

# **Lesson Plan to Supplement *Road Maps: The American Way***

**For Advanced Students of American Literature, U.S. History or Humanities**

## **Possible reading this lesson may supplement:**

*On The Road* by Jack Kerouac  
*The Great Gatsby* by F.Scott Fitzgerald  
*The Grapes of Wrath* by John Steinbeck  
Poetry of Walt Whitman

## **Possible areas of study of U.S. history this lesson may supplement:**

The introduction of the automobile  
The rise of corporate America – robber barons  
The rise of oil companies in America, the history of Standard Oil  
The roaring 20's  
WWII era  
Women's rights

## **Skills:**

1. Analysis of text and images
2. Close reading
3. Analytical writing

## **Topics/Themes of the lesson:**

- “The road” in the American imagination/mythology/iconography
- What does “the road” symbolize? Is this imagery similar to any other iconic American images?
- How are American values and ideals both reflected in and created by the road maps in this exhibition?
- Advertising methods

## **Objective:**

1. To demonstrate that even mundane objects (such as road maps) can reveal and shape the values of a culture
2. To explore the power and methods of advertising
3. To investigate the links between major events in history or great novels and the material objects that were created contemporarily
4. To develop the skills listed above
5. To encourage students to engage their world – including the advertisements that inundate them and the material objects they use daily – thoughtfully

## **Directions for teachers:**

This lesson and these activities are intended to supplement the online exhibition *Road Maps: The American Way* and to supplement the study of American Literature or U.S. History. First, please ask students to view the exhibition online, both looking at the images and reading the explanatory text. Ask students to focus their attention particularly on the “Exhibition Home Page” and the sections entitled “Adventure around the Bend,” “Guiding the Traveler,” “Selling an Image” and “Road Maps as History.” After students have viewed the exhibition, they may complete the following assignments.

**Maps students may want to focus on in answering questions/completing activities:**



**Discussion/Writing Questions:**

1. In the images on the covers of these maps, how do oil companies try to sell their product? How do they try to cultivate brand loyalty? Use specific examples from the images or from the explanatory text that accompanies the images.
2. Find patriotic images in the map covers. Why include patriotic images? Do the patriotic images tend to correspond to major events in U.S. History?
3. **Challenge:** While aimed at national travelers, these maps implicitly promote the worth of local people and knowledge of the local environment. Many of the maps contain archetypal or typical images of small town life or small town people. Find at least three map illustrations that show idealized images of small town life or that contain a knowledgeable small town hero who can direct travelers to their destinations. *What is the purpose for including these images in the illustrations? How do these images contribute to the notion of America as one big community?*

### Activity and Worksheet: Close reading

#### CLOSE READING WORKSHEET:

For the 1929 “Standard” Road Map of New Jersey. Found under the section entitled “Guiding the Traveler.”



Look closely at the illustration on the cover of this road map, then answer the following questions.

1. According to the illustration, what happens to people who don't carry road maps?
2. Who paid for the creation of this map? What interest do they have in road maps? What product are they trying to sell?
3. How does this advertisement try to cultivate brand loyalty for the company?
4. Examine the gender dynamics in this illustration. What can you surmise about the expected role of women in 1929?
5. How do the images of “lost” on the left and “found” on the right differ? (For example: look at the difference in the proportion of “wilderness” to man-made

environment.) How do these images conjure or bring up emotions about being lost? What, therefore, is the feeling that we get when we use this product and are “found”?

6. Take a close look at the thumbnail image on the left. Who is actually using the map? Why include a third character in this vignette?

After you have completed questions 1-6, choose another illustration from the exhibition that interests you. Produce a close reading of that illustration.

**Extension/Research Activities: Pick one.**

\*Students might complete this activity as a writing assignment or they might create presentations to share what they have learned with their classmates.

1. Find and review a novel, a poem, a movie, a song, a painting, etc. that deals with the theme of travel in America. Compare and contrast your piece of media with the images in the exhibition. Do they reveal/promote the same values? Do they use similar symbolism or imagery?
2. Find and review an advertisement, that, like the maps, exploits a certain image of America, American iconography or American values. How do advertisers use concepts about what is American to sell their products? Do you think these advertisements are successful? Why or why not?
3. Research the history of the Standard Oil Co.
4. Research the history of the women’s rights movement in this country from the turn of the twentieth century to the 1950’s. Consider the maps and map covers in the exhibition that include women. Do the images on the maps parallel the women’s rights movement? See “Women on the Road” under “Selling an Image.” (Note: this might complement well an essay on the treatment of women in *On The Road* or *Gatsby*.)

**Essay Question:**

\*Depending on the ability levels of the students, this question might be introduced with class discussion for clarification and to jumpstart brainstorming. Also, some of the sub-questions might be eliminated if they contain concepts that will confuse instead of productively challenge.

In the first episode of the television series *Madmen*, protagonist Don Draper states that the purpose of advertising is to make people feel that what they are doing or buying is “ok” – and that they themselves are “ok.” In other words, Draper argues that to be successful advertising must be a business of inclusion and *reassurance*. Consumers must be made to feel as if they belong and that what they are doing or buying is acceptable to themselves and to society. Let’s use Draper’s idea to shape our thinking about the advertisements in this exhibition.

Pick 1-3 maps from the exhibition to work with.

How do the illustrations on these maps affirm or support their user’s Americanism, their identity, their sense of belonging to society, their “ok-ness”? Are these maps reassuring to consumers? In what ways? How do these maps create a group identity for Americans? How do they build America as one big “imagined

community”? According to the illustrations, what cultural values do Americans hold? What is important to Americans? In writing this essay, please do not answer each question. Rather, use these questions and Draper’s premise to stimulate ideas. Then develop your own thesis that responds to this topic in general.