

LESSON PLAN

U.S. Geography

Level: Literacy, Low Beginning

Suggested Length: 1 or 2 class periods, depending on class size and level

Civics Test Questions

- #44—What is the capital of your state?
- #88—Name one of the two longest rivers in the United States.
- #89—What ocean is on the West Coast of the United States?
- #90—What ocean is on the East Coast of the United States?
- #91—Name one U.S. territory.
- #92—Name one state that borders Canada.
- #93—Name one state that borders Mexico.
- #94—What is the capital of the United States?

Reading Test Vocabulary

capital, country, state/states
 America, United States, U.S.
 What, Where
 has, is/are, name
 a, in, of, on, the
 many, north, one, south

Writing Test Vocabulary

capital, state/states
 Alaska, California, Canada, Mexico, United States, Washington, Washington, D.C.
 has, is/are
 and, for, in, of, on, the
 50, largest, north, south

Objectives:

Students will:

- identify the four directions on a compass and label them on a map
- locate the United States on a world map
- identify geographic features (ocean, river, lake, island, mountain, desert)
- identify and locate the two longest rivers in the United States
- identify and locate the five major U.S. territories
- identify and locate the U.S. coasts and oceans
- identify and label capitals of their home country, the United States, and home state
- name states that border Canada and Mexico

Materials:

Globes, wall maps of your state, the United States, and the world

Sticky notes and markers

Handouts: **Geography of the United States; Map of the United States; Lakes, Rivers, and Oceans; Borders;** and **Categories—U.S. Geography**

Writing Practice for Literacy and Low Beginners: **Map Directions**

U.S. Geography Lesson Answer Key



Lesson Overview and Notes to Teacher:

This lesson introduces basic map-reading skills and directional vocabulary. It orients the students to the geography of the United States in comparison to their native country. The students learn vocabulary to discuss geographic features while practicing the answers to Civics Test questions about rivers, oceans, border states, territories, and capitals. There are suggested teaching strategies for small group and whole class activities to practice the new vocabulary using U.S. wall maps and category games with file folders and sticky notes. For the Civics Test, applicants do not need to locate these places on a map, but they do need to understand their existence and be able to correctly answer questions about them. Lastly, the handout **Map Directions** for the Literacy Level Writing Practice helps beginners practice spelling and handwriting while using key vocabulary from the lesson.

Depending on their literacy and education level, some students may not have strong map reading skills. Displaying world maps and globes around the classroom will usually prompt your students to share information about their native countries. One option is to allow the students to examine the maps for a period of unstructured time while you circulate and provide help as needed. Your local K-12 school system may have a media center with materials such as die-cuts of continents or map puzzles. These materials work well with adults to learn about world and U.S. geography. For relatively little cost, you can buy inflatable world globes and map puzzles in toy stores or low-cost retailers. Adult English language learners usually enjoy the challenge of assembling map puzzles—individually, in pairs, or as a competition between small groups of students.

Introduction: Display maps of your state, the United States, and the world on the wall. On the board, draw a simple compass and ask the students to name the four directions (**NORTH, SOUTH, EAST, WEST**) as you write the words. Practice the pronunciation of these words, and then ask about the location of countries familiar to the students so that they can demonstrate

their understanding of these words and use them with ease. Explain **We will study the map of the United States today**. Ask a more advanced student to come to the world map and locate the United States. Ask the class **Where is the United States? (between Canada and Mexico, in North America, etc.)**

Guided Practice: Write **capital** on the board. Ask a more advanced student to come to the board and ask **Where are you from?** Have the student point to his/her native country on the world map. Ask **What is the capital of your country?** The student answers, locates, and points it out. Repeat this process with several more students. Have them each come up and show their native country and identify its capital. Then have the student at the board choose and call on the next person to come up until everyone has had a turn at the board and an opportunity to ask and answer these questions.

This turn-taking can be skipped if the majority of your students are from the same country. Keep in mind that students unfamiliar with maps may have difficulty locating their home country so allow classmates to assist, if needed. Ask the whole class **What is the capital of the United States?** Have a volunteer locate and point out Washington, D.C., on the map. Ask students **How do you spell Washington, D.C.?** while you write it on the board for them to copy. Point out that **What is the capital of the United States?** is an item on the Civics Test.

Practice: Distribute the handout **Geography of the United States**. Review the paragraph, reading each sentence 2-3 times out loud for students to hear. Have the students repeat each line after you. After each line, point out the locations mentioned in each sentence. Then, compare the U.S. map to the compass, ask **What is north of the United States?, What is south of the United States?, What is east of the United States?, and What is west of the United States?** Pointing to the coasts, ask **What ocean is on the West Coast of the United States?** and **What ocean is on the East Coast of the United States?** Point out that these two items about the oceans are on the Civics Test.

Distribute the handout **Map of the United States**. Ask the students to find their state on the map and ask **What is the capital of your state?** Practice this question with them and point out that it is an item on the Civics Test. Have students label their home state, the state capital, and Washington, D.C., on the map. Have students look at the world and U.S. maps on the wall. Then practice the words in the box at the bottom of the map. Have a student come to the map and find those locations on the wall maps, using sticky notes with the name of one place on each. Then have the students write the names of the places on the map in their handout.

Distribute the handout **Lakes, Rivers, and Oceans**. Tell the class that you want to talk about water in the United States. Discuss the picture of the river at the bottom of the page. Then review the sentences in the reading in the same manner as described previously, giving the students an opportunity to listen and repeat while following along as you read. Refer to the map and pictures so that the students can learn the meaning of the vocabulary in context.

To introduce the concept of border and border states, ask your class to find their state on the U.S. map. Write the state name(s) on the board. Then ask **What states are next to our state?** and rephrase it by asking **What states border our state?** Have students name the neighboring states. This is not required for the

Civics Test but it helps students orient their location on a map while introducing the concept of “border.” Distribute the handout **Borders**. Ask a volunteer to come up to the U.S. map and show where the United States borders Canada and Mexico. Read aloud the sentences in the handout, helping them fill in the words from the box at the top of the page. Then have them refer to their handout **Map of the United States** and identify each of the states bordering Canada and Mexico. They can refer to the wall map for help. Point out to the students that **Name one state that borders Canada** and **Name one state that borders Mexico** are both items on the Civics Test. Assure them that they will only need to identify one state on each border if they are asked these questions in their interview.

Evaluation: Distribute the handout **Categories—U.S. Geography**. Review the words in the word bank and the categories listed. Ask the students, **California—what category does this go in? (States that border Mexico)** and orally review a few more examples. Then have them work in pairs or individually to write the items from the word box in each category. As you go over

the answers as a class, review the respective Civics Test items covered.

Distribute the handout **Map Directions** for more spelling and handwriting practice on vocabulary for the Civics Test. This exercise can be used in class or for homework for those lower level students who need additional copy work.

Additional Map Activities and Games: The following ideas offer more map practice and Civics Test review for a follow-up lesson. Consider using these activities with your class.

Activity 1: Alphabet Lineup and U.S. Map Work (whole class)

Preparation: 1) Make a set of vocabulary cards (total 24) on a pad of sticky notes. Write one vocabulary item per sticky note: **Atlantic, Pacific, Canada, Mexico, United States, Arizona, California, New Mexico, Texas, Alaska, Idaho, Maine, Michigan, Minnesota, Montana, New Hampshire, New York, North Dakota, Ohio, Pennsylvania, Vermont, Washington, Mississippi River, and Missouri River**. 2) Display a large U.S. map on the wall.

Instructions for the classroom: Distribute one sticky note to each student (it is okay if you have words/notes left over). Tell the students to get up and form a line in correct alphabetical order according to the word they are holding. With a class of more than 24, extra students can play “teacher” to direct the others and check the lineup. Let the students sort out this lineup process by themselves—it may take time, but they will get it, use English, and have fun doing it. When the lineup is ready, start with “A” (**Alaska**) and ask each student in turn to read his or her word aloud, going down the line to the end of the alphabet. With any leftover words you may be holding, ask the students where these would fit into the line, and hand those notes to students nearby. Then have the students go up one by one to the map and place their word in the proper location. When done, all the sticky notes should be on the map, illustrating the vocabulary and tying it to the map.

Activity 2: Category Game (small groups, pairs, or individuals)

Preparation: Depending on the size of your class, make 5-6 sets of sticky notes with the vocabulary as previously described. Prepare one file folder for each set of words: 1) Open the folder flat; 2) Draw five category boxes on the inside; 3) Label each category: **Countries, Oceans, Rivers, Border States with Mexico, Border States with Canada.** It is a good idea to “test” the folder categories yourself before class, by sticking the notes into the correct boxes.

Countries	Border States with Mexico	Border States with Canada
Oceans		
Rivers		

Instructions for the activity: To each small group or pair of students, hand one file folder containing one set of the 24 sticky notes randomly stuck inside. Tell students to open the folder and, as a class, review the five categories aloud. Tell the students to read the sticky notes and place each one in the correct box or category. You can use this folder activity to review the specific geography items from the Civics Test such as **Name one state that borders Canada** and **What ocean is on the East Coast of the United States?**

Sticky notes work particularly well with kinesthetic learners since students can manipulate the notes and not worry about handwriting or spelling. Beginners enjoy this visual, non-threatening activity, but it also works for more advanced students. Folders with categories (in boxes or columns) and vocabulary words on prepared notes can be adapted for other civics topics. For example, to review content from the USCIS beginning level lesson, **Benjamin Franklin and the U.S. Constitution**, make folders with categories like **Benjamin Franklin, Federalist Papers, U.S. Constitution, and Branches of Government** with key vocabulary written on each sticky note. Refer to the key vocabulary listed in the Word Bank on page 5 of the student handouts in that USCIS lesson.