



Maps and Globes: A Story of the Earth

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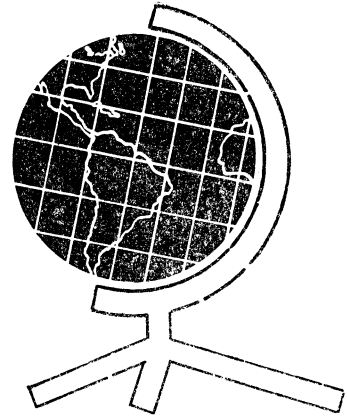


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## **Maps and Globes: A Story of the Earth**

To use maps and globes only to find names and locations is like using a story book only to read names of people and places.

Maps have a story to tell the child who knows how to read them. To understand the story that maps and globes have to tell, certain key ideas are essential. Among the concepts children need early in their study are the following:

The earth is round: the globe is a model of the earth.

No map is perfect: all maps have distortions that must be recognized and understood.

East and west are directions: they are measured along parallels.

North and south are directions. North is toward the north pole; south is toward the south pole.

Globes and maps and the marks, colors, and figures on them are symbols.

When a skilled map-reader studies a physical map, he can visualize the landscape it represents. Children should be taught to interpret maps and globes so that they, too, can look beyond the map and “see” the actual landscape. When a child reaches this point, maps give reality and personality to the area they represent. They add to children’s understanding of the people of the area and the conditions under which they live.

When should map-reading be introduced? When it is needed. When it has some relation to other activities. Isolated lessons in map skills mean little to the child.

Because maps are highly abstract or symbolic, many phases of map study are beyond the understanding of young children. Instruction should be planned and systematic. It should begin in kindergarten with concrete objects and gradually move toward abstractions.

### **First pictures—then maps**

What learning activities in kindergarten and first grade can prepare children for map work?

The study of pictures, particularly landscapes, is a useful beginning step. Through questions the teacher can introduce children to simple geographic facts about topography, vegetation, and rainfall: "What type of country do we see in this picture? Is the land flat, hilly, mountainous? What types of plants grow in this area? Does it get much rain? How can you tell?"

At the start the children will read this information from pictures. Several years later they will be able to read it from maps.

### **North . . . south . . . east . . . west**

Kindergarteners and first-graders are not too young to learn directions. They can get practice by locating places in relation to the classroom:

"The lake is east of our classroom."

"The park is north of our room."

"The public library is west of here."

"The university is south of here."

If children get this preparation in kindergarten and first grade, they will be ready for maps when they come to second and third grade.

Generally the first maps used in the classroom are street maps of the immediate vicinity of the school. The children learn that in these maps the lines represent streets. The children can place blocks or boxes on the map to represent buildings—their homes, the school, and other public buildings. Later the children can draw squares

and rectangles to represent the buildings.

There are many advantages in using a map of the community for early map study. First, the map shows symbolically an environment the children already know. They can orient themselves by locating familiar places—school, home, downtown, parks. Second, it is easier to work with concepts of relative distance, for the children already know that it is farther from the school to the park than from school to home, for example. Finally, they can readily understand that the map of the school neighborhood is considerably smaller than the area it represents.

The first maps should be placed flat on the floor or on a table, with north on the map always to the north of the classroom. With the maps in this position, the teacher can develop the idea that *up* is away from the earth and *down* is toward the center of the earth. She avoids the idea that *up* and *down* have anything to do with *north* and *south*.

Specialists differ as to the best time to introduce the globe, though most of them recommend third or fourth grade. Actually the children's background will determine the timing. Teachers will find that some children and some classes that come to them are ready to work with maps and globes, while others are not.

### **Our earth is land and water**

The first globe should be simple. The best choice is a globe that uses only two colors and shows only land

and water areas. It should be mounted on a cradle so the children can pick it up and feel its roundness. It is helpful when the teacher is discussing features or areas, to have a globe that can be marked with crayon or pencil without damaging the surface. With globes as with maps, the teacher should take care to avoid associating the poles with *up* and *down*.

In the intermediate grades, the teacher can devote much more attention to maps. By the time the children come to these grades, they have a useful background for more advanced work.

They know that the earth is round. They know the compass points—north, south, east, west, and the points in between. They can orient themselves. They understand that symbols can stand for actual objects.

Now they are ready for more abstract ideas. Road maps can be introduced. Maps symbols can be learned and used in interpreting the actual landscape.

In these grades the children can learn to locate places on maps and globes. They can begin by finding places they know on a large-scale map of the community. After they have learned to locate places on this kind of map, they can use the globe extensively. To start with, the children should be taught the location of the equator. Then they should learn to locate their community with respect to it.

A word of caution is in order. It is misleading to refer to the hot, temperate, and frigid zones for locating

places. Children should be taught to use more appropriate expressions for this purpose. In locating places, it is correct to refer to the low, middle, and high latitudes. The idea of longitude is difficult and should not be introduced until the children understand the idea of latitude very well. Latitude can be used extensively to locate places on a globe, but it is doubtful that many elementary-school children can use both longitude and latitude to locate places.

Some writers suggest that the first commercial map the children use be a world map. The map chosen should have as little distortion as possible. Homolographic or homolosine projections are recommended, for in these maps the greatest distortion is at the poles.

### **Reading the symbols**

The first commercial maps should be as simple as possible. Physical maps with the fewest possible political markings are preferred. Too many markings confuse children.

In fourth grade children may learn the symbols for water, mountains, elevation, rivers, and other physical features. Teachers will find it useful to use pictures with maps. Pictures help the children form mental images of features shown by symbols.

Care should be taken to see that children do not misinterpret elevation coloration. Areas designated as lowlands are not necessarily flat, nor are highlands always mountainous.

After children have learned to interpret simple maps, they can work

with more intricate maps—physical-political maps, human-use maps, rainfall maps, population maps, product maps.

The children will have to be taught to use the legends. As they gain understanding, more symbols can be introduced. But always maps should be studied with other materials so that children can form mental pictures of actual conditions.

Elementary-school pupils do not usually have the mathematical skills to use scales extensively. But they should be aware that every map is drawn to a scale and that maps are drawn to different scales. Before comparing size and distances on two maps, the children should remember to note the scales of the maps.

One skill essential to the proper use

of maps and globes is often overlooked: the ability to bring together information from several maps and form conclusions about the people, the climate, topography, and living conditions of an area.

Maps should not be studied in isolation. Children should learn to interpret maps in connection with the study of an area. The children will readily see that no one map can show all the important facts about an area. To get a fair picture, they will have to work with several types of maps, bring together the information they offer, and make inferences about the geographic conditions.

Map study is more than finding places on a map. Map study is a way of learning a story—the story of earth and its peoples.