

Reading Maps Strategy

Consider the following when you are given the task of reading a map:

1. Looking the map over

Preview the map

- What is the title? What and where is being mapped?
- Is this a large or small scale map?
- Which way is up? (Where is north?)
- What is in the legend/key?
 - How is colour used?
 - What symbols are used?
 - If the legend uses a measured unit, what is the unit of measurement?
- What information can you get from the caption below or beside the map?
- What type of map are you reading?
- Is the source or the date of the map identified? (Is it a reliable or useful source?)

2. What is the purpose of the map?

When determining the purpose of the map, look for clues:

- larger or bold fonts
- the frequency and size of symbols
- the use of colour

Summarize the main idea of the map in your own words.

Restate one or two specific things the map shows.

3. A closer look

Take time to study the map more carefully.

- What is included in the map and what is left out?
- What patterns are evident? Are there any anomalies?
- What does this pattern tell you about the meaning of the map's subject?
- Use the figure number or title and key words to find and read related information in written text.
- Identify the relationships among the visuals and written information presented.

4. What is my personal connection to this map?

How can you connect your personal experiences to the data on the map?

Appendix A

- “Where do I live on the map?”
- “I heard about this in the news”
- “Where have I visited on the map?”
- “I am surprised/never knew that...”

5. What is the significance?

Ask yourself why this information might be important to your current studies or to you personally.

6. “I’ve got it!”

- Rephrase the information orally or in writing. Imagine that you are explaining the map to someone who has not read it.
- Sketch the pattern shown on the map, without looking at the map.
- Explain the pattern/information based on your studies /prior knowledge and what you can infer from the map.