

Critical Thinking about **GEOGRAPHY**

United States, Canada, and Greenland

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LESSON

1

Reading a Political Map

✦ **Goal:** To develop concepts and skills related to obtaining information from a political map

National Geography Standards

Standard 1. How to use maps and other geographic representations, tools, and technologies to acquire, process, and report information from a spatial perspective.

Preparing Students for Instruction

Before starting the first activity, review the following with students:

- ✦ Make sure students understand how to read a map legend.
- ✦ Review measuring distance using a map scale.

Map Overview

This political map of the United States shows state boundaries and capital cities. Alaska and Hawaii are included in separate boxes in the lower left part of the map.

Answer Key

1. Texas and California (in either order)
2. Texas, Louisiana, Mississippi, Alabama, and Florida (from west to east)
3. Cuba, Bahamas, and Haiti
4. Juneau, Alaska, and Montpelier, Vermont; some may also list Augusta, Maine
5. The distance is greater from Austin to Pierre than it is from Trenton to Springfield.
6. Answers will vary. Some possibilities are:
 - ✦ The two states are alike in that they both are separated from the mainland of the United States.
 - ✦ They are also alike in that both are located in or near the Pacific Ocean.
 - ✦ The two states are in different locations. Alaska is close to Canada and Hawaii is in the Pacific Ocean.
 - ✦ They are also different in that one is a group of islands and the other is a peninsula, attached to land on one side.
7. Minnesota, Wisconsin, Illinois, Indiana, Michigan, Ohio, Pennsylvania, and New York (in any order)
8. Answers will vary. Jobs may include anything related to water activity, such as the loading and offloading of ships, ship's captain or crew, guide for tourist boat trips, boat and ship construction and repair, and customs officer.

Discussion Guide

To support students in reflecting on the activities and to gather some formative information about student learning, use the following prompts to facilitate a class discussion to “debrief” the map activities.

Prompts/Questions

1. When would you be likely to use a map scale?
2. If you wanted to add other items to the map legend of this political map, what would you add, and what would be the symbols?
3. What are possible uses of a political map?

Suggested Appropriate Responses

1. Map scale uses include: for planning a trip, to compare the distance between locations, or to compare the sizes of certain states.
2. Answers will vary. Have students draw their map legend symbols on the board. Major rivers could be added to the map. (Remind students that blue is the traditional color for water on a map.) A symbol for cities within each state that are not capital cities might be added to the map. County boundaries within states could be added. A symbol for cities over a certain size in area or population could be added. *Note:* Students should not suggest symbols such as forests, mountains, or highways that more properly belong to other types of maps.
3. Uses of a political map include: to compare the size and location of states within a country, to identify the capital cities of a state, or to discover which states are landlocked and which states border a body of water.

Extending and Enhancing Learning

- ✦ Have students work in groups to create a political map of an imaginary country. Give them specific criteria for their maps, such as the following:
 - ✦ Each state or province must have a capital city.
 - ✦ Each country must have a certain number (5–10) of states or provinces, at least one lake, and borders with at least one other country.
 - ✦ Each map must have a map legend and map scale.
 - ✦ Students can create a name for their country, and the adjoining countries and bodies of water.
 - ✦ They can create names for capital cities, including the capital of the country.
- ✦ After making their maps, have student groups create 3–5 questions about their map. Each group exchanges their map with another group, and answers the questions by reading the map. Verify correct answers by having groups create an answer key to be given only after the questions are answered. Display completed maps in the classroom.

- ✦ For students who need more support, have them work in pairs or small groups to practice reading the map. To encourage students to look closely at the map, have them play a map-reading *Jeopardy!* game, using the map to find the answers. Use the following *Jeopardy!*-type answers/questions, or others of your choice:
 - ✦ State capitals that start with the letter *S* (What are Salem, Sacramento, Salt Lake City, Santa Fe, St. Paul, and Springfield?)
 - ✦ State names that start with *M* (What are Missouri, Mississippi, Montana, Minnesota, Michigan, Maryland, Massachusetts, and Maine?)
 - ✦ This state is bordered by two different bodies of water (labeled on the map), one on either side. (What is Florida?)
 - ✦ The bodies of water that surround Florida (What are the Atlantic Ocean and the Gulf of Mexico?)
 - ✦ Ten states that have two words in their names (What are North Dakota, South Dakota, New Mexico, North Carolina, South Carolina, West Virginia, New Jersey, New Hampshire, Rhode Island, and New York?)
 - ✦ Nine state capitals that have two or more words in their names (What are Carson City, Salt Lake City, Santa Fe, Oklahoma City, St. Paul, Des Moines, Jefferson City, Little Rock, and Baton Rouge?)
- ✦ Groups or pairs can “race the clock” to see who finishes first with the most correct answers. Have student groups write down their responses, and when everyone is done, call on volunteers to read their answers.
- ✦ To challenge students further, have them go online, download, and print a political map of another country. Have them answer questions about their maps, such as: what countries border this country; what bodies of water are on this map; what is the distance from the eastern border of this country to the western border, and the border distance from north to south; and what are the names of states or provinces? Students may also create questions about their maps and exchange with other students as in the first group activity listed on the previous page.

LESSON

1

Reading a Political Map

Geography Vocabulary

map legend: a table that explains symbols used on a map

map scale: a ratio that compares a distance on the map to the actual distance between locations

political map: a map showing a country's political divisions (such as states, provinces, and territories), boundaries, and capitals

 **Reading the Map**

Look at the political map of the United States. This map shows all 50 states and their capital cities. It also shows bodies of water and the countries that border the United States. Note the map legend. The legend shows what kind of lines divide states and which divide countries. Symbols for capital cities and the national capital are noted. Look at the map scale. It shows how many inches (or centimeters) on this map equal how many miles or kilometers in the real world.

 **Understanding the Map**

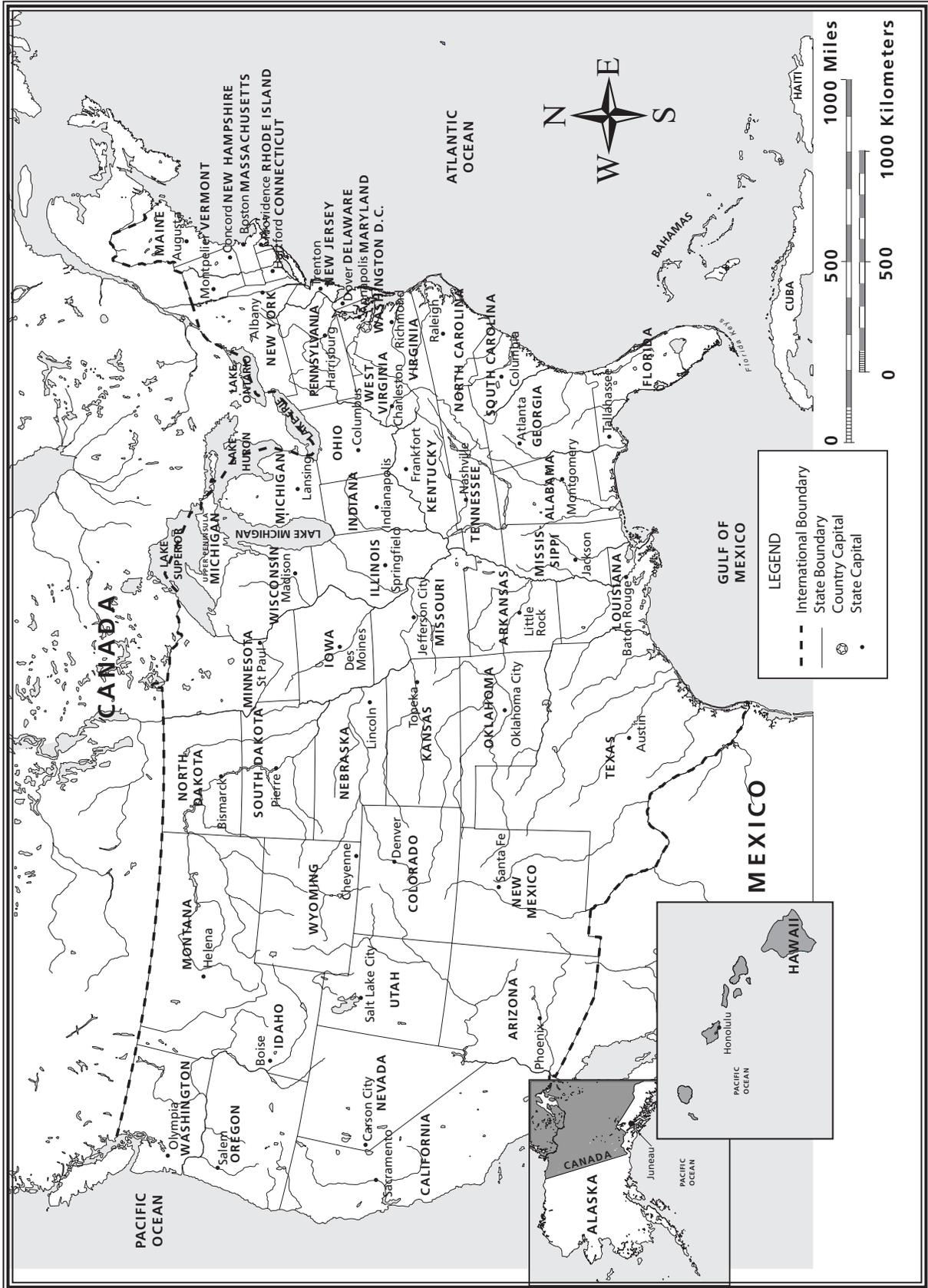
1. Use the map scale. Find and list two states that are approximately 1200 km or 744 miles in length from their northern border to their southern border. (*Hint:* You must measure each of these states on a slight diagonal rather than straight up and down.)
2. List all the states that border the Gulf of Mexico. List them in order from west to east.
3. Besides Canada and Mexico, what other countries are on the map?
4. Name two states whose capital cities are very close to another country (within 100 miles). Name the city and the state.

 **Analyzing the Map**

5. Using the map scale, determine which distance is greater: from Austin, Texas, to Pierre, South Dakota, or from the capital of New Jersey to the capital of Illinois. Name all four cities in your answer, for example, "The distance is greater from X (city name) to Y (city name) than it is from A (city name) to B (city name)."
6. Using only information given on this map, compare and contrast what this map shows about the states of Hawaii and Alaska. Tell two ways the two states are different from each other, and two ways they are similar to each other.
7. List the states that border the Great Lakes. Underline the states located near the lakes that form a national border with Canada.
8. What jobs might a person have in states that border a body of water that would not be found in a "landlocked" state such as Missouri?

Name: _____

Political Map of the United States



LESSON**2****Using the Legend and Compass Rose to Obtain Information from a Site Map**

✦ **Goal:** To develop concepts and skills related to using a map's legend and compass rose to get information from a site map

National Geography Standards

Standard 1. How to use maps and other geographic representations, tools, and technologies to acquire, process, and report information from a spatial perspective.

Preparing Students for Instruction

Before starting this activity, review with students the skills of using a legend and a compass rose.

Map Overview

This map shows the site of an RV park in detail. When introducing this map, tell students that site maps like this are common in everyday life. There are site maps of shopping malls, apartment complexes, hotels, state parks, and more. Your school may have a site map for visitors, so they can find the classroom they are visiting. Students may be able to name different site maps they have seen or used. With a site map, reading the legend is crucial because each map has its own symbols. This map also has a compass rose. Students will work with the compass rose as well as the legend.

Answer Key

1. Pet walk, wetlands, pond, and turnaround
2. The Dumpster at the western end of the park is between RV sites 54 and 55.
3. Restroom, shower, laundry, newspaper, and telephone. The facilities are accessible to the handicapped.
4. Northeast
5. Restroom, shower, laundry, newspaper, and telephone; these facilities are not handicapped accessible.
6. Southeast
7. They are near the restroom, shower, laundry, telephone, and newspaper.
8. Sites 29 through 54 because they are near the pet walk
9. They are all close to the river, and scenic.

Discussion Guide

To support students in reflecting on the activities and to gather some formative information about student learning, use the following prompts to facilitate a class discussion to “debrief” the map activities.

Prompts/Questions

1. If your family had an RV and came to this park, which site would you want? Why?
2. Do you think this park is well designed? Why?
3. What other symbols might be added to the legend?

Suggested Appropriate Responses

1. Answers will vary. Accept all reasonable responses, such as closeness to facilities, pet walk, or Dumpster, or closeness to a scenic area beside the river.
2. Answers may vary from “No, because the sites are too close for privacy” to “Yes, because everything you need is not far away from any site.”
3. Possible answers include symbols for the pet walk, pond, wetlands, and turnaround. Have volunteers draw appropriate symbols on the board for the items they would add to the legend.

Extending and Enhancing Learning

- ✦ Have each student create a site map of the classroom or of their neighborhood. Instruct students to include a legend. Then have students write four or five questions about their maps, leaving space for answers, and exchange their maps and questions with other students. Students answer the questions, and the student who wrote the questions corrects those answers.
- ✦ For students who need more support, ask a series of additional questions about the map to give them more practice using the legend and compass rose. For example, “The Dumpster in the southeast corner of the park is near what numbered site?” or “The facilities close to the highway are in what part of the park? Use the compass rose in your answer.”
- ✦ To challenge students further, have them research the history of the compass rose, write a brief report, and draw an artistic compass rose to accompany their reports.