

1D – Asking Geographic Questions

MCCC SS060106

6th Grade Social Studies Network – 2015-6
Part D of Unit 1 – Foundations of World Geography

GLCEs: 6G121 Skills of geographic inquiry; 6G131 fundamental themes; 6G111 map scales

1. Setup Activity: Review the first three lessons in Unit 1:

What are geographic questions at a local scale? (Think about locating our town in Part A.)

How about at a global scale? (Think about the pattern of ancient cities in Part B.)

How do the five themes help us organize these inquiries? (Part C)

(10 minutes – a quick brainstorming activity, not a complete rehashing)

6th 1D Spatial Reasoning Basics

6th 1C4 Spatial Reasoning presentation

6th 1D Brain Network Map

6th 1C Themes of Geography

6th 1C Themes of Geography clickable poster

2. Activity: Snowfall in Michigan – asking geographic questions about a simple thematic map

(10-30 minutes, depending on the number of other map examples you have students examine).

Michiganders already have a lot of background knowledge about snow. As a result, this is a good topic to illustrate how geographic questions can be phrased to trigger different brain networks and thus help students interpret a map pattern in different ways. Contrast this with a look at a typical symbol map in a textbook. This kind of map is superficially attractive but visually complex and demonstrably less effective in promoting durable memories of geographic patterns and relationships.

6th 1D Michigan Snow Questions

clickable Michigan mini-Atlas (on MGA website)

6th 1D Spatial Reasoning Questions About a Place

3. Scaffolding Activity (if needed): Brief review of modes of spatial reasoning

As noted in Part 1C, human brains are “hardwired” to organize spatial information in multiple ways.

Unless we consciously try to think about it, however, we are usually aware of only one of these organizing “schemas” at a time. Deliberately trying to use different modes of thinking about a simple map can help students learn how to use different organizing schemas as they look at a map.

6th 1D Spatial Reasoning Basics - Brain Networks

6th 1C2 Books on 9 Tables presentation

6th 1C4 Spatial Reasoning presentation

Pages from MCCC

We encourage teachers to look at the MCCC presentations about comparing disciplinary perspectives, analyzing a textbook, and defining a global problem, but we do not recommend giving these topics so much time in first few month of a 6th grade class. For one thing, these topics are no longer prominent in the new 6th grade Geography GLCEs in Michigan. Even if they were, it is probably more effective to have a number of shared experiences with concrete lessons about specific places before engaging in abstract discussions of disciplinary and book perspectives.

Takehome. The Common Core emphasizes “close reading” of text, but it seems to assume that students just “get information” from maps, graphs, diagrams, etc. Unfortunately, it doesn’t work that way! A teacher can’t just say “Study this map” – you have to model the inquiry. Asking questions that encourage spatial reasoning is a key part of helping students learn how to learn from maps. That’s what the first 8 of the revised Michigan GLCEs more than a quarter of the total) mean by “the world in spatial terms: geographical habits of mind.”