Basic Spatial Reasoning

A. Immanuel Kant said it well: *Human brains have "built-in" ways of organizing information: spatially (in space), temporally (in time), causally (by cause-and-effect processes)*

B. Brain-scanning reveals distinct networks that do different kinds of spatial organization:

1. **Comparison** – bigger/smaller, rounder/squarer, darker/lighter, redder/grayer
   Examples: Iowa is smaller than Texas, Poland rounder than Italy.
   China has more dots than Australia on this map.
   Botswana has a darker color than Zimbabwe.

2. **Proximity** - next to, near, close to, within its area of influence (its "aura")
   Examples: cabin near a lake, noisy house near an airport,
   gas station near an Interstate highway exit,
   refugee camp near a country with a civil war

3. **Region** - part of a group of places with something in common
   Examples: farms with corn fields in the Corn Belt,
   abandoned factories in the Rust Belt,
   people speaking Spanish in Latin America

4. **Sequence** - in order, along a line, on the way from one place to another
   Examples: third block along a particular street,
   grassland between rainforest and desert,
   middle-age houses between city and suburbs

5. **Hierarchy** - inside something larger
   Examples: counties inside state, states inside country,
   creeks inside watershed of large river,
   rivers or mountain ranges inside continent

6. **Analogy** - in a similar position in a different part of the world
   Examples: ports near mouths of different rivers,
   neighborhoods near downtowns of different cities,
   places in similar positions on different continents

7. **Pattern** - arranged in bunches, lines, arcs, waves, or other non-random ways
   Examples: forts in a line, coral reefs in a ring around an island,
   oil wells in a bunch in one part of a country,
   sand dunes arranged like waves in a desert

8. **Association** - tending to occur together with specific other features
   Examples: stoplights at major intersections,
   people with malaria in places with A. mosquitoes,
   earthquakes at borders between crustal plates

C. There are huge individual differences in how people do different kinds of spatial thinking.

D. Studies show that every student can learn to do every kind of spatial reasoning better.

E. An "expert" map reader is able to use more modes of spatial reasoning, and to use each one better, than a novice. That is why a good map reader can get more information, faster and more accurately, than a novice can.

It's like learning how to learn.