

Lesson Plan to Supplement *Mapping the Republic*

For advanced students of U.S. History

Overview:

This lesson plan is intended to supplement the online exhibition “Mapping the Republic: Conflicting Concepts of the Territory and Character of the U.S.A. 1790-1900.” Through the activities, discussion prompts and essay questions below, this lesson plan is intended to deepen students’ understanding of Westward Expansion, the ideology of Manifest Destiny and the self-conception of the United States in the time surrounding the Civil War.

Possible areas of study of U.S. History this lesson may supplement:

Westward Expansion/Manifest Destiny
The Civil War
Interpretations of the U.S. Constitution

Skills:

- Analytical thinking and writing
- Analysis of primary source documents
- Close reading
- Reading comprehension

Topics/Themes of the Lesson:

- The conflicting concepts of the U.S. as “one people” vs. the idea of states’ rights
- Ideology of westward expansion
- Contradictions/relationship between democracy and the spirit of Manifest Destiny
- Westward expansion and its role in the Civil War

Objective:

- To increase students’ awareness of the role of Manifest Destiny ideology in shaping Westward migration in the mid-19th c.
- To demonstrate the differing public concepts of and opinions about America that contributed to the divisions that caused the Civil War
- To improve students’ abilities in the areas of close reading and analysis
- To give students experience in using primary sources
- To demonstrate to students the way that maps can reveal historical attitudes and priorities

Key Terms:

1. Primary Source Document
2. Close Reading
3. Manifest Destiny
4. Westward Expansion
5. States’ Rights

Getting Started:

First, have students read and view the online exhibition *Mapping the Republic*. They may read and view the entire exhibition, or they may focus their attention on the sections entitled “Introduction,” “Spaces of Independence: Mapping the Union” and “Constitutional Spaces: Mapping States.” This lesson plan focuses on those three sections and can be completed without viewing the rest of the exhibition.

General Discussion Questions/Topics:

1. What did the idea of “The West” mean for Americans in the 19thc?
2. Define: Manifest Destiny
3. Discuss the concepts of “one people” and states’ rights. How do these differing concepts lay the ideological groundwork for the Civil War?

ACTIVITIES:**Close Reading Activity: Practicing and Understanding Close Reading**

In this activity, students will “get a feel for” close reading by dissecting a pre-existing close-reading analysis.

1. Examine Phelps and Watson’s “New Map of the United States” and read the explanatory text that accompanies the map.
2. The explanatory text provides a close reading of the map. What is a “close reading”? Why is the skill “close reading” important?
3. Create a list of features on the map that are mentioned in the text.
4. Using the explanatory text to help you, explain the significance of each feature in your own words.
5. Pick another map and begin your own close reading from scratch. First, note interesting features on this map and create a list of these features. Then try to explain a possible significance or symbolism of each feature. In writing your explanation, always keep in mind the historical context of the map.

Cultural/Regional Studies Activity:

1. Have students view the map “The Constitution of the U.S. with a Summary View of Each State in the Union” and read the explanatory text that accompanies this map. In response to this map, have students (either individually or in groups) create their own “states map.” In their map, have them pick 5-10 states and either in text or in graphics create a description of those states based on the popular image or identity of that state. For example, under Maine, students might write about or draw a lobster, under Texas, a cowboy hat.
2. Discuss the maps the students have made. Discuss stereotypes and regional identities. Why have these stereotypes persisted? Are students proud of the identity of their state? Do they feel that identity reflects who they are? Are representations of other states or regions more or less derogatory than representations of the students’ home state or region?

3. How might such stereotypes lead to the kind of divisions that contributed to the Civil War?

Extension I:

Read John O'Sullivan on Manifest Destiny (an excerpt can be found at <http://www.mtholyoke.edu/acad/intrel/osulliva.htm>)

1. Whom might the idea of Manifest Destiny profit and whom might it harm?
2. How does Manifest Destiny justify imperialism?
3. Can you argue that the U.S. still conducts its foreign policy under the ideology of Manifest Destiny? (This might be a good opportunity to connect the 19th c. ideology of Manifest Destiny to the Cold War ideology of American Exceptionalism.)

Extension II:

1. Have students read Article I Sections 8-10, Article II Section 2, Article IV and the Tenth Amendment to the U.S. Constitution.
2. What are the powers of the Federal government? What falls under the jurisdiction of the states? Have students (in groups or alone) create a chart to answer these two questions.
3. Have students list or discuss the benefits of federal power vs. the benefits or states' rights. (This might be a good time to review the failed Articles of Confederation.)
4. Students might debate these questions or respond to them in writing: is the federal government too powerful? Should state or local governments be more powerful? Should all government (federal or local) have more or less power and control? Why?
5. How did U.S. citizens in the years before the Civil War use the Constitution to attack or defend the institution of slavery?

Essay Question: A Challenge

1. Examine John Melish's "Map of the United States with Contiguous British and Spanish Possessions" and consider the following quote:

In explaining his map's significance, Melish foreshadowed the idea of "Manifest Destiny." The map provided, he said, a "view of the whole [nation] as being the habitation of men among whom self-government has for the first time had a fair chance of successful experiment." It "afford[s] ... ground for thankfulness to Divine Providence, that here at last mankind have found an asylum, where all the efforts of tyrant man to shackle his fellow will be in vain; and where every man may sit under his own vine, and under his own fig-tree, and none to make him afraid."

Is this quote ironic to modern readers? What "tyranny" was Melish referring to? Recall that Melish made this statement during the time of slavery and Indian Removal.

In a five-paragraph essay, discuss the contradictions between the democratic ideal of self-determination (as expressed in the Declaration of Independence) and the concept of Manifest Destiny. Use the quote above to help you shape your argument.