Life Skills:
Self Responsibility

What to Do:
Youths will investigate similarities in names between geographic features in the United States and in other countries.

Measuring Success:
Youths will discover connections between U.S. communities (and states) and other countries through comparing the names of towns, roads, rivers, mountains and other landmarks. They also will use map-reading skills.

Audience:
3rd – 12th graders

Time Involved:
30 minutes

Group Size:
5 - 30

Preparation and Materials
- Maps of areas your group will be exploring (state, county, United States). Have one map for every two to three youths.
- World maps
- World almanacs or other related resources (www.nationalgeographic.com)
- Pencils
- Paper
- Demographic information about your community or the areas of the map youths will study

Introduction
There are reminders all around us that people from many different cultures have settled here. You see evidence in names of towns, communities, rivers, mountains and other geographic features. Are you aware of these links with the past? What are some signs of this in your own community?
The Activity
Let's divide up into pairs or trios. (Give each small group a map of the area it is to research as well as a pencil and paper.) I'd like each group to search the maps for names of towns, roads, rivers, mountains and other landmarks that have been borrowed from other places in the world. On your papers, list each name in the map area that can be matched with another place in the world. If you know where the name originated, go ahead and list it.

Remember, names may come from specific countries, cultures or languages. They also may come from groups of people, such as the Aztecs or Native American groups.

Reflect/Discuss
Share What You Did
(Ask each small group to report on its findings. If several groups are researching the same geographic area, discuss the different findings among groups. Use world maps and almanacs to check findings.)

Tell What's Important
Is there a trend in the area you researched? Are there more names connected with a particular country, region or culture? Does this parallel what you know about the ethnic history of the particular area?

Generalize To Your Life
Perhaps we can learn more about the names by reviewing some of the latest population information from these areas. (Give each group a list of the current demographic information for its map area.) Compare the current population statistics to the geographic origins of the names. Are the statistics similar? How have they changed?

Apply What You Learned
(Explain more about maps and how to use them. Spend time studying the world map. Discuss the forms of transportation the settlers (whose names are represented in your community) used to get there, i.e., ship, covered wagon, train, horse, etc.)

More Challenges
- Use a geographical dictionary to find out more information about the names of places.
- Find different towns, counties, etc. around the country with the same name. Examples: Columbus, Jackson, Springfield.