

# Map Reading Through Activities

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We claim that learning is a continuous process. Parallel to this is the conviction that positive reinforcement of any kind is indispensable for learning to be continuous. Real learning becomes possible through reinforcement. When we start applying the knowledge thus acquired in our day-to-day life, then the learning is said to be complete. The National Curriculum Framework (NCF) 2005 has a special focus on Early Childhood Education (ECE), which asserts that learning is a constant process that results in knowledge production by consolidating the experiences outside the classroom. Similarly, teachers are not machines that force knowledge into students' minds. Children possess the ability to build knowledge on their own. Although every child is capable of self-learning, a teacher, acting as a facilitator, gives appropriate reinforcements to support the child towards independent learning.

Map reading is one such area of learning. Many efforts have been made to boost the skill of map reading. In today's digital age, the art of map reading may seem like a skill of the past. Yet, its importance cannot be underestimated. Teaching map reading in schools holds a crucial place in education. In the age of GPS and navigation apps, basic map reading skills are vital. Teaching students to navigate with maps is like giving them a timeless tool for exploration. In this article, we examine the objectives of teaching map reading and how learning this skill at the elementary level leads to a better understanding of the world around us, while also promoting spatial awareness, critical thinking, cognitive development and geographical knowledge.

## Activities around map reading

Children from mainly three villages come to our school. At the outset, we divided these children into three groups and instructed them to represent the way to school from their respective houses using directions and symbols. Accordingly, the

children enthusiastically created a map of their village using symbols and directions. Later, they discussed among themselves the location of their friends' houses, temples, lakes, churches, mosques, dargahs, wells, fields, roads, etc. on the map.

To take this further, all three groups decided to create models of their village. We enlisted the help of the maths and art teachers in the project. A small model of the village was created using cardboard and drawing sheets along with the maps and toposheets (map showing the topography of the area) designed by the children who made sure that the measurements, colours, and symbols appeared accurately in this structure. Excited by the activity, the children expressed their desire to build their village model using concrete and bricks.

This project helped children learn the basics of mapping. Some children were then able to identify their houses and fields and even the survey and check dam in the maps created by their gram panchayat. Since this activity was related to their daily lives, they found it interesting.

For another project, to understand the importance of measurement in map-making, the children first converted small copies of the maps of different states into bigger ones with the help of measurements and displayed them on the school notice board. This helped them learn about their neighbouring states, their capitals, and coastal regions. They also understood the importance of scale in map-making. Although these activities were done during their higher primary classes, they were successful in creating maps and identifying places even when they reached classes IX and X.

## Ways to reinforce map reading

Becoming skilled in map reading has long-term benefits. It ensures the application of this knowledge and more effective learning when children engage in activities such as the following:

*Field trips:* Field trips can include map reading activities, such as identifying or exploring historical places using maps. These hands-on experiences reinforce classroom learning.

*Integration with technology:* Combining traditional map reading with modern technology, such as using Geographic Information Systems (GIS), can make the content more engaging and relevant for present-day students.

*Cultural appreciation:* Exploring maps of different countries while learning about different civilisations can develop an appreciation for diverse cultures and enhance their understanding of the interconnected world.

*Problem-solving skills:* Map reading teaches students how to analyse and solve spatial problems. It encourages them to think critically while navigating and understanding geographic information, which is a valuable skill in a variety of fields, including urban planning, logistics, and environmental science. These factors are learned not only in geography but also in other subjects.

*Historical understanding:* Maps provide historical insights, and also allow students to explore how geographic boundaries, landscapes, and names of places have changed over a while. This historical context enriches their understanding of history and geography.

*Environmental stewardship:* Map reading increases environmental awareness. It enables students to understand ecosystems, natural resources, and land use, promoting responsible environmental stewardship and sustainability.

### **A final word**

Teaching map reading serves as a journey towards spatial awareness, critical thinking, and developing deep connections with the world around us. Strengthening this skill throughout a student's educational journey ensures that they not only learn but also apply and appreciate this skill. Let us guide our young learners on this cartographic adventure, helping them navigate the world with confidence and curiosity.



Figures 1 & 2. Classroom activities



Figures 3 & 4. Outdoor activities



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