

HOW MAY THE UNITED STATES BE DIVIDED INTO REGIONS?

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GRADE LEVEL: Secondary

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I N T R O D U C T I O N

Geography Awareness Week is always the third week of November. As your "Token Geography Expert," what better way to have a captive audience of some of the best teachers in the state of Indiana than at our fall meeting?

Most geography textbooks you will be seeing for adoption this year will try to use the five unifying themes of geography (see the appendix) as part of their approach to the subject. This lesson plan was created so that you can use one of these--region. From the handout you can read what the National Geographic Society and the National Council of Geographic Educators have defined as region. By dividing the United States into manageable units, several different ideas may be used. One can divide the country by time zones, acquisition of territory, climates, where tornadoes occur, division according to the participation in the War Between the States, traditional regions, the different sport teams and their influence on their followers, landforms, natural vegetation, and just about anything the students want---as long as they keep in mind the definition of regions.

O B J E C T I V E S

1. The purpose of this exercise is to acquaint the student(s) with the definition of region.
2. The student(s) will be able to take a map of the United States and divide the map into regions based on what they have decided as a group.
3. By using available resources in geography, i.e. atlases or geography books, the student(s) will be able to discover that there can be more than one definition of region.

M A T E R I A L S

1-5 blank maps of the United States per group
Colored pencils or crayons
atlases or other reference books, even newspaper articles or magazines on travel which have the regions divided (e.g. Home and Away from AAA)

P R O C E D U R E S

1. Divide your class, unless you have already done so, into groups of 3 or 4 students.
2. Give each group 1 to 5 blank maps of the United States.
3. Have the groups brainstorm for ways that they think the United States can be divided into regions. Have them make one list and then submit the list to you. Upon your approval, they should then choose one of their ideas and list the states involved in that region.
4. After the list has been created and recorded, with your approval the group should proceed in creating and illustrating through color their region. On their map they should give it a title so that others will know what the region is that the group selected. (SEE ADAPTATIONS)
5. Should the group get stuck for ideas, direct them to look through their textbooks, the atlas, or even the encyclopedia for ideas.

A D A P T A T I O N S

This exercise can be adapted for use in grades K-12. Students who are in high school, and who still don't know where the individual states are located, can find this a good review exercise. The outcome of this lesson should be that the student(s) will realize that the definition of region is contingent upon what it is being used for--physical, natural, or cultural?

For the older students, it might work out better if you gave them five blank maps and had them create five different regions. Other groups may come up with some similar ideas, but if you are enough of a "cop" you can lead groups that come to you with, "We can't think of another region!" plea toward any reference books that you may have in your classroom or library.

This exercise, designed for grades K-12, can last a class period or a week--as always, it is up to the teacher to decide how extensive they wish to be. Once your exercise is over, you may wish to display the works of the groups. You can then follow-up with having the groups to look and see the different regions that the state of Indiana is a member of.

THE FIVE UNIFYING THEMES OF GEOGRAPHY

The National Geographic Society (NGS) and several other organizations--the National Council of Geography Educators, the American Association of Geographers, and the American Geographical Society (AGS)--have actively promoted the use of five unifying themes in the teaching of geography. The five are used as organizers for the atlas activities. When the aforementioned organizations formed the Geographic Education National Implementation Project (GENIP), the stated purpose of the GENIP was to improve the status and quality of geographic education in grades K-12.

The following summaries of the five themes are based on explanations and examples set by GENIP.

L O C A T I O N

The first geographic question is always "Where?" and so the most fundamental geographic skill is the ability to describe where things are located. Location can be described in both relative and absolute terms.

Relative location describes where a place is in relation to other places. Which landforms and water bodies are nearby? Which other places are to the north, south, east, and west? Which other places are at the same latitude?

Absolute location directs us to a precise position on the earth's surface. Our street address and even our telephone number define the absolute location of our home. To describe absolute location on a map or globe, we use latitude and longitude coordinates.

Reasons for location also are part of the theme, and they can be practical, historic, geographic, or purely cultural.

P L A C E

Besides having a specific location, every place has many other distinctive characteristics. They include not only its natural characteristics, but its human or cultural characteristics as well. Cultural characteristics can be as tangible as architecture or as intangible as religious beliefs.

Natural characteristics of a place include shape, landforms, water bodies, climate, vegetation, and animal life. Topics related to rotation and revolution--such as seasons, climate, and time zones--also can be considered part of this aspect of the theme.

Cultural characteristics of a place include airports, shopping centers, highways, railroads, bridges, and all other built structures. Also included are the languages, religions, political systems, and even the areal distribution of the inhabitants.

Ways of representing places are part of the theme. Related topics include scale models, linear scale, map symbolism, map projections, and special maps.

R E L A T I O N S H I P S W I T H I N P L A C E S (Also known as HUMAN AND ENVIRONMENTAL INTERACTION)

Humans interact with the environment in many ways. Not only do we depend on nature to meet our needs, we also adapt to it and even alter it in significant ways. The ways in which different peoples interact with the environment are

affected by cultural background and technological resources.

People depend on the environment for their basic needs and for many recreational activities.

People adapt to the environment with the clothing they wear, the housing they build, and the way they use the land. Patterns related to seasons, climate, or land use also are part of the theme.

People change the environment with their techniques of farming, forestry, and mining. Modern transportation systems deplete resources and cause air pollution.

M O V E M E N T

People, products, information, and ideas move in patterns that are mappable. The theme of movement concerns human interactions: the ways in which we are linked with regions, cultures, and people beyond our immediate environment.

Linkages with other places include distant birthplaces, countries of origin, and places visited on vacation. All types of transportation and communication also create linkages.

Interdependence with other places can be seen in the foods, raw materials, - and manufactured goods that come to us from far away. Even our water supply may come from a distance source.

Patterns of movement can be seen in exploration, trade, settlement, migration, and invasion. Trips and routes can be traced and described by travel times and schedules.

R E G I O N S

Geographers divide the world into manageable units of study called regions. Some regions are defined in terms of a single characteristic, while others meet a complex set of criteria. The criteria for defining a region can be either natural or cultural and may change over time.

Natural regions can be defined by landforms, bodies of water, patterns of vegetation, climatic conditions, soil types, or the presence of certain resources.

Cultural regions can be defined by political units or alliances, land use patterns, economic relationships, race, language, religion, or some combination of several such factors.

How regions change is another aspect of the theme, including changes in boundaries, alliances, population, land use, and even climate.

united states

