

European and Native American Mapping Activity

Goal: To understand that different cultures use different mapping concepts and techniques.

Grade Levels: Middle School and Junior High

Materials: paper, pencil, ruler
Optional: stick, area of sand or dirt

Objective: Students will be able to distinguish and describe the differences and similarities between European style and Native American style mapping concepts and methods after practicing interpreting and drawing both types of the same location.

Illinois State Board of Education Standards and Goals:

Geography: Middle School and Junior High

17.A.3a Explain how people use geographic markers and boundaries to analyze and navigate the Earth (e.g., hemispheres, meridians, continents, bodies of water).

17.A.3b Explain how to make and use geographic representations to provide and enhance spatial information including maps, graphs, charts, models, aerial photographs, and satellite images.

History: Middle School and Junior High

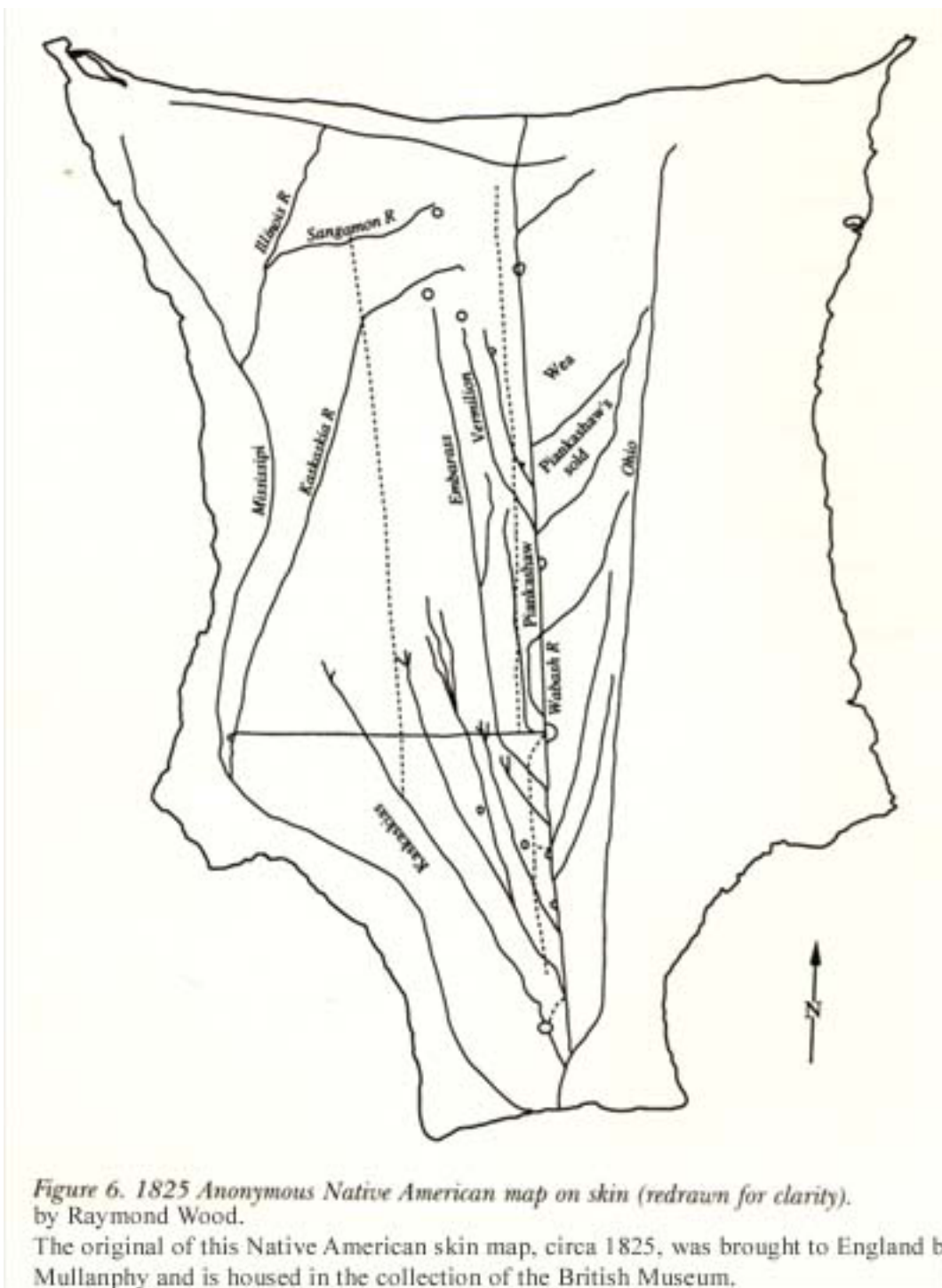
16.A.3b Make inferences about historical events and eras using historical maps and other historical sources.

Native American Mapping Concepts

Native American maps were usually temporary objects, such as drawings made with a stick in the sand or dirt. Occasionally they were drawings on deerskin, such as the sky maps on shields or maps dictated to Euro-Americans.

The content of the maps were physical places. The drawings, however, had no uniform distance scale, size scale, or directional orientation. They were drawn with the place of origin near the mapmaker, and the destination place at the top of the map. Paths and streams were drawn abstractly, as evenly-spaced wiggly lines of the same size. It was the spoken story that accompanied the map-drawing that explained what each place was and what distances or time-of-travel there was between landmarks. Historical information was often included (old villages, hunts, etc.)

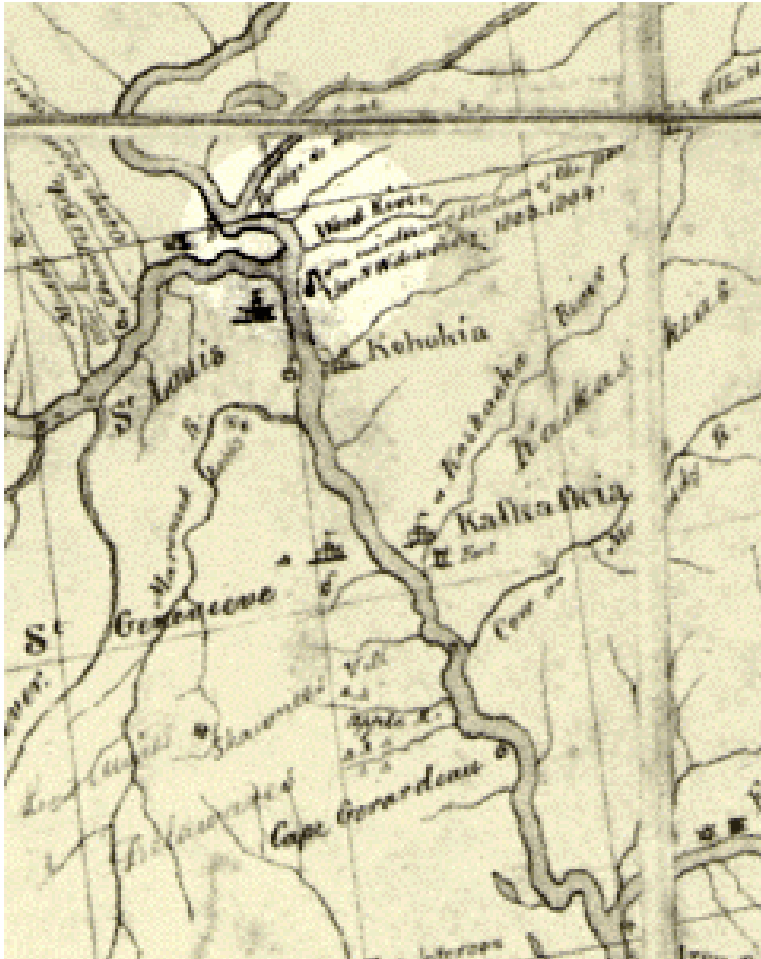
Below is a drawing based on a Native American skin map. It shows the rivers in and around Illinois. It is obvious that no scale or uniform grid for distances was used. It represents the homelands of Native Americans in the Illinois Country (and the State of Illinois after 1818) before and current to 1825. Villages and paths are marked.



European Mapping Concepts

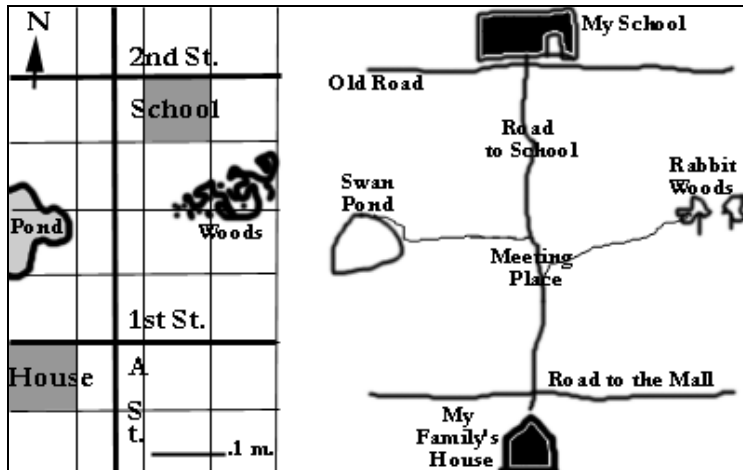
European maps are based on an underlying grid marking off even distances (lines of latitude and longitude) or local artificial lines indicating uniform distances (miles, blocks, etc.) Roads, rivers, and other natural features have official names. Lewis and Clark had the opportunity to name some features, as the first Euro-Americans to map some areas. Europeans developed scientific instruments to help them measure locations, distances,

and times. The map below is a detail of a map of 1807 an unknown cartographer made, evidently for Robert Frazer in St. Louis. It is in the Collection of the Library of Congress. It used other maps, such as the Mackay-Evans, as sources. This detailed area is of the American Bottoms. This map is of the same area as the left side of the map above. Notice the lines of latitude and longitude. The individual curves of the rivers reflect dead reckoning measurements.



Activity Example:

Study the two maps below. The one on the left is made according to a European style of mapping, with even distances drawn to a scale. The map on the right is drawn to a style more like Native Americans used. It marks places important to the mapmaker and reflects actions that take place in the places mapped.



Which map is more accurate? It depends upon who is using the map. The left-hand map is drawn with a grid that is meant to help anyone locate the places. However, that includes any person who is familiar with the mapping tradition and style.

The right-hand map is drawn to help someone who is traveling through an area familiar to local people. It uses landmarks rather than measurements. It is similar to oral instructions a car driver can get from locals.

Directions: Draw two maps, one of each kind described above, of a place you know. Use the principles of Native American mapping for your first map, then, using measurements, draw a second version using European principles.

