



Curriculum Units by Fellows of the National Initiative  
2007 Volume III: Maps and Mapmaking

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## **The Beautiful Art of Map Making**

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The mind's eye that humans have is a very special ability that rarely is mentioned. Humans are able to see and take measurement of land, and convert it in their minds as line and contours. The idea of a map and then drawing it according to scale is part of a very special ability. It is called *spatial reasoning*. How does one develop this? Obviously, abstract thinking is involved. Understanding a map has its spatial or visual requirements. It is a cognitive and abstract thought. You see flat yet think in round terms. Illustrated maps can summon visions of ancient places, treasure maps and top secret places. Maps are everywhere. Indeed, maps are an integral part of common daily life.

The middle school child is at the point of expanding his visual sense of spatial reasoning. To think of angles, transparency, parallels, and the like makes an introduction to abstract thought, geometry, algebra, and other concepts easier to grasp. That also leads to being able to display an understanding of patterns and relationships. So what does that have to do with making and learning about maps? Map-making is one of the oldest and least talked about skills. Additionally, the beauty of mapmaking is rarely presented as an art skill. The knowledge of using the compass, charting, measuring and all other tools of the trade must be understood by the map-maker. My unit will provide discussion, research, writing, science, geography, history and art to surround the students with ways in which to enrich their spatial reasoning skills.

(Developed for Fine Arts, grade 6, and History, grades 6-8; recommended for Geography, Fine Arts, History, and Mathematics, grades 6-10)

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