

TABLE OF CONTENTS

A Letter from the Author: Why explore spherical geometry?	v
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Using the Lénárt Sphere Curriculum

Fitting Spherical Geometry into Your Curriculum	xii
The Adventures and the Adventure Cards	xiii
Student's Guides to the Adventures	xiv
Contents of the Student's Guides	xiv
Teacher's Guides to the Adventures	xv

Using the Lénárt Sphere Construction Tools

Sphere	xvi
Torus	xvi
Transparencies	xvi
Hangers	xvii
Spherical Straightedge/Ruler/Protractor	xvii
Spherical Compass and Center Locator	xviii
Non-Permanent Marking Pens and Collars for Holding the Pens	xviii
<i>The Living Earth</i> Poster and Globe	xix
Storage Container	xix

Adventures Comparing Planar and Spherical Geometry

Chapter 0: Getting Started

0.1 What color is the bear?	4
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Chapter 1: Basic Concepts

1.1 What is the simplest shape?	11
1.2 Can you draw a straight line on a sphere?	13
1.3 How do you measure distance?	17
1.4 How can you construct equators and pole points?	20
1.5 How can you use a protractor to measure angles on a sphere?	22

Chapter 2: Parallels and Perpendiculars

2.1 How many points can two lines share?	28
2.2 What do perpendicular lines look like on a sphere?	32
2.3 How many perpendiculars can two lines have in common?	35

Chapter 3: Polygons

3.1 Is it possible to make a polygon with only two sides?	43
3.2 What regions can you create using three lines?	47
3.3 How many triangles can have the same three vertices?	51
3.4 What is the sum of the angle measures of a triangle?	55
3.5 Can a triangle have more than one right angle?	58

Chapter 4: Similarity and Congruence

4.1 Can you construct similar polygons?	66
4.2 What is special about two triangles whose corresponding angles are congruent?	70
4.3 What conditions guarantee congruence of spherical triangles?	74

Chapter 5: Circles

5.1 What are some properties of a circle on a sphere?	80
5.2 What are some relationships in families of concentric circles?	84
5.3 What is the ratio of the circumference of a circle to its diameter?	88

Table of Contents

Chapter 6: Area

- 6.1 Can you always use square units to measure area? 96
- 6.2 How can you measure the area of a triangle? 99
- 6.3 How can you approximate the area of a circle? 104

Adventures on the Planet Earth

Chapter 7: Mapping the Earth

- 7.1 Can you create a globe from a flat map? 113
- 7.2 Where in the world are you? 125
- 7.3 What time is it? 128
- 7.4 What did Columbus think the world looked like? 131
- 7.5 What causes earthquakes and volcanoes? 134

Adventures in Spherical Geometry

Chapter 8: Surprises on the Sphere

- 8.1 What is special about triangles inscribed on a diameter of a circle? 140
- 8.2 What are some properties of a triangle inscribed in an octant? 144
- 8.3 How can you construct Napier’s pentagon? 146

Chapter 9: Tessellations

- 9.1 What are some tessellations on the sphere? 153
- 9.2 How can you construct a soccer ball? 156
- 9.3 How can you tile the sphere with three different types of regular polygons? 159
- 9.4 How can you inscribe the Platonic solids in a sphere? 162
- 9.5 How can you “blow up” the Platonic solids to tile a sphere? 165

Chapter 10: Polar Triangles

- 10.1 How do you construct a polar triangle? 173
- 10.2 How are the angles and the sides related in a pair of polar triangles? 176
- 10.3 What is special about the altitudes of polar triangles? 178
- 10.4 What is special about the angle bisectors in a triangle and the perpendicular bisectors of its sides? 180
- 10.5 What is special about lines through the midpoints of the sides of a triangle? 183

Chapter 11: Reflections on the Sphere

- 11.1 What happens to a point if you reflect it across three perpendicular great circles in succession? 188
- 11.2 What shapes can you create if you reflect a point across the sides of an octant? 190

Appendices

- Appendix A: Five-Day Units in Spherical Geometry 193

- Appendix B: Traditional Geometry: A Correlation Chart 195

About the Author 201

For Further Reading 203

Ordering Lénárt Sphere Materials and Replacement Parts 204



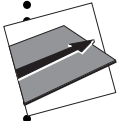
How many points can two lines share?

ADVENTURE
2.1

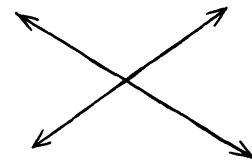
When two distinct lines intersect on the plane or on the sphere, they meet at one or more points.

- Investigate the points of intersection of two straight lines on the plane.
- Investigate the points of intersection of two great circles on the sphere.
- Explain your observations about parallel lines on the plane and on the sphere.

Construction on the Plane



- Step 1* Draw a straight line. Label it l .
- Step 2* Try to draw another straight line that has no point in common with line l . Label it a .
- Step 3* Try to draw a straight line that has exactly one point in common with line l . Label it b .
- Step 4* Try to draw a straight line that has exactly two points in common with line l . Label it c .
- Step 5* Try to draw a straight line that has more than two points in common with line l . Label it d .



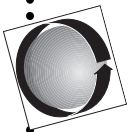
Investigate

1. Which constructions were possible on the plane?
2. Which of your lines are parallel? Why?
3. Describe all the different ways in which two distinct lines can intersect on the plane.

Make a Guess

4. Will your conclusions be the same for great circles on a sphere?

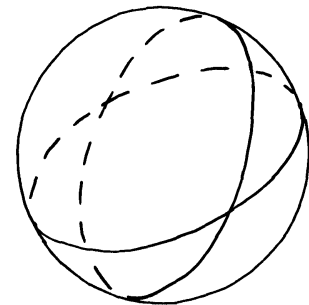
Construction on the Sphere



5. Perform the same steps on the sphere that you performed on the plane, replacing the straight lines with great circles. Keep track of which constructions are possible on the sphere.

Investigate

6. Describe all the ways in which two distinct great circles can intersect on the sphere.
7. Can two great circles ever be parallel?



Compare the Plane and the Sphere

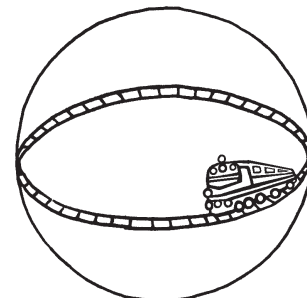
8. See how many observations you can make about the intersection of two straight lines on the plane and the intersection of two great circles on the sphere. Record them on a comparison chart like the one at right. Add as many rows as you need.

Intersection of two lines	
On the plane	On the sphere

9. Do you think the intersection of two lines is simpler on the plane or on the sphere? Which case is more intriguing? Why?
10. Now try to reverse your argument. Give reasons why the intersection of two lines is simpler or more intriguing on the surface you *didn't* choose above.

Explore More

11. Imagine that it is possible for a pair of railroad tracks to extend all the way around the earth. Can the railroad tracks represent parallel lines?
12. Parallel lines on the plane are always the same distance apart. Draw a great circle on your sphere. Then draw a different figure that is always the same distance from your great circle.
 - a. Describe this figure.
 - b. Decide if the figure could be a great circle.
13. A boat travels in a such a way that it is always 50 km from the equator. Explain why the boat is not traveling in the most direct path between two points.
14. Euclid was a mathematician from ancient Greece who is famous for being one of the first to organize the ideas of geometry. In his treatise titled *Elements*, Euclid lists a set of **axioms** for geometry. Euclid's axioms were statements that he believed were so obviously true that he was willing to accept them without proof. Almost two and a half thousand years later, we still base plane geometry on Euclid's axioms. However his last axiom, commonly called the parallel postulate, has always been open to debate. Here is one form of Euclid's parallel postulate: Given a straight line and a point not on this straight line, you can draw only one straight line through the given point that is parallel to the given straight line.
 - a. On a piece of paper draw a straight line and a point not on the line. Draw as many lines as you can through the point that are parallel to the first line. Use your drawing to explain why Euclid's parallel postulate makes sense on the plane.
 - b. Rewrite the parallel postulate for the sphere by replacing the words *straight line* with *great circle*. Then make a construction on your sphere similar to the construction you just made on the plane. Now explain why Euclid's parallel postulate does not make sense on the sphere.
 - c. Write your own parallel postulate that is true for geometry on a sphere.
15. Describe all the ways that three distinct great circles can intersect.





How many points can two lines share?

Student Audience: Middle School/High School

Prerequisites: Students should know the terms line and great circle.

Class Time: 25–40 minutes.

Construction/Investigation on the Plane

In Step 2, students can use the parallel edges of the straightedge. Step 4, of course, cannot be constructed. The only construction in Step 5 is found in two coincidental lines with infinitely many points in common.

Two distinct lines are either parallel to each other, with no common point, or intersecting, with exactly one point of intersection.

Construction/Investigation on the Sphere

Students may be surprised to learn that parallel great circles (with no common point) do not exist. Sometimes they construct a parallel circle that is not a great circle, using the upper unscaled rim of the base hoop of the spherical ruler. To help students see this, ask them to stretch a taut string between two points of a “false” circle. On the sphere, Step 4 is the only possible construction. The only solution in Step 5 is found in coincidental great circles, just as it is with lines.



Two distinct great circles always intersect in exactly two points.

Compare the Plane and the Sphere

Intersection of two lines	
On the plane	On the sphere
Two distinct straight lines with no point of intersection are called parallel lines.	Two distinct great circles can never be parallel to each other.
Two distinct straight lines with exactly one point in common are called intersecting lines.	Two distinct great circles can never have exactly one point of intersection.
Two distinct straight lines can never have more than one point of intersection.	Two distinct great circles always have exactly two points of intersection.

- We must consider three cases on the plane: parallel, intersecting, and coincident lines. On the sphere, however, we must only consider two because parallel great circles do not exist. Therefore in this investigation, the sphere is simpler than the plane.

Explore More

- Presumably the two tracks never intersect. Because every pair of great circles intersects, it follows that both tracks cannot lie on great circles. Therefore both of the tracks cannot represent great circles on the sphere.
- The figure is a circle with a radius between 0° and 90° . If the distance in question measures 0° , then the circle is the original great circle with radius 90° . If the distance measures 90° , then the circle is the pole point of the original great circle.

13. The boat isn't traveling in the most direct path between two points because a line that is always at a 50-km distance from the equator must be a circle smaller than a great circle.
14. c. Answers should sound something like this: Given a great circle and a point not on the great circle, there is no great circle through the point that is parallel to the given great circle.

As you see, there is one straight line through a given point that is parallel to a given straight line on the plane. There is no great circle through a given point that is parallel to a given great circle on the sphere. Logically, the third possibility is a surface with some kind of simplest line on it, which adheres to the following property: There is more than one simplest line through a given point that is parallel to a given simplest line. Can we find such a surface? This question was first answered in the nineteenth century by Carl Friedrich Gauss, János Bolyai, Nikolai Lobachevsky, and others. Indeed, we can find such surfaces, but these are a bit more complicated and less demonstrative than the plane with the straight line or the sphere with the great circle. For example, if we replace the straight lines of the plane or the great circles of the sphere with certain arcs of certain circles as the simplest lines, then we can build up geometries of the third kind.

15. If the three great circles are concurrent, then they have two points of intersection. If they are not concurrent, then there are six points of intersection on the whole sphere.