



Introduction

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“Cordiform World Map in Fool’s Cap,” [Novacco MS 2F 6] (<https://www.newberry.org/file/1366>)

Courtesy of the Newberry Library.

The map above is one of my favorite maps in the history of cartography—and this YNI seminar begins with each participant sharing a favorite map. In summer 2025, these ran the gamut from the simplified map of London used in the classic board game *Scotland Yard*, body maps used to teach ASL, beautifully illustrated hyper-local maps of Philadelphia, to trail maps and topographical maps, a mid-twentieth-century tourist map of Navajoland, transportation maps, an emotional-personal heart map, and even a musical tour itinerary. The intellectual and aesthetic range of these objects, and the passion, excitement, and memories they evoked revealed in moments how powerful maps are as analytical and affective instruments. “Teaching with and through Maps” is an exploration of how to harness the power of the map in a variety of classroom contexts to enhance learning in subjects from English Language Arts and History to math, science, and music.

My favorite map, reproduced above, captures the long historical entwining of people and places, of spatiality

as a concept that shapes our lives and our thinking. The anonymous Fool's Cap Map, published sometime around 1590, shows the striking juxtaposition of a then state-of-the-art world map inside the motley hat of a court jester (or Fool). Entitled, "Nosce teipsum" – know yourself – the engraving evokes the merging of world and self as the map image becomes the figure's face. We can only know the world through the self, it seems to suggest—or, alternatively, know the self through its connections in and with the world. More important, perhaps, it embeds the map itself—a now-iconic emblem of mathematical accuracy, empirical proof, and scientific method—into a deeply humanistic, allegorical, and moral matrix suggesting the inextricable relations between science and art.

In a similar vein, this seminar took up the invitations to thinking, reflecting, representing and interpreting contained in this print, which was produced in the midst of the "cartographical revolution" of the sixteenth-century. Beginning with the premise that maps both create narratives and influence the shape and interpretation of texts, the participants considered how maps as historical objects offer narratives about how we imagine and organize ourselves in psychological, spiritual, social and political terms. But to get to this perspective, we had to interrogate our assumptions about what maps actually *do*. Are maps simply tools to help get from *here* to *there*, static forms of the ubiquitous GPS navigators we all use today? Are maps visual representations of places—or are they schematic and complex reflections on what we understand space and place to be? What sorts of objects count as maps: is a mood meter a map? Is an online data visualization a map? When are tattoos, tablets, sculptures and religious diagrams also best understood as maps? Taking our cue from Mark Monmonnier's classic *How to Lie with Maps* we asked how individuals, states, and cultures have used maps to amplify and shape various assumptions, arguments, and points of view. We also explored how, as teachers, we might harness this same conceptual power in our classrooms.

Maps have become charged images in our ever-more visual world, codifying ideas and expectations about space, place, orientation and itinerary. "What is a map?" asks the map scholar and theorist Christian Jacob—and after famously spending 99 pages attempting a definition, he observes: "The map is a device that presents a new dimension, another degree of reality, within the field of vision...[it is] a widening of the visible field, of what can be thought and what can be uttered. It is also a space of anticipation, of predictability, of omniscience tied to the very fact of the synoptic gaze" (*The Sovereign Map*, 99). From this perspective, the term "map" usefully applies to very wide range of objects from all over the world – as this seminar discovered, graphic organizers in classrooms are maps and so are the changing maps of the COVID pandemic; mappings of the self, like heart maps often used in elementary and middle-school classrooms, coexist on a continuum with political maps which establish and contest territorial sovereignty. Maps have also existed across cultures in various forms, even though we (too often) assume that maps are a European invention in early modernity.

As the seminar traced the shifting intersections between cartographic technologies, social-political conflict, and literary form, we moved through themes in the history of cartography from the "cartographic revolution" of the sixteenth century to the grand digital-spatial dream of Google Earth. Participants grappled with the challenges of spatial literacy in verbal and visual texts, cartographic technologies and instruments, maps in books and as books (atlases), and textual uses of various mapping practices (spiritual, geographic, conceptual, data-driven). As the rich curriculum units designed by the participants show, we made ample use of online digital materials while also emphasizing hands-on mapping exercises. Indeed, what distinguishes this seminar's approach is an insistence on embodiment and spatiality through *making maps*. All participants played with different map-making techniques and practices and almost every single curriculum unit reflects this commitment to the impact of hands-on learning in our classrooms and communities as an antidote to the increasing reliance on screens and digital data.

The materials compiled in these units are wide-ranging—moving from mapping contexts and characters in literary texts, exploring how songs carry maps within them, to teaching concepts of scale and triangulation, environmental change over time, local and indigenous histories, and investigating spatial representations for disabled people. Whatever their specific focus, each unit includes introductions to teaching with maps for various grades levels, examples for working with maps, hands-on classroom exercises that teachers might use to integrate maps as thinking tools in their classrooms, and a variety of external resources that fellow teachers might draw on as they include maps in their pedagogy. Each unit also has ideas for how teachers in adjacent topic areas might adapt their strategies.

Though the units in this volume are arranged alphabetically by author, I group and describe them here by topic for ease of reference, though there is considerable overlap across these sections:

Math & Science:

Kristina Kirby uses the mathematical bases of map-making to bring alive concepts of geometry and trigonometry alive by showing students how to perform triangulation and trilateration using real-world examples.

Raven Dorman has their students create a “touchstone atlas” as a tool for learning concepts of scale, proportionality, and rational numbers that they can then use as a graphic tool in itself.

Anna Herman devises a range of hands-on activities using maps to help students connect big issues in sustainability and environmental studies to place-based projects in and around their school in Philadelphia. This unit bridges disciplines as it moves from science and geography to history and social studies.

Interdisciplinary: Special Education, ELL, Music

In a similar vein to Herman, Vickie Young Weatherspoon takes a local place-based learning approach to her life skills, special education classroom by integrating math, science, history, and English through maps in a multi-faceted study of Hearne, Texas, where her school is located.

Kari Flynn uses maps in her English Language Learners (ELL) classroom to demystify and bring alive the topic of housing discrimination and the centrality of home-ownership to the American dream. These visual, analytical tools allow students to better grasp the content that they must then articulate in words.

Amanda McMahon leads their art students to investigate strategies of mapping for the blind as both a conscious-raising exercise in universal design as well as the complex, creative practices shaped in and by disabled communities.

Zanneta Kubajak shows how music and songs are also maps—they spatialize sound and shape imaginaries of place and space. Focusing on the folksong “Follow the Drinking Gourd” and the histories of Black music associated with the legendary Chitlin’ Circuit, she brings together music, history, and radical cartography.

English, History, Social Studies

Marc Hillis taps into the representation force of maps to connect topics in AP US History to the local names and places of his Navajo students. In the process, the complex history of mapping indigenous territories enables him to center the history of indigenous people in the Americas to large-scale national histories.

Alyssa Lucadamo similarly draws on the power of maps to help imagine faraway places in her unit on teaching Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*. Maps help students understand the historical context of Arctic exploration while also helping them map relationships between characters, tone, mood and text.

Michelle Newton proposes a map-based game to teach students how to make close observations and analyze textual clues as a framework for developing skills necessary to write the text-dependent essay (TDE). Here, the map acts as a graphic organizer as well as tool to help students envision and articulate their analytical thought-process.

As will be clear from these very brief summaries, maps present an astonishing range of possibilities for the classroom!

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