

Learning With Maps

Maps are a reflection of the time in which they were created and the people who created them. They can teach us more about the politics, culture, and history of the time than just practical directions between two places. Learning how to analyze ancient maps strengthens learners' skills in analyzing images, reading between the lines, thinking creatively, and connecting the dots.

Group Activity

With your class, watch the [video](#) about learning with maps.

Introduce ancient maps to your learners:

- Ancient maps can tell stories about how people understood the world.
- Many cartographers had not visited the places they drew. Instead, their depictions reflected religious beliefs, cultural perspectives, or particular worldviews.
- Symbols, animals, illustrations, and decorative elements were used to communicate messages about different regions.
- Size, placement, color, and the amount of details about locations reveal ideas about power, importance, popularity, or purpose.

Using the [worksheet](#), groups compare two ancient maps, identifying and analyzing important symbols, visual features, and perspectives represented in the maps. Groups then present their observations, analysis, and conclusions to the class.

Learners should use evidence from the maps to make observations, interpretations, and reasonable guesses. No prior knowledge is required. Speculation is encouraged as long as it is supported by details visible on the maps.

Discussion Questions

- Looking at the layout of the map, what is most important on this map? What indicates that?
- Who drew the map, and who was the intended audience?
- What story is the map trying to tell, and which values does it promote?
- What are the hidden messages in the map?

Creative Activity

Learners choose a perspective and map type to create an ancient-style map of their school, town, or favorite place using the mapping skills they have learned. Their map should show the shape, boundaries, and size of the location, including the layout of the important places. They should represent the distances between locations and any routes or connections that link them. To reflect the style of ancient maps, they may include symbols, labels, illustrations, and other decorative elements. The completed map should demonstrate both creativity and an understanding of geographic and spatial planning concepts.

[Primary Sources in this Lesson](#)

Map 1: Panorama of the Holy Land, 1900, The Eran Laor Map Collection, National Library of Israel.

This map was published in Breslau (now called Wrocław in Poland) in 1900. Nothing else is known about this map. The largest area in the center of the map is Jerusalem, with the rest of the region surrounding it. There are many known places on the map, but they are not in the correct location according to where we know they are located today.



Map 2: Paradise or the Garden of Eden, 1661, The Eran Laor Map Collection, National Library of Israel.

This map was drawn by Nicolaes Visscher, a member of a Dutch mapmaking family renowned for highly detailed maps of Europe. On the right side of the map, beneath the word "Assyria," you can see depictions of the expulsion from the Garden of Eden and of the Tower of Babel. On the far left of the map, you can see Jonah and the fish.



Map 3: Palestine, 1475, The Eran Laor Map Collection, National Library of Israel.

Lucas Brandis was one of the first printers in the Holy Roman Empire. Many of his maps include biblical events and locations of Crusader victories, as his maps were used in textbooks for the clergy. His maps were also printed and sold to the public. Jerusalem is at the center of the map. You can see a baptism in the Jordan River in the top center and Jesus' crucifixion underneath Jerusalem. In the left center, there is a crusader castle in Acco. Moses can be seen receiving the Torah in the top right corner, and Sodom and Gomorrah are in the sea on the top right side of the map. This map also includes mystical figures and elements. This map was one of the first world maps to be printed, and it was produced as a woodcut and an engraving.



Map 4: China, 1700, The Eran Laor Map Collection, National Library of Israel.

This map was hand-drawn and hand-painted by Jodocus Hondius. The map features the Great Wall of China in red at the top center of the map, in the mountains where it protected China against the Tatars. The killing of Christian missionaries, on the right-center border, indicated the Chinese refusal to convert to Christianity despite continuous missionary visits and China's constant pushback against Western expansion into China. Under the vehicle with wheels and a sail, on the left center border, the cartographer tells how China has expanded its rule and trade.



Map 5: Circular World Map, 1543, The Eran Laor Map Collection, National Library of Israel.

This is a woodcut map and one of the first world maps produced. Lucas Brandis was one of the first printers in the Holy Roman Empire, and many of his maps include biblical events and locations of Crusader victories as they were used in textbooks for the clergy. They were also printed and sold to the public.

The map is produced in the form of a "T-O map": it has T-shaped lines which divide the O-shaped map into sections. Judea and Palestine appear at the center of the world. The four rivers of the Garden of Eden are featured at the top of the map. The Pope and the King are depicted in the bottom left section, sitting in Rome.

