

RESOURCE LIBRARY
ACTIVITY : 1 HR

Selecting Settlement Sites

Students work in groups to make decisions about where to build settlements in hypothetical places. They consider site features and locational factors in the decision-making.

GRADES

5 - 9

SUBJECTS

Geography, Social Studies, U.S. History

CONTENTS

5 PDFs, 3 Images

OVERVIEW

Students work in groups to make decisions about where to build settlements in hypothetical places. They consider site features and locational factors in the decision-making.

For the complete activity with media resources, visit:

<http://www.nationalgeographic.org/activity/selecting-settlement-sites/>

DIRECTIONS

1. Brainstorm factors that would influence the location of a settlement.

Have a whole class discussion about the settlement of students' town. Write this question on the board: *Why do you think our town is here?* Students will have a variety of ideas related to industry, natural resources, access to transportation, food, water, and more. List their ideas below the question. Explain that they will be exploring the factors typically considered when creating a settlement in a particular location.

Brainstorm the needs people likely had when deciding to build a town 100-200 years ago, before air and car travel were commonplace. Write a second question on the board: *What factors would have been considered in deciding a town's location in the 1800s?* Students' ideas will vary, but may include access to transportation routes such as rivers, railroads, highways, availability of food and water, and safety. List students' ideas on the board, and explain that students may use these ideas as they try to determine settlement locations. Have students compare the lists and mark with an asterisk any factors that are included in both lists.

2. Discuss one ideal site location as a whole class.

Explain that extensive settlement in the United States took place during the 1800s. How places were settled changed over time with new transportation technologies. Tell students they will be analyzing locations from 1800, 1830, 1860, 1890, and 1910. These represent different types of settlement and the changes in transportation that took place throughout the 19th century.

Distribute a copy of the worksheet Site Map: 1800 to each student. Have them read the notes, then circle the letter at the location where they think a settlement was most likely to develop. Ask students to write their reasons for their choices.

Engage the whole class in a discussion about their choices and their reasons, modeling the process they will use in small groups later. Explain that there are no wrong answers as long as students give good reasons for their choices.

3. Have students consider three ideal site locations on their own.

Distribute to each student three worksheets: Site Map: 1830, Site Map: 1860, and Site Map: 1890. Have them study the maps and circle the letter on each map that represents the site where they think a settlement is most likely to develop. You can give students the option of

placing an X instead of circling a letter if they think another location is a better site selection.

Remind students that people selecting the sites recognized the importance of having access to transportation routes and natural resources. They also considered it important that living conditions be conducive to health, safety, and comfort. Students can make assumptions of their own based on the maps, in addition to the notes provided.

4. Have students work in small groups to reach consensus and present their decisions.

Divide students into small groups and have them refer to the three site maps from Step 3 together. Ask each group to come to an agreement on the site it considers best for each map. Explain that compromise may be needed because students might have different ideas for the best sites. Explain that each group will need to defend its selection compared to those made by the other groups.

After the groups have reached their decisions, have a spokesperson for each group present and defend the selections. Project each map from the provided gallery as it is discussed. As the groups defend their selections, make sure students realize they are making assumptions about the site and the settlers. Information *not* on the maps or in the notes may be just as important as information included. Ask: *What is not included on these maps?* Brainstorm a list of what is not included.

5. Have a wrap-up discussion.

Have a whole class discussion. Ask:

- *What factors seem to have had the greatest influence on site selection during each of the years?*
- *Are these factors similar to the ones identified at the beginning of the activity (listed on the board)? Explain.*
- *How does the passage of time alter the relative importance of each of these factors?*
- *How do changes in technology influence the site selection process?*

- *What additional information would be helpful in making a decision for each of the maps?*
- *What factors do you think contributed to the growth of settlements into big cities?*

6. Have students individually analyze the final site.

Distribute the worksheet Site Map: 1910. Have students work independently to write a paragraph about each site indicating factors that make it a good selection and factors that make it not a good selection. Then have the students rank sites A, B, C, and D from first choice to last choice for a town settlement. One additional rank is provided for students to include an unlabeled site. Have them justify their rankings; also remind students to make sure their justifications align with the transportation available in 1910, not present day.

Tip

Consider showing students the site maps and covering up the notes. After students have had a chance to think about the map only for each, provide the notes and let students revise their choices.

Informal Assessment

Check students' paragraphs for Site Map: 1910 for ideas synthesized from the class discussions about the pros and cons of different locations for site selection. Responses will vary, but students must defend their ideas.

Extending the Learning

- Have small groups work with their [State MapMaker Kit](#) tabletop map to analyze why cities and towns developed where they did. Have them look at the impact of landforms, such as rivers, coastlines, or mountain ranges in building cities, railroads, and highways. Direct different groups to take a different city/town from the map and collect information from the map to try and hypothesize the "why of where," and then do additional research to further analyze their state's settlement history. Have each group present their findings, including how close their original hypotheses were.
- A century ago, Henry Ford's assembly lines began to make automobiles commonplace, and the United States' interstate highway system was just developing. Have students explore what this meant in terms of the growth and location of towns. Have them view the streets base layer of the National Geographic [MapMaker Interactive](#); zoom in to see the interstate

system and cities along it. Discuss how highways were built to connect port cities with cities all over the country.

- To help students to see actual settlement locations, have students look at these five places in the United States: [map 1](#), [map 2](#), [map 3](#), [map 4](#), and [map 5](#). Have students study the characteristics on the map base layer—and also view the satellite image base layer—to determine which of the sites from the activity resemble each of these present-day places. (Answers: [1800](#) [map 2], [1830](#) [map 1], [1860](#) [map 5], [1890](#) [map 4], [1910](#) [map 3]. Note: These place examples are not exact matches for the maps.) Ask: *Does the settlement you see in these locations make sense based on what you learned in the activity?*

OBJECTIVES

Subjects & Disciplines

Geography

Social Studies

- U.S. History

Learning Objectives

Students will:

- describe factors that influence the location and settlement of sites
- describe factors that influence the growth of urban sites
- describe how factors that influence site selection and urban growth change in relative importance over time
- make group decisions to evaluate and select settlement sites

Teaching Approach

- Learning-for-use

Teaching Methods

- Brainstorming
- Discussions

- Reading
- Visual instruction

Skills Summary

This activity targets the following skills:

- 21st Century Student Outcomes
 - Learning and Innovation Skills
 - Communication and Collaboration
- Critical Thinking Skills
 - Understanding
- Geographic Skills
 - Analyzing Geographic Information

National Standards, Principles, and Practices

NATIONAL COUNCIL FOR SOCIAL STUDIES CURRICULUM STANDARDS

- Theme 2:

Time, Continuity, and Change

- Theme 3:

People, Places, and Environments

NATIONAL GEOGRAPHY STANDARDS

- Standard 12:

The processes, patterns, and functions of human settlement

- Standard 17:

How to apply geography to interpret the past

- Standard 3:

How to analyze the spatial organization of people, places, and environments on Earth's surface

COMMON CORE STATE STANDARDS FOR ENGLISH LANGUAGE ARTS & LITERACY

- Speaking and Listening Standards K-5:

Comprehension and Collaboration, SL.5.1

THE COLLEGE, CAREER & CIVIC LIFE (C3) FRAMEWORK FOR SOCIAL STUDIES STATE STANDARDS

- Human Population: Spatial Patterns and Movements: D2.Geo.7.6-8:

Explain how changes in transportation and communication technology influence the spatial connections among human settlements and affect the diffusion of ideas and cultural practices.

Preparation

What You'll Need

MATERIALS YOU PROVIDE

- Pencils, pens

REQUIRED TECHNOLOGY

- Internet Access: Required
- Tech Setup: 1 computer per classroom, 1 computer per pair, Projector

PHYSICAL SPACE

- Classroom

GROUPING

- Large-group instruction

BACKGROUND & VOCABULARY

Background Information

Determining where to settle land has always depended on a variety of factors, including proximity and accessibility to needed resources. Locations of landforms such as rivers, mountains, and bays has influenced where towns and cities were built. Advances in transportation—including efficient river travel, railroads, and automobiles—influenced the settlement and growth of cities and towns across the United States.

During the 19th century, the United States expanded to include all but five of its 50 states (Oklahoma, New Mexico, Arizona, Alaska, and Hawaii all received statehood in the 20th century), and settlements were established throughout the country. Examining the landforms of a state and the changes in transportation help in understanding the “why of where” and that settlement of land is not random.

Prior Knowledge

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Recommended Prior Activities

- [The Erie Canal](#)

Vocabulary

Term	Part of Speech	Definition
factor	<i>noun</i>	element contributing to an event or outcome.
location	<i>noun</i>	position of a particular point on the surface of the Earth.
map skills	<i>noun</i>	skills for reading and interpreting maps, from learning basic map conventions to analyzing and comprehending maps to address higher-order goals.
settlement	<i>noun</i>	community or village.
settler	<i>noun</i>	person who migrates and establishes a residence in a largely unpopulated area.
spatial decision-making	<i>noun</i>	understanding and solving problems based on knowledge of the relationship between objects or organisms.
town	<i>noun</i>	human settlement larger than a village and smaller than a city.

For Further Exploration

Video

- [Smithsonian American History Museum: American on the Move—Transportation History Videos](#)

Websites

- [Teach U.S. History.org: Historical Background on Traveling in the Early 19th Century](#)



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