard smiling, obviously relishing the fact that he will be the center of attention for the next few minutes. He picks up a piece of chalk, poised to begin his recording duties.

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"What are some things we've just learned about the polar region?" Ms. Marotta asks. "Jackson will write your answers on the board."

"Less sunlight," says Meghan.

"Especially in winter," Julian adds.

"The ground stays frozen," says Alan.

"Long, cold winters," says Will.

"Short summer," says B.J.

"Cool summer," says Reynelda.

"Did *you* get everything on the list?" Ms. Marotta asks Jackson. "Good, I see

that you did. Okay, is there anything else we need to add?"

The children search their textbooks for other possibilities. "Not much precipitation!" shout Germaine and Arnie simultaneously.

"Why isn't there much precipitation?" Ms. Marotta asks.

"Because the air's so cold that it can't hold much moisture," responds Libby.

"So if you lived in Alaska, you'd have some days with very little sunlight and very long nights. What do you think it would be like to live in Alaska in the winter? How do you think you might feel?"

"Tired," says Alan.

"Lazy," says Meghan.

Ms. Marotta waits for a few seconds, but the students seem to have run out of ideas. "You might get very depressed, too, mightn't you?" Several students nod.

"Okay, then, who would like to read the section about the 'Temperate Region' for us?"

The lesson continues as the class reads about temperate, subtropical, and tropical regions. As the students list the characteristics of each climactic region aloud, Jackson writes them on the board.

Glancing at her watch, Ms. Marotta realizes that the class period is almost over.

"Thank you for taking notes for us, Jackson," she says. "Now did you all get the characteristics of the different regions in your notebooks?"

The students look at her with blank expressions. As she surveys the room, she realizes that none of the students has even opened a notebook. Early in the school year, Mr. Koehn had the class create sections in their looseleaves called "Geography." Why has it not occurred to anyone to take notes today? After all, Jackson has made the job easy for them by listing everything on the board.

As Ms. Marotta thinks about it, she recalls how Mr. Koehn has always told the class when to take notes and exactly what to write each time. "I guess I still have a lot to learn about teaching middle school students," she thinks to herself.

Possible questions for "Climate":

1. *What strengths do you see in Ms. Marotta's lesson?*
2. *What weaknesses do you see in Ms. Marotta's lesson?*

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3. *Ms. Marotta inadvertently asks Kevin, a poor reader, to read a section of the chapter aloud. Is it a good idea to ask your students to read aloud? Why or why not?*
4. *Why do the students not take notes, even though Jackson has made it easy for them to do so?*
5. *Good teachers reflect about how their lesson has gone. How did Ms. Marotta reflect about her lesson?*