

RESOURCE LIBRARY
LESSON

Political Borders

Students think about regions and borders by determining where they would place borders in an artificial continent, based on a set of physical and cultural features of the area.

GRADES

6 - 8

SUBJECTS

English Language Arts, Geography, Human Geography, Physical Geography

CONTENTS

2 Activities

ACTIVITY 1: DRAWING POLITICAL BORDERS | 50 MINS

DIRECTIONS

1. Activate students' prior knowledge and introduce vocabulary.

Conduct a short discussion with the class about the vocabulary terms border and region. Ask: *What is a border? What is a region? What do those words mean to you?* Then ask: *Why do people define regions or countries in any given area? How are borders defined?* Have students brainstorm examples of different types of borders and what defines them. Encourage students to think about what forms a border, who determines borders, and where borders can be found. List students' ideas on the board and add to the list throughout this activity. If time allows, extend the discussion to include some of the benefits and challenges of borders.

2. Introduce the activity and its purpose.

Write the guiding questions for the activity on the board: How are regions defined? How are land and resources divided among countries? Have students build on their ideas from Step 1 to explore the question of how land and resources are divided among countries. Explain to students that in this activity they will work, first independently and then in small groups, to set borders and define regions in an area of land. This activity is intended as a discussion starter. Make sure students understand that there are no right or wrong answers.

3. Have students work independently to draw political borders.

Distribute a copy of the worksheet Draw Political Borders to each student. Instruct students to use the information in three of the maps—Religions, Mountains and Rivers, and Languages—to determine where they would place borders in the Outline map and draw them. Remind students there are no right or wrong answers and they should draw borders as they see fit. Give students about 5 minutes to draw their borders.

4. Have students work in small groups to revise political borders.

Divide students into small groups of approximately four students each. Distribute one copy of the worksheet Draw Political Borders to each group. Have students compare their individual maps to spark discussion and debate as to whose borders are most valid and why. Write the following questions on the board for students to consider while working in groups:

- *Do you think physical features, such as rivers, are more important than cultural ones, such as language, in setting borders? Why or why not?*
- *What would happen if you split a physical feature between two countries? Would people in the countries be able to share the land and/or resources? Or would they constantly fight over its use?*
- *What would happen if a country had a mix of different cultural features, such as language and religion? Would this impact how the people live and work together in that country? How?*

Ask each group to come to a decision together, draw new borders, and take notes about why they drew borders where they did. Give groups about 15 minutes to discuss and draw their borders. Ask students to include a map legend and a compass rose. Rotate around the room, observing small groups as they work.

5. Have a whole-class discussion about political borders.

Regroup as a class and discuss the questions on the board. Then revisit the guiding questions for the activity to see how students' answers have changed. Tell students that they will have an opportunity to present and discuss their maps in Lesson 1, Activity 2 of this unit.

Modification

Print the worksheet Draw Political Borders on transparency paper. Cut the transparency into quarters and place the maps on top of one another to show students the interplay of physical and cultural features.

Modification

You may want to start the activity by first making a connection to your own country's borders. For example, show a map of the United States and discuss why borders in the United States are located where they are, including both physical and cultural reasons.

Informal Assessment

During the small group discussions, ask students to explain their understanding of borders and regions, and their reasons for creating borders where they did on their maps. Encourage students to use the information in the Religions, Mountains and Rivers, and Languages maps in their explanations.

Extending the Learning

- Have each group create a name for their country and label landforms and features of the country. On a separate piece of paper, have each student write three reasons why their group chose those borders.
- Display each group's map in the classroom and provide sticky notes and pencils. Give students enough time to write comments and questions and post them next to other groups' maps. These can be used as discussion points for Lesson 1, Activity 2 of this unit. They can also remain on display for students to refer to throughout the year as you move into other units.

OBJECTIVES

Subjects & Disciplines

Geography

- Human Geography
- Physical Geography

Learning Objectives

Students will:

- demonstrate how physical and cultural features could be used to define country borders
- discuss their ideas about which features are most important in establishing good borders

Teaching Approach

- Learning-for-use

Teaching Methods

- Brainstorming
- Cooperative learning
- Discovery learning
- Discussions
- Hands-on learning

Skills Summary

This activity targets the following skills:

- 21st Century Student Outcomes
 - Learning and Innovation Skills
 - Communication and Collaboration
 - Creativity and Innovation
 - Life and Career Skills
 - Social and Cross-Cultural Skills

- Critical Thinking Skills
 - Analyzing
 - Applying
 - Creating
 - Understanding
- Geographic Skills
 - Analyzing Geographic Information
 - Answering Geographic Questions
 - Asking Geographic Questions
 - Organizing Geographic Information

National Standards, Principles, and Practices

NATIONAL COUNCIL FOR SOCIAL STUDIES CURRICULUM STANDARDS

- Theme 3:

People, Places, and Environments

NATIONAL GEOGRAPHY STANDARDS

- Standard 1:

How to use maps and other geographic representations, geospatial technologies, and spatial thinking to understand and communicate information

- Standard 13:

How the forces of cooperation and conflict among people influence the division and control of Earth's surface

- Standard 5:

That people create regions to interpret Earth's complexity

ISTE STANDARDS FOR STUDENTS (ISTE STANDARDS*S)

- Standard 1:

Creativity and Innovation

- Standard 2:

Communication and Collaboration

Preparation

BACKGROUND & VOCABULARY

Background Information

Maps can be used as tools to help us understand our world. Specifically, maps can help demonstrate how borders intersect physical and human geographical features, and how those intersections can lead to cooperation and/or conflict. Borders of regions or of countries define an area, which has a particular shape and size. Sometimes physical features define the border of a region or a country. For example, coastlines are borders between the regions of land and water, and mountains may serve as borders between different countries or different cultural groups. Country borders, however determined, define a physical space over which a country exercises control. When a political border is imposed on the physical landscape, it defines the area, shape, and size of the country, as well as the physical features and natural resources available. These factors of shape and size can influence the ways in which human activity is structured; for example, land use, transportation, and settlement patterns. Sometimes the shape and size suggest that a country may want to expand its borders in order to increase its size, change its shape, and/or control more resources.

Prior Knowledge

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Recommended Prior Activities

- None

Vocabulary

Term	Part of Speech	Definition
border	<i>noun</i>	natural or artificial line separating two pieces of land.
compass rose	<i>noun</i>	symbol indicating the cardinal directions (N, S, E, W).
continent	<i>noun</i>	one of the seven main land masses on Earth.
country	<i>noun</i>	geographic territory with a distinct name, flag, population, boundaries, and government.
landmass	<i>noun</i>	large area of land.
language	<i>noun</i>	set of sounds, gestures, or symbols that allows people to communicate.

Term	Part of Speech	Definition
legend	<i>noun</i>	explanation of symbols and abbreviations used on a map, also known as a key.
map	<i>noun</i>	symbolic representation of selected characteristics of a place, usually drawn on a flat surface.
mountain	<i>noun</i>	landmass that forms as tectonic plates interact with each other.
natural resource	<i>noun</i>	a material that humans take from the natural environment to survive, to satisfy their needs, or to trade with others.
physical features	<i>noun</i>	naturally occurring geographic characteristics.
political boundary	<i>noun</i>	imaginary line separating one political unit, such as a country or state, from another.
region	<i>noun</i>	any area on Earth with one or more common characteristics. Regions are the basic units of geography.
religion	<i>noun</i>	a system of spiritual or supernatural belief.
resource	<i>noun</i>	available supply of materials, goods, or services. Resources can be natural or human.
river	<i>noun</i>	large stream of flowing fresh water.

Before Moving on to the Next Activity

Make sure you have groups' completed maps from Lesson 1, Activity 1 in the Beyond Borders unit.

ACTIVITY 2: COMPARING POLITICAL BORDERS | 50 MINS

DIRECTIONS

1. Have small groups present and compare borders.

Remind students that, for the maps they created in Lesson 1, Activity 1, they were asked to draw borders as they saw fit. There are no right or wrong answers. Have students separate into the same small groups from Lesson 1, Activity 1 of this unit and select a spokesperson. Have each spokesperson present their group's map, along with the reasons for creating

borders where they did, including why each group, religion, or physical region was placed there, to the class. List the reasons on the board as students share them. If needed, use the following prompts:

- *How many countries do you have? Why?*
- *What did you mostly base your borders on? How did you decide to create your borders?*
- *What made drawing the borders challenging?*
- *How did the physical features factor into your decision? How might the physical features affect the development of your countries? (Possible response: Mountains and rivers are a key factor because if countries had to split a physical feature between them, each country would try to gain the part that is most valuable, such as freshwater.)*
- *How did the cultural features factor into your decision? How might the cultural features affect the development of your countries? (Possible response: Language is a key factor because citizens that speak a certain language within a country will be better able to communicate. If a country has a mix of different cultural characteristics, those characteristics could spread from one culture to another, creating a new culture.)*

2. Discuss factors that impact borders.

As a class, discuss the reasons listed on the board for why borders were placed in different areas. Ask: *What factors were most important? What factors were least important? What information did you think was missing, or would have been helpful to know in order to avoid conflict when creating borders?* Ask students to comment about whether they agree or disagree with reasons other students gave. Remind students that there are no right or wrong answers; students should discuss their ideas and impressions.

3. Brainstorm other factors that shape country borders.

Ask students to brainstorm what else might shape country borders, in addition to the physical and cultural features they examined during this activity. Add students' ideas to the list on the board as they volunteer them. Elicit ideas such as wars between countries, natural resources, or dividing land evenly between different groups.

4. Have students record ideas to refer to later in this unit.

Tell students that they will complete a unit of lessons about borders in Europe, and that their ideas about where borders should be placed will be important for their study of Europe. Have each student record the list of factors that shape country borders on a piece of paper to refer to in later lessons, to see if their ideas have changed.

Informal Assessment

Evaluate students based on their participation in the whole-class discussion.

Extending the Learning

- Ask students to think about borders in their state, community, or school. Ask: *How were the borders defined? Do they follow a physical feature in the landscape? Do they follow cultural differences between people on either side of the border?*
- Pose questions related to the size and shape of countries. Ask: *Are large countries at an advantage or a disadvantage? Have students use a globe or wall map of the world to locate really large countries. Ask: How many really large countries are there? What might be some reasons for this?*

OBJECTIVES

Subjects & Disciplines

- English Language Arts
- **Geography**
 - Human Geography
 - Physical Geography

Learning Objectives

Students will:

- explain and compare their border selections based on physical and cultural features
- discuss other factors that could impact where borders are established

Teaching Approach

- Learning-for-use

Teaching Methods

- Brainstorming
- Discussions
- Reflection

Skills Summary

This activity targets the following skills:

- Critical Thinking Skills
 - Analyzing
 - Evaluating
 - Understanding
- Geographic Skills
 - Analyzing Geographic Information
 - Answering Geographic Questions
 - Asking Geographic Questions

National Standards, Principles, and Practices

IRA/NCTE STANDARDS FOR THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE ARTS

- Standard 4:

Students adjust their use of spoken, written, and visual language (e.g., conventions, style, vocabulary) to communicate effectively with a variety of audiences and for different purposes.

NATIONAL COUNCIL FOR SOCIAL STUDIES CURRICULUM STANDARDS

- Theme 3:

People, Places, and Environments

NATIONAL GEOGRAPHY STANDARDS

- **Standard 1:**

How to use maps and other geographic representations, geospatial technologies, and spatial thinking to understand and communicate information

- **Standard 13:**

How the forces of cooperation and conflict among people influence the division and control of Earth's surface

- **Standard 5:**

That people create regions to interpret Earth's complexity

Preparation

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