

Czesc! from Poland

Living and Learning in the Center of Europe

The Location

How quickly can you find Poland on a world map? You know that it is located in Europe and about now, you might be thankful that Europe is a small continent. Did you know that Poland is located right in the very center of Europe and is the 9th largest European nation? If you were looking down on this



territory from the air, you would see that the Carpathian Mountains form Poland's southern boundary and to the north, the Polish coast meets the chilly waters of the Baltic Sea. Its borders are shared by seven land neighbors and two maritime neighbors, and in this way Poland holds a tie with Germany for most neighboring countries. Neighbors often mean trouble and this is perhaps why Poland has had such a tumultuous history and has experienced multiple divisions, collapses, and redrawn borders. Poland has even disappeared entirely off the map a couple of times during its long and dramatic history.

The People

Poland is a land of 39 million residents, over 97% of these inhabitants are of Polish descent, and the remaining 3% are German, Ukrainian and Belorussian. Most of the population of Poland lives in the cities of Warsaw (the capital), Krakow, Lodz and Wroclaw. 95% of Poles are Roman Catholic and the other 5% divide themselves equally between Russian Orthodox and Protestant.

Many notable and accomplished Poles have made their mark on the world at large, including Nikolas Copernicus (astronomer/mathematician 1473-1543), Frederic Chopin (pianist/composer 1810-1849) and Marie Curie (chemist/physicist 1867-1934) to name just a few.

The History

Poland's vibrant history dates back over one thousand years when its first recorded leader, Duke Mieszko I, converted to Christianity after marrying Dabrowka of Bohemia in 966AD. This is recognized as the birth of the Polish nation. It was at this time that Mieszko allied himself with the German Emperor Otto I and placed his land under the protection of the Pope. By embracing Christianity, Poland became an influential participant in western culture. Interestingly, the borders of Poland at that time in history were very similar to today's boundaries.

Over the course of time, Poland has been divided, raided, plundered and re-established many times over. The Golden Years of Polish history is considered to be during the time of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth which transpired between the years of 1382 and 1790. This alliance with Lithuania dramatically increased Poland's boundaries and lasted for over 400 years. During the 1700's, three of Poland's powerful neighbors, Russia, Prussia and Austria, each wanted to own Poland. In an effort to avoid war, these three giants settled their dispute by dividing Poland into three partitions. Thus the Golden Years came to an abrupt end and Poland was essentially wiped off the face of the map for the next 123 years.

Poland regained its independence in 1918 after the conclusion of World War I, but unfortunately lost it again during



World War II. The nation of Poland emerged several years later as a communist country within the Eastern Bloc controlled by the former Soviet Union. When communist rule was overthrown in 1989, Poland became what is unofficially known as the 3rd Polish Republic. In actuality, the country is more simply named the Republic of Poland and today it is the 6th most populated member of the European Union, which it joined in 2004.

Over the course of Poland's turbulent history, its boundaries have moved like squiggly lines on a child's drawing pad and so have its people. Tragically, during the time of the Holocaust, nearly 3 million of Poland's Jewish citizens were exterminated in Nazi concentration camps. Then, at the conclusion of WWII, Poland's borders were shifted westward and this decision by a handful of world leaders forced millions of residents to migrate. The people of Poland have experienced tragedy, difficulty and despair, but they have arisen stronger and more resilient as a result.

Homeschooling

When their territory was gobbled up by their German and Soviet neighbors in 1939, the government school system shut down. Education, being highly valued by the Poles, began to be conducted underground. The home became the secret location of learning for more than one million young Polish students. Throughout WWII, most schools and universities in Poland were destroyed and thousands of teachers were executed or sent to concentration camps. Children



studied secretly in dark rooms when possible during the week. Educational materials were scarce as the Nazis had burned most of Poland's books. Schooling would have ceased altogether were it not for the dedication of parents and students who understood that education was the key to

freedom. They had to work diligently to keep their lessons secret as they risked imprisonment on a daily basis if their clandestine school operations were discovered.

Today, the school system is intact once again. Poland has a compulsory attendance law for students age 7 through 18. Once a student has finished his primary and secondary schooling, he will choose to attend university, technical school or a basic vocational school, depending on what occupation he wants to pursue. This is a serious and permanent decision for a student and his parents as it will have long term ramifications for his life.

Homeschooling is a legal choice in Poland. However, a parent must request permission to homeschool from the local school principal. This school authority has the right to grant or decline these rights as he or she so chooses. The principal may also decide what obligations he will require of this student whom he has allowed to school at home. In other words, homeschooling is legal, but at the mercy of the local school authorities' whims. And these decisions by the principal are absolute and legally indisputable.



“There are regions in Poland where no parents can homeschool their kids - every such application is refused [by school headmasters],” says Marek Budajczak, head of the Home School Association in Poland. “Fortunately there are also such rare places, where parents are welcome [to teach their children at home] and school officials are really helpful.”

When communism fell in 1989, the political environment seemed like it would be conducive to home-based education. Since that time, the Ministry of National Education has introduced changes and limitations to the “much too liberal” homeschooling laws. Now, government authorities and school principals may make any demands they want on parents and students before granting them the right to school at home. Also, every homeschooled student is required to pass an annual exam which regular school students are not required to take.

The homeschool movement in Poland is small but growing. Budajczak writes humorously that the homeschool climate in Poland is much like its temperatures during the wintertime, “freezing, but slowly heading towards springtime.” As of this writing, there are approximately 40 Polish families teaching their children at home. Many Polish homeschooling families not only speak English and have read various books on home-based education that have been published in the English language, but also have really helpful American friends, who are home educators themselves.

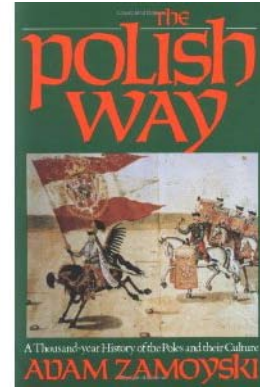
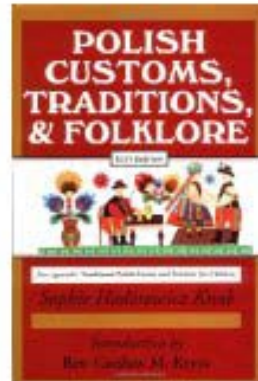
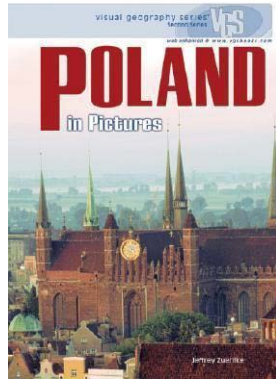
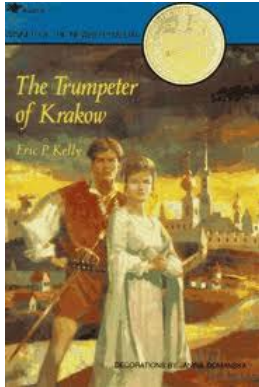
Homeschooling in America is largely successful because of the materials available and the support that can be gained through co-ops and support groups. Understandably, these are the resources that the homeschooling families in Poland actively seek as they begin to put into place the structure of a Home School Association (Stowarzyszenie Edukacji Domowej) that will encourage and equip parents to teach their children confidently at home.

Pray for the homeschooling families in Poland. Many of them are participating in your online support groups. Include them and encourage them as they seek a method of schooling that is very exceptional and uncommon in their country.

Now that you have read the chapter, it's time to dive in for some hands-on learning to cement your student's growing knowledge of this small but fascinating European country.

Unit Study

- 1. READING SELECTIONS** - Let's start with some extra reading. Listed below are some great books about Poland, or set in Poland, that will provide many hours of enjoyable reading. The links below will take you to Amazon.com for more information, but you may be able to find these at your local library. Read for pleasure alone, or have your kids write a book report on one of these selections.



- [The Trumpeter of Krakow](#) by Eric P. Kelly
- [Poland in Pictures](#) by Jeffrey Zuehlke
- [Polish Customs, Traditions and Folk...](#) by Sophie Hodorowicz
- [The Polish Way](#) by Adam Zamoyski

2. HISTORY & TIMELINES - Learn more about Poland by compiling historical facts and events from Poland's turbulent history and adding them to your timeline. If you do not have a timeline already started, you can construct one by following these directions - [How to Make a Timeline Easily](#). Here is a link to a wonderful resource for timeline entries about Poland - <http://www.rootsweb.com/~polwgv/history.html>.

3. MAPWORK - A unit study would not be complete without taking a good look at the lay of the land. Pages 39 and 40 include both a labeled and unlabeled map of Poland. Have your students mark some of the major cities, the surrounding countries, and the sea to the north, at the least. For older students, have them use your teacher's map and fill in the rest!

4. RECIPES - This is my favorite part - the food from the land! And I love Polish cuisine! If you do the above activities on Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday, then take some time on either Thursday or Friday to whip up some authentic Polish dishes in your kitchen.

Poland's cuisine is dictated by crops such as rye, wheat, millet, barley and buckwheat. Rye bread is common in this part of Europe. Pickled vegetables such as cucumbers, beetroot, cabbage (sauerkraut) and kohlrabi have become an essential part of Polish cooking. The idea of pickling is not limited to vegetables, however. Herring, fished in the Baltic, is drenched with spices and vinegar and is often served on holy days. This has become Poland's favorite national food. Meat plays a significant role in the Polish diet. Perhaps the most famous Polish meat is *kielbasa*, Polish sausage. Indeed, Polish food has much to offer, and I enjoy its hearty and comforting flavors. As the Polish would say, "*Jedzcie, pijcie i popuszczajcie pasa*"... "Eat, drink and loosen your belt."

Savory Sausage & Sauerkraut

A cold weather favorite. Good served with pierogies or even baked beans.

- 2 tablespoons butter
- 1 medium onion, chopped
- 1/4 cup chopped green peppers
- 1 large apple, peeled, cored, and chopped
- 2 tablespoons brown sugar
- 1/2 teaspoon caraway seeds
- 3 red potatoes, cleaned and diced
- 1 1/2 cups sauerkraut, drained, rinsed, & packed
- 1-2 lb smoked sausage (kielbasa), cut in 3 inch pieces



Melt butter in saucepan. Add onion and green pepper. Cook until tender. Add apple, brown sugar, caraway seeds, potatoes, and sauerkraut. Mix well. Place sausage on top of sauerkraut mixture. Cover. Cook over medium-low heat for 40 minutes.

Potato and Cheese Pierogi

This is a recipe for traditional Potato and Cheese pierogi. Serve with chopped fried bacon and onions.

Potato and Cheese Filling

1 tablespoon grated onion
2 tablespoons butter
2 cups cold mashed potatoes
1 cup cottage cheese (or more)
salt and pepper

Pierogia

2 1/2 cups flour
1/2 teaspoon salt
1 egg
2 teaspoons oil
3/4 cup warm water

For the Filling: Cook the onion in butter until tender. Combine it with potatoes and cheese. Season to taste with salt and pepper.

For the Pierogi: Vary the proportions and ingredients in this recipe to suit your taste.

Mix the flour with the salt in a deep bowl. Add the egg, oil and water to make a medium soft dough. Knead on a floured board until the dough is smooth. **Caution: Too much kneading will toughen the dough.** Divide the dough into 2 parts. Cover and let stand for at least 10 minutes.

Prepare the filling. The filling should be thick enough to hold its shape. Roll the dough quite thin on a floured board. Cut rounds with a large biscuit cutter, or the open end of a glass. Put the round in the palm of your hand. Place a spoonful of filling in it, fold over to form a half circle and press the edges together with the fingers. The edges should be free of filling. Be sure the edges are sealed well to prevent the filling from running out.

Place the pierogi on a floured board or tea towel and then cover with another tea towel to prevent them from drying out.

COOKING: Drop a few pierogies into a large quantity of rapidly boiling salted water. Do not attempt to cook too many at a time. Stir VERY gently with a wooden spoon to separate them and to prevent them from sticking to the bottom of the pot. Continue boiling for 3-4 minutes. The cooling period will depend upon the size you made it, the thickness of the dough and the filling. Pierogies will be ready when they are puffed. Remove them with a perforated spoon or skimmer to a colander and drain thoroughly.

Place in a deep dish, sprinkle generously with melted butter to prevent them from sticking. Cover and keep them hot until all are cooked. Serve in a large dish without piling or crowding them. Top with melted butter- chopped crisp bacon and/or chopped onions lightly browned in butter.

REHEATING: One of the great things about pierogies, is that they can be made in large quantities, refrigerated, frozen and reheated without lost of quality. Many prefer reheated pierogies as compared to freshly boiled ones. To re-heat, you can: 1) pan fry pierogies in butter or bacon fat until they are light in color or, 2) heat the pierogies in the top of a double boiler or in the oven until they are hot and plump or, 3) deep fry them.

Doughnuts - Paczki

10 servings

1 c Sweet cream
2 Yeast cakes
10 Egg yolk
1 ts Salt
5 tb Butter
4 c Unbleached flour (all-purpose)
2 oz Rum
6 tb Sugar



Heat cream to luke warm. add salt and egg yolks and beat till thick. cream butter and sugar. put these into large bowl, add yeast dissolved w/ 1 tablespoon sugar and mix thoroughly. Add rum then flour and cream alternately and beat hard till dough blisters. set in warm place to rise. punch down and let rise again. place dough on floured surface and stretch and fill w/ pitted prunes. Fold over and cut into desired size balls. place on floured surface and let rise. fry in deep hot oil turning once. Paczki should be very dark in color before turning to ensure that they are thoroughly baked. drain on soft absorbent paper. Sprinkle w/ powdered sugar.

5. **CRAFTS** - Finally, it is craft time!

When I think of Polish crafts, immediately Pisanki, Kraszanki and Wycinanki come to mind. You say, "What?" Oh, you have never heard of these. Oh my... the Poles are known for their beautiful, intricately detailed crafts. Some of these might be a bit difficult for the untrained to take on, but others are more doable, at least in modified versions. At the very least, take a moment to view some of these beautiful crafts from the heart of Europe.

Pisanki - Pisanki is an art form of dyeing eggs and coloring them with very intricate detailed patterns. Check out this beautiful picture here -

<http://www.polishamericancenter.org/Pisanki.htm>.

Let's be realistic when we say that this is not something we are just going to replicate with our children on a boring afternoon. These are incredible creations created by master crafters. BUT we can dye eggs using natural dyes and have a lot of fun doing so. We don't even have to wait for Easter. Here is a site with directions on how to dye eggs when those Easter egg kits are not on the grocery store shelves.

Kraszanki

<http://acweb.colum.edu/users/agunkel/homepage/eggs/eggs/oniondye.htm>



Wycinanki - Another beautiful type of art that is created in Poland is

Wycinanki. Wycinanki is the Polish word for paper-cut designs. These beautiful cut-outs have been used to decorate the interior of Polish homes since the early 19th century.

Here is a great site that will get you started on creating your very own Wycinanki that can decorate your home or school room - <http://info-poland.buffalo.edu/classroom/wycinanki/text.html>. Try using colored paper or pasting the cut-out on a backing of colored paper.

And remember to have fun!

Around the World POLAND



Around the World
POLAND

