Why in the World Do We Need to Know About Okinawa?

**Curriculum Connections and Standards:** Geography, Social Studies, Current Events

National Council for the Social Studies IX: *Global Connections*: Social studies programs should include experiences that provide for the study of global connections and interdependence.

[http://www.socialstudies.org/standards/strands](http://www.socialstudies.org/standards/strands)

National Social Studies and Geography K-12: *The World In Spatial Terms*: As a result of activities in grades K-12, all students should

1. Understand how to use maps and other geographic representations, tools, and technologies to acquire, process, and report information from a spatial perspective.
2. Understand how to use mental maps to organize information about people, places, and environments in a spatial context.

**Objectives:**

**Students will be able to**

- Locate Okinawa on a map and describe its geographical location including closest neighboring countries and surrounding seas
- Explain briefly the role Okinawa played in U.S. history especially post WWII
- Analyze several maps and draw conclusions about why the US has such great interest in this region
- Analyze the current U.S. military presence in East Asia and describe the locations of the highest concentration of bases
- Identify the importance of the geographical and strategic location of Okinawa to Japan, China, Korea, and Southeast Asia
- Explain the most current issues in U.S.-Okinawa relations
- Discuss the positive and negative contributions the U.S. military presence has made to Okinawa from different perspectives
- Demonstrate cultural sensitivity and awareness for the citizens of Okinawa

**Essential Questions:**

Why is Okinawa a continued point of interest for the U.S.?

What does the U.S. military presence in Okinawa mean to the U.S., the Japanese government and the citizens of Okinawa?

Why do many Okinawan people want the U.S. military presence reduced and why the U.S. and Japanese governments would like to see it increased?

What is the future of the U.S. military presence in Okinawa?
Important Facts and Figures:

- Okinawa is a prefecture (similar to what we call a state in the U.S.) of Japan which is made up of over 100 islands
- The Okinawa islands are 0.6% (less than 1%) of the total lands of Japan
- Okinawa is the largest of the islands and home to the capital city, Naha
- Okinawa is roughly 1,200 square kilometers (1 square kilometer is equal to approx. 1/3 of a mile)
- Okinawa is located 400 miles south of the rest of Japan
- Today U.S. military bases occupy approx. 18% of the main island of Okinawa prefecture
- Nearly 75% of all U.S. military facilities are located on the islands of Okinawa
- Okinawa hosts 14 U.S. military bases out of a total of in Japan
- Okinawa was a separate nation from Japan for most of its history resulting in having its own unique language and culture

Suggested Articles for Background Information:

*Trampled Islands – Bases, Violence and Unheard Voices*
http://www.japanfocus.org/events/view/162

*Anger Simmers Over Okinawa Base Burden*
http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-pacific-11390281

*U.S. Defense Shift Keeps Okinawa in Strategic Mix*
http://www.japantimes.co.jp/text/nn20120516f1.html

*Give Okinawa Back to the Okinawans*

Materials: Attached maps and a variety of online materials.

Outline of Procedure:

1. Distribute Figures 1A and 1B to the class. Students locate and point out
   - Okinawa within the Ryukyu Islands
   - neighboring countries and surrounding seas
   - distance from the major islands of Japan
   - proximity to China including Taiwan

2. Distribute Figure 2 to the class. Students analyze this map and make inferences on why the geographical location of Okinawa is significant.

3. Distribute Figure 3. Looking at this map, students discuss the significance of the placement of the bases in the most densely populated areas of the island.

4. Show students the photo of Futenma. Examining this photo, students should point out the size of the base among the surrounding neighborhoods and consider what this could mean for the Okinawan people. (e.g. noise and air pollution, use of a large portion of land in a relatively small area, the growing neighborhoods and the need for more space for businesses, schools, parks, etc.)

5. Distribute Figure 4. Using the information on this map, students make comparisons on the numbers U.S. bases and personnel.
Lesson Extensions: Dividing the class into small groups or pairs, assign research to collect facts and other data on current issues in Okinawa and the U.S. military presence in the prefecture. Have students present the views of each side.

Topics for research

The Senkaku Islands Dispute:

*Can China and Japan Trust One Another?*

Ospreys:

*Tens of Thousands Converge in Okinawa to Protest Osprey Deployment*
http://www.japantimes.co.jp/text/nn20120910a2.html

U.S. Military Misconduct:

http://www.japantimes.co.jp/text/nn20121018a1.html?fb_ref=article_japantimes

http://www.japantimes.co.jp/text/nn20121020a3.html

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Figures 1A and 1B
Figure 2

Note: 1 Nautical Mile = 1.1 miles
Figure 4

[Map showing military bases and personnel across regions such as South Korea, Japan, Thailand, Philippines, Guam, Australia, with specific numbers of bases and personnel listed for each location. The map notes that figures are not available for Guam.*]
Some 9,000 US Marines are to be transferred off the southwest Japanese island of Okinawa to Guam and other parts of Asia-Pacific, it was announced in April 2012. The US military presence in Japan dates back to WWII, when defeated Tokyo signed an agreement for the Americans to keep bases on its soil provided the US acted as its security force. But the arrangement has proved increasingly controversial, especially on Okinawa. Close to the Chinese mainland, Taiwan and the Korean Peninsula, this 'keystone of the Pacific' was an important US base during the Korean and Vietnam wars. Returned to Japanese control in 1972, it still houses one of the world's largest concentrations of US bases. However, accidents, crime, noise pollution and other environmental effects have sparked local protests and strained the US-Japanese security alliance.

**Other major military bases in Japan**

1. **Kadena Air Base**
   - This is the largest US Air Force base in the Pacific. With up to 4,000 Japanese workers, it is also a major local employer. The USAF estimates that Kadena alone contributes $700 million annually to Okinawa's economy. With Marine Corps fees and expenditure, the Prefecture of Okinawa has estimated it derives about $1.9 billion a year from all military-related transactions. Kadena houses 18,000 US personnel with the 18th wing of the 6th Air Force.

2. **Futenma Air Station**
   - The most disputed base on Okinawa sits in the densely populated centre of Ginowan city. After public outrage over US troops' gang-rape of a schoolgirl in 1995, Tokyo and Washington agreed to move the base, but could not finalise the details. A helicopter crash on the local university campus in 2005 prompted another deal in 2006, under which the base would move to the less-crowded Cape Henoko, while another 8,000 marines on Okinawa would be transferred to the US territory of Guam, east of the Philippines. Futenma is home to the Marine Aircraft Group 36 under 1st Marine Aircraft Wing of the 3rd Marine Expeditionary Force (III MEF).

3. **Cape Henoko**
   - The plan mooted in 2006 to build a partial replacement for Futenma here was opposed by many Okinawans, who said it would destroy delicate marine ecosystems, and kill the area's dugongs and turtles. Campaigners wanted the base off Okinawa entirely, and when it came to power in 2009 new PM Yukio Hatoyama proposed shifting up to 1,000 of the 2,500 Marines at Futenma to Tokunoshima Island in Kagoshima Prefecture. But he was forced to accept the Henoko option in May 2010, after Tokunoshima residents' protests, US objections to moving Futenma off Okinawa, and renewed tensions on the Korean Peninsula. Hatoyama resigned in June 2010. The new government said it would honour the Henoko deal, but was itself forced to resign over 2011's tsunami and Fukushima accident.

4. **White Beach Naval Facility**
   - A plan to build an offshore replacement for Futenma near White Beach was revived in 2010 before being ruled out amidst public hostility. The port provides logistics support for the 7th Fleet and is home to its 76th Task Force 1st Amphibious Unit. Nuclear-powered US vessels also call at White Beach.

**Okinawa facts**
- Okinawa (pop. 1.3m) makes up 0.6% of Japan's total area
- 18.6% of the main island is covered by US bases
- 47,000 US troops in Japan are joined by an equal number of family
- Okinawa has 19,000 Marines; 4,000 Navy/Air Force personnel
- 90,000 protesters in April 2010 demanded Futenma's total removal

Sources: Al-Jazeera, Associated Press, BBC, Global Security, Institute for Defence Studies and Analyses, Japan Times, Kadena Air Base, Prefecture of Okinawa, Reuters, Stars and Stripes, United States Forces Japan, United States Marine Corps.
Futenma Photo