



# Map your Home Place

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Unit: Henry as Citizen

Topic: Mental maps, mapping, knowing your own home

## Thoreau Quotations

“When you are starting away, leaving your more familiar fields, for a little adventure like a walk, you look at every object with a traveler’s, or at least with historical, eyes; you pause on the first bridge, where an ordinary walk hardly commences, and begin to observe and moralize like a traveler. It is worth the while to see your native village thus sometimes, as if you were a traveler passing through it, commenting on your neighbors as strangers.”

—*Journal*, September 4, 1851

“How little there is on an ordinary map! How little, I mean, that concerns the walker and the lover of nature. . . The waving woods, the dells and glades and green banks and smiling fields, the huge boulders, etc., etc., are not on the map, nor to be inferred from the map.”

—*Journal*, November 10, 1860

“Moreover, taking a surveyor’s and a naturalist’s liberty, I have been in the habit of going across your lots much oftener than is usual, as many of you, perhaps to your sorrow, are aware. Yet many of you, to my relief, have seemed not to be aware of it; and, when I came across you in some out-of-the-way nook of your farms, have inquired, with an air of surprise, if I were not lost, since you had never seen me in that part of the town or county before; when, if the truth were known, and it had not been for betraying my secret, I might with more propriety have inquired if *you* were not lost, since I had never seen *you* there before. I have several times shown the proprietor the shortest way out of his wood-lot.”

—“The Succession of Forest Trees”, *The Writings of Henry D. Thoreau*, 1906

## Background

Henry David Thoreau walked extensively in his hometown of Concord, throughout the woods surrounding Walden Pond, and throughout the fields surrounding the town and woods. He was also a surveyor, which meant that he made very precise maps of people’s properties. He knew the area where he lived very, very well because he walked so much, was very observant, and mapped out much of the area in detail. He knew Concord so well because he was *paying close attention*.

Often, we are unaware of our surroundings, especially when we do something every day - it becomes a habit that we do without thinking or noticing. We *stop paying attention*.

Sometimes this is very useful, but other times we may miss out on something or get lost because we have not been observant.

## Objectives

1. Have students use their mental maps to map out a familiar area or route.
2. Understand why mental maps might be different than “reality”.

## Method

Each student will draw a mental map of an area that is familiar to them. They will compare their mental map to what is actually present and see how accurate they were.

## Time Required

30-50 minutes

## Materials

- Blank paper or grid paper
- Colored pencils
- Rulers, optional

## Procedure

1. Give each student a blank piece of paper and ask them to draw a map of an area they know well (e.g., playground, route to school from their house, route from their house to a friend’s house, or the layout of a room in their house). They should include anything that they know or remember about the area (including names of places and things, landmarks, street names, street numbers, woods, open fields, empty lots, playground equipment, bodies of water, sidewalks, etc.). When helpful, they can also use indicators like color or size to describe things on their map. Additionally, ask the students to be consistent with the distances they think are between two points; if they think it’s a mile from their house to the school, make sure they don’t just crowd in the last block because they were running out of room. If the couch in their living room is eight feet long and the coffee table is five feet long, ask them to draw them in relative proportion. If it is relevant to your grade level and learning objectives, even have them draw a scale for the distance used on their map (Extension 2 below).
2. Explain that maps can give people unfamiliar with the area a way to get an overview of a particular place. However, because we are mapping a familiar place, our mental maps, those that we carry around in our heads, may or may not be 100% accurate. We have a lot to think about and take in, so our brains naturally filter out things are not as important to us. For example, a student that loves soccer may know where all the soccer fields are between their house and school. And another student may know where all the houses that are brightly colored are located. We would expect that Henry’s mental maps were very accurate both because of his love of walking and

- because he was a surveyor (a type of map maker or cartographer). But he too would have had particular interests that he may remember better than other aspects of his hometown (the 2<sup>nd</sup> quotation found at the beginning of the lesson is a great example).
3. Now that they've created their mental map, there are two alternative ways for them to compare their mental maps to what it actually looks like.
    - a. Ask the students to take their mental maps home and walk or drive the route they mapped out (or visit the space, if a room or playground). Compare what they saw on the drive, walk or visit with what they have on their map. Have them add things that they missed, draw an arrow to the correct location if they remembered it but it's not quite in the right spot, or make an X through anything that doesn't belong.
    - b. If relevant, have the students use an online mapping tool (such as Google maps) to see how a cartographer has mapped their same route. And again add in things they missed, draw an arrow to the correct location if they remembered it but it's not quite in the right spot, or make an X through anything that doesn't belong.
  4. In pairs or small groups have them discuss the "Reflect and Explain" questions below. Or you may want them to write out answers to the questions.

### Reflect and Explain

- Was it easy or hard to draw the map from memory? How accurate was your mental map? Why do you think it had that level of accuracy? How does your mental map reflect your particular perceptions/perspective?
- Are there elements on your map that would have interested Henry David Thoreau (i.e. waving woods, smiling fields, boulders, streams, etc.)? If so, why did these places stay in your memory? If no natural places are included, why not (i.e., are there none? Is nature unimportant to you? Are natural places scary/unknown/unpleasant?)
- If you used the online mapping tool, are there things missing on their map that you know about or are important to you? Why might that be? Who else would these missing places be important to (e.g. other soccer players)?

### Extensions

1. Once they've drawn their mental map, ask a parent/guardian to draw a mental map of the same route. Then compare both of their maps to an online mapping tool. Whose map was more accurate? Why? Hint: we would expect the parent/guardian's to be more accurate because it's usually their job to get the student from one place to another. And as each of them gains more independence they will develop more accurate mental maps because they will now be expected to make sure they can make it from one point to another.
2. Have them draw their map to scale with the correct angles, too.
3. Have them compare the online mapping tools to the older topographic maps that were often used in the past. Have them write an argument for either using the online

mapping tool or the topographic paper maps. Brainstorming the advantages and disadvantages of each type of map may be needed.

4. Ask them to re-draw their map using the actual space as reference, not just their memory.

## Vocabulary

**cartographer** - a person who makes maps.

**mental map** - a mix of objective knowledge and subjective perceptions: precise knowledge about the location of geographic features as well as impressions of places, rough estimates of size and location, and a general sense of the connections between places.

**surveyor** - someone whose job is to assess boundaries and measure the area of pieces of land.

## Additional Resources

[http://www.concordlibrary.org/scollect/Thoreau\\_surveys/Thoreau\\_surveys.htm](http://www.concordlibrary.org/scollect/Thoreau_surveys/Thoreau_surveys.htm) - a collection of Thoreau's surveys can be found here

## Common Core Standards

### English Language Anchor Standards (all grades)

- [CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.SL.1](#)  
Prepare for and participate effectively in a range of conversations and collaborations with diverse partners, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively.
- [CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.SL.2](#)  
Integrate and evaluate information presented in diverse media and formats, including visually, quantitatively, and orally.
- [CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.SL.4](#)  
Present information, findings, and supporting evidence such that listeners can follow the line of reasoning and the organization, development, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience.
- [CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.SL.5](#)  
Make strategic use of digital media and visual displays of data to express information and enhance understanding of presentations.
- [CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.SL.6](#)  
Adapt speech to a variety of contexts and communicative tasks, demonstrating command of formal English when indicated or appropriate.
- [CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.L.1](#)  
Demonstrate command of the conventions of standard English grammar and usage when writing or speaking.

- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.L.2  
Demonstrate command of the conventions of standard English capitalization, punctuation, and spelling when writing.
- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.L.4  
Determine or clarify the meaning of unknown and multiple-meaning words and phrases by using context clues, analyzing meaningful word parts, and consulting general and specialized reference materials, as appropriate.
- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.L.6  
Acquire and use accurately a range of general academic and domain-specific words and phrases sufficient for reading, writing, speaking, and listening at the college and career readiness level; demonstrate independence in gathering vocabulary knowledge when encountering an unknown term important to comprehension or expression.