

Lesson Plan 3: Mental maps

SUBJECT(S): Geography

GRADE LEVEL: 7 - 10

DURATION: one class period

Objectives

Students will understand that:

- a map may or may not be an accurate representation of the real world
- a map may reflect the bias of the person who made it
- factors such as news or other media, gossip and rumors help to shape our perception of places

Students will be able to:

- adjust their perceptions of a place based on data and observation
- convert a mental map into a drawing to illustrate relative location, size and distance between geographic features

Warm-up/Discussion

Ask each student to draw a rough map of the neighborhood around the school from memory. Draw the boundaries on the blackboard, using major streets or other significant features to define the neighborhood so that all maps cover the same area.

Ask students to draw and label as many of the following as they can:

- streets
- schools
- homes
- parks
- religious buildings
- stores and restaurants
- office buildings
- water (ponds, streams, lakes, rivers, canals)
- bike paths or other trails
- parking lots
- bus stops and train stations
- government buildings (fire and police station, post office, city hall)
- other features

Materials Included:

- Mental Maps [pg. 29]

Additional Materials Needed:

- paper
- pencils and/or markers

Vocabulary

perspective:

an outlook or point of view

prejudice:

a judgment or opinion formed without knowledge or examination of the facts

Learning Activities

Divide students into groups of three or four and ask them to discuss the questions on the *Mental Maps* (pg. 29) handout.

Assessment

Have students compose a paragraph about why their maps included certain things and left others out.

Wrap-up/Reflection

Ask students to share what they have learned. For example, each group might share the answer to one of the questions on the *Mental Maps* (pg. 29) handout.

Ideas for Additional Activities

Geography: as an alternative to mapping the area around the school, have students draw the route from their homes to school, labeling as many features as possible.

Ask students to discuss the implications of the following statement: “What is perceived as real will be real in its consequences.” For example: suppose that a person believes that aliens from Mars are waiting to capture him if he leaves his house. Even though there are no Martians outside, the consequences of this perception are the same as if it were true (the person does not go outside). The belief that a neighborhood has a lot of crime can have a very real impact on investment in the neighborhood, even if the perception is inaccurate.

Ask students to think of an example in which misconceptions about people and places might have consequences that are the same as if the perceptions were accurate.

Geography, Social Studies: examine maps from different cultures, comparing the type of information included in each. What is similar? What is different? Do students think that cultural differences are reflected in the maps? The David Rumsey Map Collection (www.davidrumsey.com) has an extensive collection of maps from different periods and cultures.

Activity based on Terry Evans photographs for the Revealing Chicago Exhibition included in the back of the binder:

BUNGALOWS. CHICAGO'S SOUTHWEST SIDE, JUST WEST OF MIDWAY AIRPORT. MAY 12, 2003.

EMPTY LOTS. ENGLEWOOD NEIGHBORHOOD ON CHICAGO'S WEST SIDE. JANUARY 29, 2004

BACKYARD POOLS. FRANKFORT SQUARE, WILL COUNTY. SEPTEMBER 17, 2003.

Ask students what kinds of assumptions they make about the people who live in each neighborhood just from looking at the photos. Are their assumptions based on personal knowledge of any of the communities? For the neighborhoods where they have never been, what do they see in the photos that shapes their ideas about the people who live there? Consider factors such as the income, education level, race, occupation and age in your answer. They can use the census profile of Englewood (in the Chicago Community Area) on the Resource CD, for example, to compare student assumptions to the actual statistics.

Mental Maps

Compare the maps people in your group made and answer these questions:

- 1) Most mental maps reflect our own perspective. Do your maps include things you think are important and leave out things that don't particularly interest you? What features were left out of your map? Why do you think this happens?

- 2) What are your favorite places in the neighborhood? Why?

- 3) Where are your least favorite places? Why?

- 4) Is there anything that used to be in the neighborhood that's gone now? If so, what replaced it? Do you think this was a good thing, or would you rather have had it not change?

- 5) Do your maps reflect the route you take to get to school? Are there more details for the places you pass on your way and fewer details for areas that you don't walk through?

- 6) How do you think your own personal mental map shapes the way you think about places that you know and places where you have never been? Does it influence where you go and where you don't? How?

