

Maps author-unknown

There are certain kinds of information that youngsters need in order to function adequately as competent members of society. One of those areas is geography. Recent studies, even of college students, show that a surprising number of high school and college students have a remarkably poor understanding of geography-even a reasonable understanding of where major cities and countries are located in relation to one another.

Where to begin? Start early with a basic investment of at least four maps that can be hung in your child's room: a map of the world, the USA, your own state, and one of your local region. Check with your local library if you have any difficulty locating the maps you need.

If you are willing to go even one step further, invest in relief maps. These are particularly helpful when youngsters hear, for example, information such as "The Mississippi River basin drains two-thirds of the United States." By noting the location of the Rocky Mountains on the western third of the continent and the contours of the eastern slopes of the United States, the child can readily see why this fact is true. On such maps it is also obvious why populations are concentrated more in some areas of the country than others and why parts of the country lend themselves more to farming and ranching than industrialization, as well as the importance of ports and river ways, and so on.

Once the maps are mounted, identify the four major points of the compass-north, east, south, and west. Make large, clear labels for these and put them on the maps. (A note-the top of a map is always north.)

Basic facts about the local area should be taught. Your child should know adjoining or nearby cities and that they are "to the east of" or "north of" his city of residence. With the massive highway connections in this country, youngsters can "fix" some locations by their proximity to major thoroughfares.

Virtually a day doesn't pass that some event of consequence isn't reported from some place on the globe. These countries and cities can be marked with little flags.

With many families separated because of jobs and other factors, a map can be used to show San Francisco where Aunt Susan lives, or Tallahassee where Uncle Jim lives, or Washington, DC, where Grandma lives, or Boston where Cousin Ed works. An effort should be made to give the child a sense of key spots that can serve as "anchors"-for example, "Connecticut? That's the state next to Massachusetts where Cousin Ed works."

Next to the bathroom, the kitchen is the most commonly used room in the house. Don't overlook placing a large map on one wall. As news of consequence about problems in specific parts of the world-turmoil, earthquakes, floods, monsoons, famine, oil-crises, their locations can be flagged for everyone's benefit.

Every home should have an Atlas of fairly recent date-one that, like a dictionary, isn't stored on a shelf collecting dust but is used for frequent reference. An atlas makes a noteworthy birthday or holiday gift. In addition to the locations of countries and cities, a tremendous amount of other important information is given-products, resources, populations, languages spoken, and so on.

If your child really gets turned on to maps, introduce the concept of "scale. " Every map has a scale that shows how many inches equal a mile. The smaller the map, the more miles will be squeezed into an inch. Get out a ruler when figuring distance and ask your child to determine the approximate number of miles from one place to another. This activity can take on added meaning if the family is planning a trip, and the number of miles involved is important. (If you really want to get your child involved and interested, tell him how many miles to the gallon your car uses in highway travel. See if he can figure out the number of gallons of gas that will be needed for the trip. He can then multiply that figure by the price of a gallon of gas to estimate the cost of the trip.)

Make good use of your local area map. What are spots of interest to your child-places he knows or likes to go, such as the football field, the city hall, the city park, the zoo, the sports arena, the civic center? Mark these with "flags" to relate them to "Flag #1" (your home).

If time permits (and often it doesn't in busy households in the morning families prepare for school and work) the morning news shows on the major television stations show a considerable number of news, political and weather drawings and maps. Just from repetition alone, a certain amount of geographical information will "stick" aside from the other valuable and timely information.

There are puzzles of maps of the United States and the world that add yet another dimension to becoming familiar with our country and world. These range from very simple to complex and should be selected based on the child's current ran & of knowledge-too easy would be insulting; too difficult would be frustrating. If a puzzle of a map at the proper level cannot be found, it is possible to make one at home by mounting a map on a stiff piece of cardboard and cutting it into puzzle pieces. (This is something a brother or sister might make to give the child as an inexpensive birthday or holiday gift.) In some commercial maps of the United States and the world, the actual shape of the state or country forms the pieces. This is an excellent way for the child to learn *the size* and shape of his own state and country and how they relate in size to other states and other countries.

Just memorizing states and their capitals doesn't teach geography. Such information has to be linked into other facts-facts that have special meaning for the child. For example, knowing and locating the home cities of the major football and baseball teams or places of general interest, such as Philadelphia (home of the Liberty Bell), Boston (the Boston Tea Party), New York (Statue of Liberty), Hollywood (where motion pictures are made), et cetera.

Before taking a family outing or trip, lay out the route on a map. "Let's take U.S. Highway 101 south from San Francisco to San Jose. Then we'll take Highway 17 to Santa Cruz and be at the beach." Let your child be the "map keeper" with the responsibility of watching road signs as the trip is made.

One thing all youngsters should do, either as a government class project or with the family, is to visit their own state capital and arrange to visit legislative sessions--and to contact in advance their local state representatives. This is one sure way that they will learn and remember the name of their state capital and its location relative to other cities. But a trip to the state capital should involve a bit of advance study. Along the way, whether it is by car, train, or bus--or even airplane--certain key spots (rivers, historical locations, and cities) will have to be passed. Knowing these in advance will "lock in" additional geographical information.

On a family outing, keep a record of mileage and time so that your child understands the distance involved. If you are taking a trip that might involve more than an hour, record the starting and ending mileage.

A great source of geographical information that is bright, colorful, and well designed is any local Chamber of Commerce. A phone call or letter requesting printed materials will unfailingly bring a response. Another source is your local travel agency whose representatives will be glad to share their information brochures. Almost every major airline has a fine magazine tucked into the pocket in front of the seat. These publications are a treasure of geographical information, including maps that show air routes. If a family member or a friend is scheduled to make an air trip, ask that person to bring back one of these magazines.

Another valuable resource is an automobile club. If you or a family member or a friend is a member, check out their ample supply of maps, both local and otherwise. Such clubs will also provide "strip maps" with routes plotted which are models of clarity and will interest and fascinate the child.

While knowledge of the locations of various places around the globe is almost second nature to most adults it can occasionally be perplexing and confusing to children. Stimulating talk about the news and why, for example, an early frost in Brazil will raise the price of coffee, or how difficulties in the Middle East can affect the price of oil, or why a strike in the automobile industry in Michigan may affect the cost of a car, will, little by little, help youngsters get a better grasp and sense of geography.

For maps, country information, and other help on geography visit [World Atlas Online](#)