

BODY GEOGRAPHY THROUGH THE GRADES—abbreviated version

By Ingun Schneider (edited 11/2025)

One of the great benefits of being a Waldorf teacher is the opportunity to develop a theme through the grades, watching how students' capacities evolve in a certain area. A theme in the movement sphere is body geography exercises through the grades; see Audrey McAllen's indications given in *The Extra Lesson*.

In the "Ilkley course"—*A Modern Art of Education*, August 1923, Lecture 12—Rudolf Steiner suggested using body geography exercises as a strengthening activity for the nervous system: "The child quickly lets his thoughts flow into his movements, which helps him make a connection between concepts and impressions." For other Steiner references to body geography exercises, see: [The Kingdom of Childhood](#), [Soul Economy](#) and [Waldorf Education and Faculty Meetings, Vol.I.](#)

Body geography exercises are particularly valuable for today's students since so many of them have an incompletely developed imprinting of the threefold body into the etheric (memory) body. This imprinting of the 'map of the body' is normally completed by the time the child is seven. The main 'surveying instrument' for creating this map is the sense of self-movement (proprioception); also involved are the senses of touch (tactile), life (interoception), and balance/equilibrium (vestibular). These 'instruments' are 'tuned' and brought forth by the child's movement system. If unhindered, the organism of the young child, from birth to age 7, guided by the ego-organization and the astral body, gives the child the urge to repeatedly seek movement experiences that gradually are performed with less and less conscious attention of the astral body. When the movements can be performed subconsciously without the slightest intellectual involvement (see Ilkley Course, Lecture 3), they are fully imprinted into the etheric body, having become habit. This means they can be performed while the child is speaking or mentally engaged with something else. The child needs this 'map of his internal landscape', as a foundation from which to orient himself, for the unhindered and easeful development of the skills of writing, reading, and mathematics.

When using the following exercises with a class, the teacher does not model the instructions but only gives them verbally. (If there is initial confusion, teachers can at first stand in front of the class to one side, with the back towards the students while demonstrating the movements; this way the teacher's body positions match the students' so there is no direct mirroring by the students with the words 'left and right'.)

Grade One, to begin with:

Use right hand to touch body parts on the right side or middle of the body.

Examples:

- Touch your nose with your right little finger.
- Touch your right hand to your right shoulder.
- Touch your right eyebrow with your right thumb.
- Touch your right pointer finger to your right big toe.

Next:

Use right hand to touch body parts on the right side or the middle, left hand to touch parts of the body on the left or middle.

Examples:

- Touch your right cheek with your right ring finger.
- Touch the back of your neck with your right hand.
- Touch your left pointer to your left earlobe.

- Touch your right hand to your left heel.
- Touch your left ankle with your left hand.

Grade Two:

Continue using each side of the body separately, while gradually switching instructions more rapidly and/or giving two instructions at a time (can be performed after a given signal).

Examples:

—Touch the fourth finger of your right hand to your right eyelid and touch your back with your left hand.

—Touch your forehead with your right hand and your chin with your left hand.

Follow this with:

—Now switch hands; switch again; and again. (I.e., switching hands when they are both at the midpoint of the body.)

Grade Three:

Now the hands cross over the vertical midline of the body. A cross-lateral quality can be seen.

Examples:

—Touch your right pointer to your left knee.

—Touch your left hand to your right thigh.

—Touch your left calf with your right hand.

Once the students are comfortable with one 'across the midline' instruction at a time, give two instructions at a time and/or switch positions.

Example:

—Touch your right palm to your left knee and your left thumb to your right cheek.

—Touch your right upper arm with your left index finger and your left shin with your right index finger.

—Touch your right ankle with your left hand and your left ankle with your right hand; switch; switch again; and again.

Fourth and Fifth Grade:

Continue with cross-patterned gestures, naming specific fingers, top of the hand, wrist, and other details of the body. Then pick up speed for giving directions to create a greater challenge for the students.

Examples:

'Body geography statues'—now every position is held with each new position added to the previous:

Example:

—Touch your right knee with your left heel, —touch your right elbow to your left thigh, —touch your left palm to your right shoulder, —touch your right thumb to your chin, —touch your left thumb to your right cheek, —touch your right pointer to your nose, —touch your right little finger to your left cheek,....

Many will have let go before you get to the later instructions; this is a much appreciated body geography variation that requires good balance and focus. As you have students do this variation over time, they are able to hold more and more positions.

Sixth Grade:

To challenge the students and bring in the social element, students are asked to face a partner. They are then asked to touch the specific body part on their partner with their own named body part. This activity always creates an enlivened, fun filled lesson! Each student has to help the partner identify and perform the correct movement as a cooperative process.

Examples:

—Touch your partner’s right shoulder with your left hand (pause as the students figure this out); then touch your partner’s left elbow with your right hand. From this position, proceed without moving anything until the next instruction.

—Touch your partner’s right knee with your right hand (pause); then your partner’s right shin with your left hand.

—Touch your right hand to your partner’s right big toe (pause); then your left hand to your partner’s left ankle.

Seventh Grade:

As the teacher introduces experiments with mirrors during physics class, have the students perform a mirroring variation of the body geography exercises. Here individual students take the lead, creating movements that will be imitated by the partner student. The student partners face each other. To begin, one student imitates the movements and gestures of the partner by performing all movements as if looking in a mirror. At a certain point, roles are switched, so that each student has the mirroring experience. Later, the movements can be done in a cross-mirroring pattern, right/left, left/right when facing each other, i.e., if the leader student uses the right arm the cross-mirroring student uses his right arm.

Grade Eight:

As the students learn the anatomical parts of the body during anatomy lessons in eighth grade, it is fun and challenging to return to the body geography exercises.

Examples:

—Touch your right ulna to your left radius.

—Touch your left humerus with your right carpal bones.

—Touch your second right phalanx to your left patella.

—Touch your right tibia with your left calcaneus.

Each student keeps ‘in touch’ with his or her external and internal geographical map through the grades in a healthy manner. These exercises can be done for a block of time to allow the positive effects of these lessons to imprint into the students.

Early Childhood ‘Body Geography Games’

Rocking Game: See-saw, Marjery Daw...

Hold the baby or toddler (old enough to sit up unassisted) sitting facing you or sideways on your lap. Tilt the child back and forth to the rhythm of the nursery rhyme:

See-saw, Marjery Daw, Jacky shall have a new master. He shall have but a penny a day, if he can’t work any faster.

Hey Diddle Diddle, the Cat and the Fiddle...

Hold the baby or toddler on your knees: bounce the child rhythmically up and down while saying the rhyme. Then run off with the child holding hands on the last line of the verse.

Hey diddle diddle,

The cat and the fiddle

The cow jumped over the moon.

The little dog laughed

To see such a sport,

And the dish ran away with the spoon.

Ride a Cock Horse to Banbury Cross...

Hold the baby or toddler sitting on your knees: bounce the child rhythmically up and down while saying the verse. Touch and rub each of the child's fingers, touch and wiggle each of the toes, then bounce the child to end the verse.

*Ride a cock horse to Banbury Cross,
To see a fine lady upon a great (white) horse.
With bells on her fingers,
And rings on her toes,
She shall have music (will make merry) wherever she goes.*

Horse Riding

Sit the child on your knees: gently rhythmic bouncing, slightly higher as the verse proceeds, then side to side on last lines, sliding the child off the knees while firmly holding onto child.

*This is the way the ladies ride; Nim-nim! Nim-nim!
This is the way the gentlemen ride: Trim-trim! Trim-trim!
This is the way the farmers ride: Trot-trot! Trot-trot!
This is the way the huntsmen ride: A-gallop, a-gallop, a-gallop, a-gallop! This is the way the plough boys ride;
Hobble-de-gee! Hobble-de-gee! Hobble-de-gee! Hobble-de-gee!*