EXPLORE Lesson Plan for California Teachers

Lesson Title: Maps Tell Stories About the World

Grade Level: 3-5

Lesson Objectives:
• Students will analyze and interpret maps.

Big Idea: Maps are interpretations of the world.

Essential Question(s): What can people learn from maps?

California Standards:
• HSS 3.1: Students describe the physical and human geography and use maps, tables, graphs, photographs, and charts to organize information about people, places, and environments in a spatial context.
• HSS 3.1.1: Identify geographical features in their local region.
• HSS 4.1: Students demonstrate an understanding of the physical and human geographic features that define places and regions in California.

Lesson Introduction:

Teacher presents large map (pull down map, projected online image, or large poster wall map) and invites Students to identify and name the parts of a map. One by one, Students can come to the map, point at a feature, and name the feature (e.g., title, compass rose, key or legend, scale bar, symbols, latitude and longitude lines, place names, etc.). Students describe the purpose of each feature. Teacher leads a class discussion about why these features are important and commonly used across maps.

Learning Activities:

Teacher explains that maps are important “texts” that can be used to learn information about the world. Teacher presents several different types of maps from previous lessons (political, travel, population, weather, topographical, etc.) and names the type of map for Students to learn. For each map, have Students point out what the map shows – landforms, political boundaries, place names, highways, population, etc. – and explain why this information is important.

Teacher poses these questions for Think-Pair-Share: Why do you think there are different types of maps? How did people gather the information they needed to create these maps? (First, each Student thinks about the question and answers to himself, then pairs of Students share their answers with each other, and finally pairs share their answers with the class and Teacher facilitates a discussion.) Teacher helps Students understand that maps provide information and can tell stories.
Teacher explains that Students will analyze some historical maps. Introduce the Historical Maps Chart and review instructions for Students to analyze each map and write 1-2 sentences in the “What I Think” column describing what story they think is told in this map. Encourage Students to think about what information is presented in the map, who might have used this map, and for what purposes. Review with Students basic map reading skills to read the title, look for a date and author, determine the orientation (or directionality of the map), and identify scale. Colors, symbols, and key or legend are helpful tools in map reading. In the end, Students should be able to answer the question, “What is this map about?” Work together as a class on the first map, or on all of the maps.

Historical Map Chart, Map 1:

Students look at the map and then write a few sentences or bullets in the “What I Think” column. Teacher has some Students share what they wrote and explain why. Teacher shares information about the map:

Ptolemy (1482)’s untitled map of the world is one of the most popular maps in the world today. Ptolemy lived around 100 – 178 a.d. and was an important geographer and astronomer working in Ancient Rome. He wrote about his studies in a book called Geographia, which was used many years later by mapmakers to produce this map in 1482. Ptolemy introduced coordinates for positions of places and mathematical calculations to determine the size of places featured on the map. Before using calculations, mapmakers depicted important places as larger on the map than other places.

Discuss what is seen on the map and use features and information to answer the questions, “What is this map about?” and “What stories does this map tell readers about the world?”

Students write what they now know about this map in the proper column.

Historical Map Chart, Map 2:

Students look at the map and then write a few sentences or bullets in the “What I Think” column. Teacher has some Students share what they wrote and explain why. Teacher shares information about the map:

Paolo Forlani (1566) was an Italian cartographer and therefore the writing on this map is in Italian. This is one of the first maps to show North America only. We can find Canada (Canada Pro, or Proper) and New France (La Nova Franza) in the northern region. The map shows Apalchen (Appalachian) Mountains and the names of Iroquoian villages, Stadacone and Ochelaga, known to European mapmakers after Jacques Cartier visited them. This map reflects the explorations of North America by Europeans during this time period.
Discuss what is seen on the map and use features and information to answer the questions, “What is this map about?” and “What stories does this map tell readers about the world?”

Students write what they now know about this map in the proper column.

Historical Map Chart, Map 3:

Students look at the map and then write a few sentences or bullets in the “What I Think” column. Teacher has some Students share what they wrote and explain why. Teacher shares information about the map:

This map was first published in Amsterdam around 1650 based on descriptions and earlier maps made of California. Around 1602-03, a friar accompanied explorer Sebastian Vizcaino on his West Coast expedition. Around 1620, he drew a map of California as an island. Several other maps showed California as an island. In 1747, the King of Spain declared that California is not an island.

Discuss what is seen on the map and use features and information to answer the questions, “What is this map about?” and “What stories does this map tell readers about the world?”

Students write what they now know about this map in the proper column.

Consider adding local maps – historic or modern – to this learning activity.

Teacher leads a discussion about how maps were used over time and how maps are used today. On the back of the chart, students write a response to the question, “What can people learn from maps?” Encourage students to use information learned in this lesson.

Assessment:

5-point Scoring Guide
- 1 point for accuracy of statements made in the last column (3 points possible)
- 1 point for addressing the prompt in final written response
- 1 point for using information learned in the lesson in final written response

Materials:
- Selection of maps used in previous lessons (see Social Studies textbook or other resources)
- Historical Maps Chart

Credits: Lesson plan adapted from “Geography: Maps are Narratives of the World” by Becky Fowler. Empires of the Wind NEH Seminar, June 2013.
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<th>Historical Maps Chart</th>
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