

An Introduction to Maps as Primary Source Documents: Reading maps critically.
Appropriate for advanced students of history.

This introduction may be used for any exhibition and in conjunction with any lesson plan on the OML website.

Objective:

1. For students to understand that maps can be “read,” interpreted and analyzed like other primary source documents.
2. To build skills in analysis, close reading and writing.
3. To hone ability in working with primary source documents.

PART I

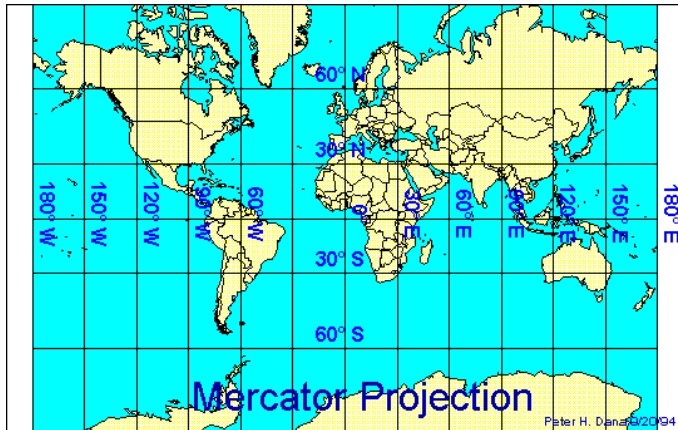
Directions:

Before viewing the exhibition, read over and discuss the preliminary/general questions with students, explaining the language of the questions and giving real-world examples as necessary. Students should keep these questions in mind as they view the maps in the exhibition.

Preliminary/General Questions:

1. What is the purpose of a map?
2. In a history class, how do we know what we know? How much of the study of maps (and the study of history) is conjecture or informed opinion? (Discuss history as an interpretive study -- like literature.)
3. Discuss maps as perspectives using the Mercator and Peters projections as examples.

Mercator: from Colorado.edu



Peters: from petersmap.com



PART II

Directions:

Hand the following questions out to students just before or after viewing an exhibition. Read the questions over together, making any necessary clarifications and defining any unfamiliar vocabulary. Students should pick 1-3 maps from the exhibition that they found particularly interesting. In writing, they should answer the following questions for the map/maps they chose.

1. What was the mapmaker's purpose in creating this particular map? Is there an ulterior or secondary purpose that we can determine?
2. What strategy does the mapmaker employ in achieving his/her purpose?
3. Do you think the mapmaker has been successful in achieving his/her purpose? How can you determine that?
4. What do maps tell us? What do maps reveal to us about culture that they do not realize they are revealing?
5. Does the mapmaker (unknowingly or knowingly) reveal any values or cultural biases through the map? How do the ideas and values of the map differ from our own ideas and values?
6. Can you relate this map to any other primary or secondary sources you have studied this year?

PART III – Extension

Ask students to develop one of their answers to questions 1-6 into a five paragraph essay. They may also create a thesis that works with more than one question.