

World Geography

Unit 2: Mapping Skills

Maps are something many people take for granted. Some people even think maps aren't necessary any more since satellites can pinpoint a position from space, and it seems like every inch of the globe has been explored. However, maps represent information, power, history, wealth, and so much more. Maps will always be an important tool and mapmaking is an essential skill.

By the end of this unit, you will be able to:

- Understand the basic history of map making.
- Identify examples of the human-environment interaction.
- Demonstrate mapmaking skills.
- Interpret the data on maps and graphs.

Timeline for Unit II: 7 weeks

Lesson 1: How Mapmaking Changed the World (Duration: one week)

Lesson 2: What Maps Can Tell Us (Duration: one week)

Lesson 3: Mapping the World (Duration: two weeks)

Lesson 4: Human/Environment Interaction (Duration: two weeks)

Lesson 5: Interpreting Data (Duration: one week)

Lesson 1: How Mapmaking Changed the World

Context

Think about the town map you created and all the research you did to determine how to plan a town and make it successful. You can begin to get a sense of the important work that geographers do in the real world. You can also see how important tools like maps are. Of course, in your exercise, you benefitted from the aid of all those geographers who came before you. The maps you used were created by others who had studied and explained the interdependent relationships between people and nature.

Imagine living long ago, before anyone had made a map of the world or Montana or your town. Think about how much harder your tasks would have been! Of course, if you had lived long ago, there is a very good chance that you would have had a more intuitive understanding of the landscape and your place in it. When daily survival depends on knowing where you are in relation to all the resources you need to live, you can imagine how much mind space would be

given over to being attuned to your environment. The landforms, terrain, weather, and living things would have been as much a part of you as the air you breathed. You would have had a mental map of your surroundings at all times.

Draw

Creating maps is really a way of providing information about space, distance, and resources so people can use that information for planning purposes. Imagine you lived in an early community and had sophisticated mental mapmaking skills. Supposed you found a rare medicinal plant in your explorations. Soon afterward, you fall ill and only this plant will cure you. You are too ill to make the journey to retrieve the plant, so you need to show other people the map in your head. How would you do this? What would your map look like? What kinds of reference points would your map include?

Use your imagination to create a map showing the way from your village to the location of the plant.

Context

As time passed, many people began living in towns and trading for goods and services. Self-sufficiency wasn't necessary once you could buy what you needed in a store. The need to have a detailed map in your mind of the surrounding landscape dwindled, as did the mental mapmaking skills so vital to earlier cultures. Creating maps became another specialized skillset, and the knowledge on maps became a valuable source of information available to the powerful few who had possession of maps.

Create and Compare

With these ideas in mind, close your books, computers, and other information sources. Take out a blank piece of paper and without looking at any resources, take a few minutes to draw a simple world map. See if you can get the rough shape, orientation, and spatial relationships (where they are in relation to one another) of the continents and major oceans. Add labels.

Don't worry if you are not great at drawing—there are no points for artistry on this project; just try your best to depict on paper your current knowledge of the world. If you think your drawing isn't clear enough, feel free to add short descriptions.

When you are done, pull up a map of the world (such as this [World Map](#)) and compare what you have drawn to the map. How did you do? Where did you go wrong? What did you portray fairly accurately? What surprised you about the similarities and differences between your map and the professional map? Write a few sentences about this comparison and your experience.

Context

You have likely heard that in the old days, before anyone had circumnavigated the Earth, some people thought the Earth was flat and that if you went far enough you would fall off the edge. We know now that the Earth is round, but this knowledge was gained because of explorers who set out to see what was out there and who drew more and more detailed maps as they traveled.

It may seem hard to imagine today, with our easy access to maps of all kinds, but once upon a time maps were something that gave access to power and wealth, started wars, and helped save civilizations.

Watch and Read

Watch these videos and then answer the related questions, and turn the answers into your teacher.

[The Map Makers, Part 2: The Waldseemüller Map, 1507](#)

[12 Maps that Changed the World](#)

Reflect

Answer these questions:

1. Reflect on the film and write down something that you did not know that you found deeply interesting. Explain what you learned and why you found it so interesting.
2. Think about what it was like to live in a world where the location of the Earth's landmasses was only dimly known, or not known at all. Imagine some area of life in the world today where you think we are similarly lacking knowledge. Name or describe this region (or state of mind, concept, area of study, or whatever it is) and explain why you chose it.
3. The film talks about the courage of the sailors who sailed, quite literally, into the unknown. Would you have been willing to do this? Reflect on your own life and describe a time when you journeyed into the unknown, or tried something new, or entered into a situation for which you did not know the outcome. Compare the character traits this brought out in you to those you imagine the early sailors must have needed.

Share Your Work

Send your work to your Oak Meadow teacher by adding the following to your course doc:

- Map of imaginary route to medicinal plant
- Hand-drawn simple world map
- Comparison between hand-drawn and professional maps
- Answers to questions about the film on early mapmaking

Lesson 2: What Maps Can Tell Us

Context

Maps are inherently valuable because of the knowledge they contain, and one of our most valuable tools for understanding our world is learning how to read maps. The saying *knowledge is power* is absolutely true. For instance, knowing where resources are, or where other people or animals live, can be vital to your survival. Without this information, is it difficult to plan for the future.

Imagine you live in an area that lacks adequate fresh water for the community's needs (this is called *water stress*). If this happened to your imaginary town in Montana in the 1800s, you would need to explore your local landscape to try and find new sources of water, and come up with practical ways to move the water from its source to your community without negatively impacting the ecosystem. In fact, no matter where you live now, there are people who work for