

Instructions for Making Big Maps

Maps can inform an individual about various aspects of life in places—climate, population density, agriculture, elevation, distribution of ethnic groups, historical events, political regions, or capital cities, etc. Maps tell stories in a visual language.

Making **Big Maps** is an interdisciplinary strategy that helps students place the stories of history in relationship to the lands and peoples whose lives and cultures they are studying. It lends itself to group work because separate maps can show various aspects; cluttered maps, which include too much information, are hard to read.

The larger and simpler the base map, the more appealing it is to work on. To make a base map, use an outline map of the area, including major rivers but leaving out all names of places. Students look up and then transfer geographic information onto their own maps and by doing this extra step, they remember the places. Finding places and other information to put on a map becomes a kind of detective game.

Developing the Map as the Unit Progresses

Students can add to a base map throughout a unit with new information from the discussions and readings. They can print images from websites and attach them to appropriate places on the map. They can place historical events, boundaries and/or sea routes. Color-coded keys can be simple or complex; latitude and longitude can be included.

Materials required

- LCD projector
- A laptop or desktop computer
- A simple outline map of the area under study, with rivers but no writing on it
- Thick permanent markers
- A large (minimum 3' x 4') piece of butcher paper (or four pieces of chart paper taped together on the back) taped to a smooth wall. The larger the map, the more engaging it is for students. Foam-core board or cardboard are good for making relief maps, which should be laid flat after the outline has been traced.

Before class

1. Download the outline map with no writing on it to your computer.
2. Tape piece of butcher paper onto a smooth wall or lean foam-core board upright against a hard surface.



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3. Connect the LCD projector to your computer and project the outline map on the paper. Adjust the projector (using the zoom in/zoom out feature) until the map fills the entire space.

Trace the big map onto paper or board with permanent markers.

Two or three students at a time trace the outline map with the permanent marker. Tracing the whole outline should take no more than 20–30 minutes. The result is a template onto which students can add features (names of places, tools, crops, ethnic groups, etc.) as they learn about them, so that the Big Map grows richer and more complete as the unit progresses. Alternatively, teachers can trace the maps before class.

Note: Depending on the teacher's preference and the availability of an LCD projector, Big Maps can also be created using overhead projectors and transparencies.