

This Group or That One

(Region)

Background

- The human brain is structured to put things that it observes into groups, in order to simplify its perception of the world and make things easier to remember. The visual system does this almost unconsciously and seemingly effortlessly, e.g., as it decides which splotches of color on your retina belong to this tree as opposed to that schoolbus. Geographers expand this skill when they construct regional maps, e.g. of rainforests or areas where people speak Chinese. Regional maps can be made at any scale, from a town map of store regions to a world map of religious regions.
- Students who learn that regional maps are products of human decisions will be better able to gather accurate information about the world from this kind of map.

Materials

- (from previous lessons) a classroom model or map
- photos of animals in their “typical” habitats; photos of landscape features in the neighborhood, community, and state; photographs of the neighborhood taken from an airplane.
- string or yarn that can be strung across a room or placed on a map or photograph. The goal is to separate areas into regions with boundaries that can be discussed and perhaps changed.

Vocabulary

Review: model, map, stand for, represent, like, unlike, same, different

Concentrate on: group, separate, similar, dissimilar, divide, region, aerial photo, satellite image

Introduce: boundary, gradual, abrupt (see separate unit about Spatial Sequences and Transitions)

Procedures

- arrange blocks, drawings, other symbols to represent desks, rugs, other classroom features. Hand a student a piece of string or yarn and ask that student to arrange the yarn across the map or model in order to “separate the desk area from the rug area” (or whatever divisions make sense in that particular room – choose a criterion that clearly divides the room into distinctly different areas).
- VARIATION: start by using a rope or long piece of yarn to divide the classroom into its “regions”
- VARIATION: hold up objects and ask “In what region of our room do we find things like this?”
- show aerial photographs of the neighborhood around the school. These tend to be high-interest items, as students try to identify specific features, such as the school, a nearby store or church, perhaps their home (if they live close enough). Online sites such as Google Maps and Yahoo Maps can display photos at different scales. Practice first!!
- VARIATION: show a picture or model of a memorable animal (penguin, giraffe, monkey, camel) and a simple map of world environments (Antarctica, savanna, rainforest, desert). Explain the legend of the map and the traits of the regions. Then ask where this animal might like to live. The goal is for students to see the map colors as representing groups of different kinds of places.
- VARIATION: hold up a picture or model of features and have students decide which ones go in cities, suburbs, or rural areas (have a map of land use regions in the local area to consult).

Learner outcomes

- awareness that a regional map is an attempt to simplify the world by drawing lines around groups of places that have similar characteristics

Issues to be resolved

- How fast can we move from concrete pictorial maps to abstract maps that divide areas into regions?
- When to introduce the idea that different criteria can make different regions in the same area?

This Group or That One - Developmental Sequence

Background: As with any statement of developmental sequence, this list indicates what *might* happen with a typical child. It is not a prescription of what *must* happen in precisely this order in a classroom. This lessons assumes that students are familiar with the idea of comparison.

Stage 1: Individuals examine simple, familiar places and try to divide them into regions

Teacher gives a piece of rope or yarn to a group of students and asks them to arrange it so that it divides the room into regions with different features or uses – e.g. desk area, reading area, discussion rug, or whatever logical divisions are obvious in that particular classroom (if it doesn't have a obvious internal division, make one for this lesson, or choose another place!)

Use other simple examples (e.g. coins on a table, with mostly pennies on one side and nickels on the other) and have students divide the table into “coin regions” until the concepts of *grouping similar places* and *drawing a line between dissimilar areas* are clear.

Stage 2: Students arrange yarn or string to show regions on a classroom map/model.

Teacher displays a fairly complete classroom map or model (i.e. one that shows the locations of all desks, tables, rugs, etc.) and asks students to place a string to divide the room into its main parts

VARIATION: Teacher uses a string to divide the classroom map into another kind of region (e.g. sunny or shady, orderly and needs cleaning, etc. See below). Like some other ideas that seem “intuitively obvious” to adults, this process has to be learned and may take time and/or repetition.

Stage 3: Students divide the neighborhood around the school into major areas.

Teacher shows a detailed aerial photograph or Google-Earth satellite image of the area around the school and asks students to identify features that they see. Then have students try to stretch string or draw lines around smaller areas that have the same characteristics (like dividing a pile of coins into pennies or nickels). In an urban are, for example, a public-housing project is usually a visually distinct region, as is a park – houses and apartments are less obviously different. But that's one of the big points of this lesson – some regional divisions are obvious, others are judgment calls.

VARIATION: Write summary descriptions of different regions.

Stage 4: Students divide other maps into regions.

Teacher displays a state map that has pictorial symbols for hilly or mountainous areas (IF your state has obvious divisions), and asks students to draw lines to divide the state into flat and hilly regions. Doing this will also help organize the students' mental images of the state; its value in helping students build mental maps should not be underestimated.

Teacher displays a satellite image of an area or a map of observations (languages on signs, apartments and houses, Republican and Democratic votes, etc.) and asks students to draw lines to divide the map into regions. CAUTION: choose topics and areas where regional distinctions are simple and obvious. Students are able to start dividing areas into regions in kindergarten, if the areas have obvious regions, but they can continue to learn more about the process of regionalization into graduate school as they encounter places with less obvious distinctions!!!

Stage 5: Students learn that different criteria can divide the same area into different regions.

If the room arrangement permits, students can divide the classroom into several different kinds of regions – desk/rug, boy/girl, lighter/darker, brown floor/green floor, etc.

Divide the neighborhood into several kinds of regions, such as residential/commercial, old/new, English/Spanish, whatever differences are both obvious and clearly regionalized.

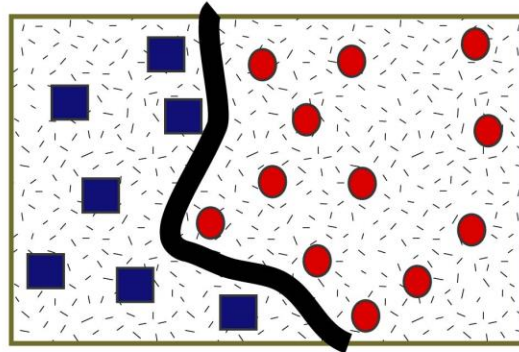
Assessment game: Put towels of different colors on several tables in the room, hide a flat object (e.g., a photo) under one towel, describe it in regional terms (e.g., “near the middle of the green-towel region”), and have students search for the treasure.

Forward: repeat the process of dividing areas into regions for larger areas – city, state, country, continent, world – as appropriate.

This Group or That One on a Tabletop

1

Where would you put
a string to divide
this tabletop
into a coin area
and a block area?



A regional map divides
an area into smaller,
more uniform areas.

It uses lines to divide dissimilar areas from each other;
it uses colors to group similar features together.

This Group Or That One - Concept

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This Group or That One in the Classroom

2

All students whose last names begin with G thru M:
stand up, take this rope, and stretch it to divide
the classroom into two main areas:
the desk area and the discussion area.

All students in the Bluebird group,
take this rope and stretch it to divide
the desk area into two "subareas":
the Bluebird area and the other areas.

Substitute/adjust to fit the
details of a given classroom.

This Group Or That One - Classroom

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This Group or That One in the Neighborhood

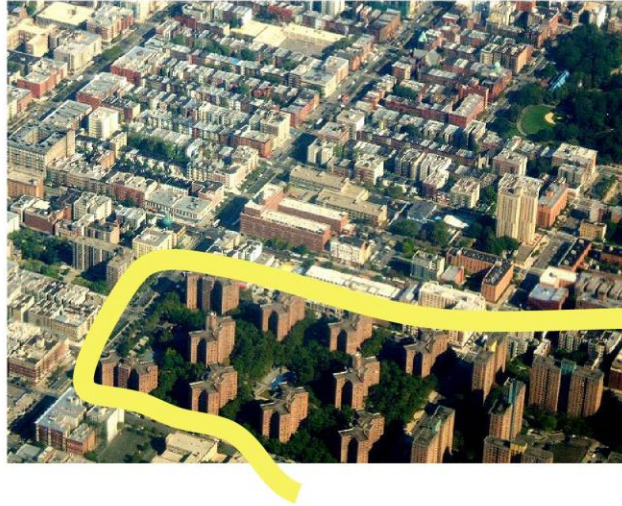
3

How would you divide
the neighborhood
into regions?

Draw a line around
the MLK houses?

Draw another around
Marcus Garvey Park?

Draw another around
the school block?



This Group Or That - Neighborhood

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This Group or That One on the Map

4

Point to a place on a world map,
provide a few clues about the environment there,
and ask which animals and plants
are likely to live there

MONKEY IN A **TREE**

PENGUIN ON SOME **ICE**

BUFFALO EATING **GRASS**

CAMEL IN A **DESERT**

LION IN A **LAKE ?**

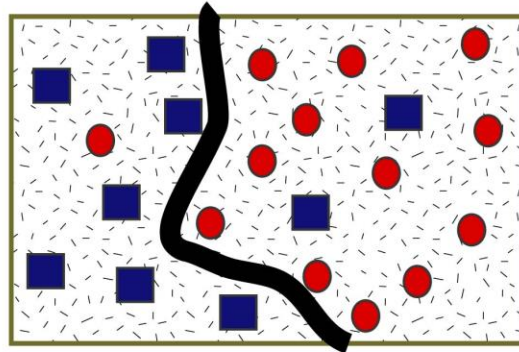
This Group Or That One - Environments

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This Group or That One: Complication

5

In the real world, things are seldom arranged neatly on opposite sides of a simple line.



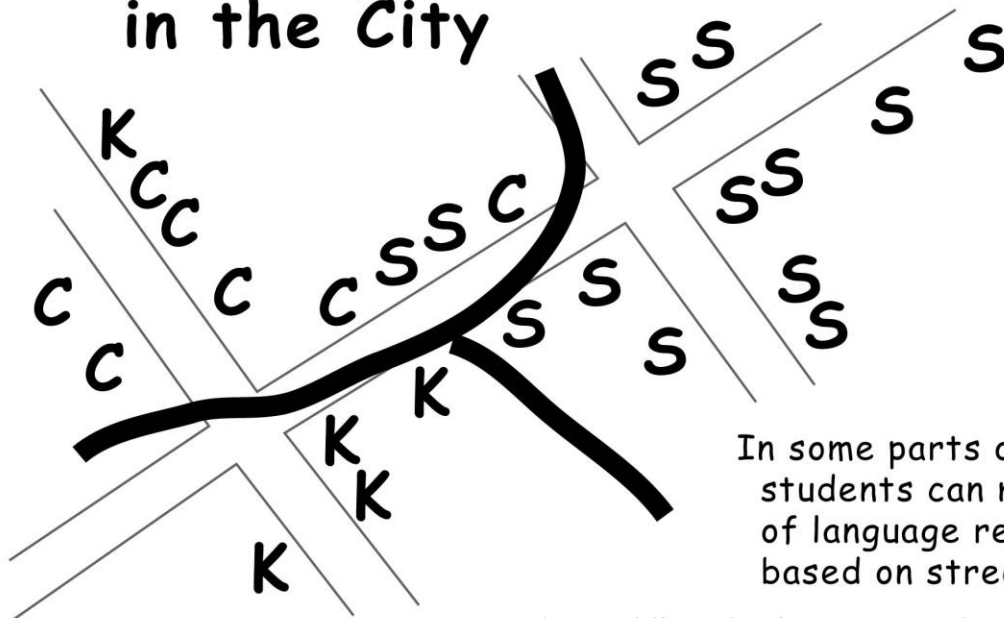
Here's the big question:
how many inliers
(different things within a region)
and outliers
(similar things outside of the region)
are acceptable on a map?

This Group Or That One - Complication

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This Group or That One in the City

6



In some parts of the city, students can make maps of language regions based on street signs.

This middle-school activity is the eventual goal; learning to interpret regional maps by making them

This Group Or That One - Languages

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This Group or That One: Community

7

If your curriculum has a focus on community, you can use that to reinforce the idea of region:

Describe several kinds of communities.

Show a photo and ask which community it belongs in. Start simple!

Classify several photos into three groups:

- I'm certain it is from community A.
- I'm certain it is from community B.
- It could be from either community.

This Group Or That One - Community

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This Group or That One: Continent

8



Satellite images are now available from many sources.

Tell students:
"Tan color shows desert"

Have them draw a line around the desert region in this part of the world.

Point and name names:
Egypt, Iraq, Siberia

This Group Or That One - Continent

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