

# Narrative Performance Task: Modern Day Treasure Hunting

## Student Directions

Task:

Your class has been discussing different types of adventurous activities: kayaking, surfing, hiking, and many other hobbies. You are given three resources about geocaching—a hobby described as involving hiking and treasure hunting.

*Read the sources carefully so you can **write a story** about your own adventures of geocaching. In your story, tell what happens when you find something interesting during one of your treasure hunts.*

When writing your story, find ways to use information and details about geocaching from the sources to improve your story.

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## Sources for Performance Task:

### Source #1

This article is from *Appleseeds* magazine and is about geocaching.

#### **Here, There, (Virtually) Everywhere: Get into Geocaching!**

by Audrey Kerchner

You are standing in front of a statue in New York's Central Park. You have the GPS. Your best friend has the directions on his phone. You turn your back to the statue and walk 18 feet. You find a sign with a date. The directions say to add up the four numbers in the year the statue was built. You walk that many steps away from the sign. You sit down and wonder where the "treasure" is. What in the world are you doing?

You are geocaching.

Geocaching (pronounced jee-o-kash-ing) is a kind of scavenger hunt. Anyone can play. Cache<sup>1</sup> hidens hide something in a secret location. It could be something like a small toy, a note, or a picture placed in a watertight container.

The hider uploads to the geocachegeocache website the coordinates where the cache is hidden. The hider also uploads clues on how to locate the cache. Creating good clues is part of the fun, just like setting up a scavenger hunt.

People who want to geocache can go to [www.geocaching.com](http://www.geocaching.com). There you can locate geocachesgeocaches around the world. You can download the directions or clues and the coordinates. Using the coordinates on your GPS unit lets you navigate to within two feet of the cache. This is when the clues will guide you to the exact spot. Or maybe not! It all depends on how clever you are at figuring out the clues. If you're good at solving mysteries, you'll find the cache. Inside the cache, you'll find a logbook. There you can record your name and see the names of all the other geocachers who also found that cache.

The website is the hub of the virtual community of cachers. Create an account (it's free!). Then find a cache by searching a specific location by zip code or address. The website also tells you how to hide your own first cache.

There are over a million caches out there waiting to be found. Join in the fun by starting your own virtual team. Have virtual competitions of who can find the most caches in a day or who can be the first to find a cache in an area. Share your stories of both the great finds and the fail-to-finds. Explore the world by using the virtual world of geocaching.[geocaching.com](http://geocaching.com).

<sup>1</sup> cache: a hiding place or a supply of hidden things

Here, There, (Virtually) Everywhere: Get into Geocaching! Geocaching! by Audrey Kerchner. Copyright©2011 by Carus Publishing Company. Reprinted by permission of Carus Publishing Company.

## Source #2

This article is from *Odyssey* magazine and is about geocaching.

### Urban Geocaching: Treasure Right Under Your Nose

by Sameer Halai

"Victory Cache." The title sounds intriguing, along with its code name, "GCG0XR." I put the coordinates<sup>1</sup> of the geocache into Google Earth and wait as the world spins around on my screen. Within seconds I hover virtually over the spot where the treasure is hidden, a super-busy intersection with a lot of traffic. The description reads, ". . . along the Emerald Necklace . . . between the Hynes and Fenway T stops . . ." I load the coordinates into my Global Positioning System (GPS) satellite receiver, feed a calibrated<sup>2</sup>, zoomed-in Google Earth screenshot of the area, and begin to plan my route. I'm on my way to seek a geocache.

Geocaching is a geeky, modern treasure hunt. You find an interesting location—say the Public Garden in Boston—and bury or hide a box filled with anything interesting (your favorite keychain, a fridge magnet, a compass, a toy). The content of your cache is up to your imagination and the geocache's theme, in this case "victory." According to the geocache site rules, you must obtain permission from the landowner or property manager *prior* to placing a geocache. Before any cache is listed on the official site it is rigorously reviewed to assure that it meets geocaching safety guidelines. For example, a cache cannot be placed in a schoolyard, government building, or on a highway bridge. Once your proposed cache has passed the site review, you post the GPS coordinates of its location online. Geocachers, in this case in the Boston area, will find your published coordinates, and if the geocache description sounds interesting enough, they just might decide to "seek" it. The search is fun, but finding the cache is even better. When you successfully locate a geocache, which can take anywhere from 15 minutes to an entire day, you remove it from its hiding place, open it, take something from it, put something in its place, sign the logbook, take a picture of yourself with the cache's disposable camera, and put the whole thing back in its hiding place.

Geocaching, as a sport, is a different way of looking at the world around us. Park benches, gaps in stone walls, metal plaques, and hollow trees are all places where geocaches are normally hidden. Hundreds of people can walk by a geocache and be totally unaware of its presence. The only way to know there's one around is to search the Internet for published coordinates. The sport is a great way of discovering interesting places in an area—area—a great scenic view, a historically significant location, a relaxing or entertaining spot in the city.

Whenever I travel to a new city, I look on the Internet at geocaching.com for some good geocaches in the area. There are thousands of geocaches listed in the United States, in cities, tourist destinations, and rural areas. The geocaches are rated based on their difficulty to access, the best time to seek, etc., so it's easy to know beforehand what the geocache will be like. I always read reviews to find out how interesting the locations are before I visit them. Some people go geocaching three to four times a month. I go around once every two or three months on average. Overall, the geocache community is made up of people who enjoy this sport. I have not heard of any incidents of vandalism or malicious<sup>3</sup> behavior involving geocachers.

When a geocache is hidden inside a city, it's called an urban cache. The "Victory Cache" that I am seeking is urban. People who don't geocache, but who happen to be around a hiding place and who could, by accident, discover a cache, are called "muggles." Geocachers try to protect their cache from muggles at all times! Urban caches require seekers to be very discreet because there are so many muggles around and you don't want them to see what you're doing. . . .

I take a subway train and get off at the Hynes stop in Boston. I fire up my GPS receiver and wait until it communicates with satellites trying to triangulate<sup>4</sup> its position. It takes 60 seconds before I get a "GPS fix," which basically means that my receiver is now telling me exactly where I am in the world with an accuracy of within 5 meters. *Great, I think, I'm glad it's not a cloudy day.*

Cloudy days are a geocacher's worst enemies. They can cause errors in your GPS readings and make it very hard to know where you are. I put the GPS system in navigation mode and ask it to take me to GCG0XR.

It shows me a beeline path to the geocache and indicates that the treasure is exactly to my southwest and just 600 meters away. It's a rare situation when you can actually take a beeline path to a geocache, and in this case a river clearly obstructs my path. I begin to plan a route around the river; I have a map and know exactly what I am going to do. I head west for 250 meters, cross over a bridge and then turn south, circling around the river. The map shows me that the geocache is very close to the intersection of Park Drive and Agassiz Road. One of the beauties of urban geocaching is that you can easily locate a reference point very close to a geocache, thanks to the dense grid of streets and intersections in a city. Many urban geocache can be found even without a GPS receiver!

I reach the intersection and look around. My receiver tells me to go 50 meters east. That means crossing a bridge. As I walk along, the receiver points southward; the distance to the geocache continues to decrease until it indicates just 10 meters south. Wow, I must be really close! I have to leave the road and go into the nearby woods as I continue to walk south toward the river that I have just crossed. When you get really close to a geocache like this one, the GPS receiver is useless. The normal margin of error in its readings leaves you with a 5-meter to 15-meter radius circle to search within. That's when you start upturning stones and looking at the bases of trees—trees—basically you follow your instincts about where the cache might be hidden.

It's my lucky day! I find the cache after only five minutes of searching. It's small and wedged between the

rocks of the stone bridge. I slowly remove the box from its hiding place and open it. I sign the logbook with my name and date, take a Bullwinkle travel bug, and leave behind a Stewie dashboard toy and a keychain. The box also contains some coins from different countries, a few fridge magnets, a keychain, and a miniature flashlight. Carefully, I hide the box back in its original location. What is significant about this location? Well, ten minutes ago I was walking along a busy road, surrounded by traffic and noise. Thanks to this geocache, I have discovered a quiet, sweet spot right next to the river, one with an excellent view. I relax for a while and then head home.

That night, I log my find on the geocache website. Four hundred and ninety people had found this geocache over the past four years. I am number 491. I try to check where the travel bug has been so far and am surprised to see that Mr. Bullwinkle started out in Missouri and has been all over the country. I think for awhile about how I can find a way to get him out of the country.

**CAUTION: Discuss a geocache with your parents and be sure to get their permission before you try and seek it—it—better still, ask them to accompany you. Also, avoid geocaches in remote locations. It's best to stick to urban geocaches; geocaches; be stealthy, and beware of the muggles!**

<sup>1</sup> coordinates: a set of two or more numbers (in this case latitudes and longitudes) long used to determine the position of a point

<sup>2</sup> calibrated: adjusted so that it can be used in an accurate and exact way

<sup>3</sup> malicious: showing a desire to cause harm to another person

<sup>4</sup> triangulate: a method of finding a distance or location by measuring the distance between two points whose exact location is known and then measuring the angles between each point and a third known point

Urban Geocaching: Treasure Right Under Your Nose by Sameer Halai. Copyright©2008 by Carus Publishing Company. Reprinted by permission of Carus Publishing Company.

### Source #3

This article about geocaching is from a 2010 issue of *The New York Times*.

#### **Modern Treasure Hunts for the Whole Family**

by Dave Caldwell

Not long after Morgan Lawless, now 13, took up geocaching last year, he asked his mother, Lisa, if she could drive him to a cache near their home in Mamaroneck, N.Y., and let him seek hidden treasure by following Google maps. . . .

They found themselves in the parking lot of a suburban shopping center that she says she had probably been to hundreds of times. But the hunt did not end there. They walked around a bush to pinpoint the cache, and there, much to her surprise, was an 18th-century graveyard.

Then there was the time Morgan searched for a cache near Rye Playland, also in Westchester County. They

wandered off the grounds of that amusement park and found a bird sanctuary, with egrets and roaming deer and a panorama of Long Island Sound.

"We never would have found the place if it weren't for geocaching," said Ms. Lawless, whose son has since acquired a more accurate global positioning system device to pursue his hobby.

It is a hobby that has developed only since May 2000. . . . Almost immediately, geocaching sprang up as a high-tech treasure hunt among a few enthusiasts in search of not-very-valuable trinkets and more precious bragging rights.

It's evolved since into a family- and budget-friendly adventure, a chance for Mom and Dad to do something with their children before being officially declared "uncool." And the only equipment needed is something most parents and kids already have, a smartphone. GPS applications are available for about \$10 for iPhones, BlackBerrys, and Androids, enticing<sup>1</sup> more people to try the hobby.

Such affordable technology, along with the growing number of "stashes" to find—21,000 within 100 miles of Times Square—has made geocaching easier for Morgan Lawless and other youngsters. Most caches contain souvenir coins or trinkets of small value, like a toy plastic animal, and are placed by those already involved in geocaching.

Morgan remembers finding his first prize, which turned out to be not a prize but a bag filled with trash. He was disappointed, but not deterred. Now, he said, "my favorite part is probably being on the hunt—searching it and finding it." In the year he has been participating, he figures he has found 150 caches and even come up with a few of his own. . . .

He said the activity was particularly accessible in New York City, where it can easily be undertaken year round: a searcher just needs a GPS unit and a MetroCard (a pass to ride public transportation), he said with a laugh. Additionally, the caches are easier to find in the fall and winter when there's less foliage and fewer competing hunters. . . .

Though adventurers can take part on their own through websites like geocaching.com, where stashes and coordinates are posted, formal events are also held by groups like the Metro New York Geocaching Society, and this year the Boy Scouts of America added a geocaching merit badge.

On a crisp, cool autumn Sunday morning, a geocaching event at West Hills County Park, in Suffolk County on Long Island, drew Morgan; his 10-year-old sister, Samantha; their parents; and about 100 other cachers, as they are known. The size of the group surprised the organizer, Marilyn MacGown of the New York society, who had expected about a third as many. They were all trying to discover the whereabouts of 15 caches. . . .

The activity is as intense as the cacher makes it. Ms. MacGown, organizer of the Long Island hunt, has found 7,000 caches. Mr. Pritchard goes to events mostly to socialize. Mr. Rogers, the financier, likes coming up with more complex "puzzle" caches, but he also carries small toys, buttons, and foreign coins because making

trades is a big part of the fun for his children.

<sup>1</sup> enticing: to attract someone

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