

Teachers' Guide for Cobblestone

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Taking Shape: Our State Boundaries

By Debbie Vilardi

Debbie Vilardi is an author of poetry, lesson plans and works of fiction.

Goal: To learn the stories behind the borders that separate states from one another.

*Always have a parent or trusted adult help with web research.

Before Beginning:

- Look at the front cover. How many states can you name based on their shapes? Do you know why any of them have that shape? Which states are missing?

"Taking Shape, State by State" by Mark Stein (Pages 2-5)

Comprehension:

1. Which European nations colonized the areas that are now part of the United States?
2. What territory did each European nation control?
3. Why did some colonies give up territory after the Revolutionary War?
4. What states were formed by breaking up the Northwest Territory?
5. Why are they similar in size?
6. What impact did the Erie Canal have on state borders?
7. Why was canal access so important?
8. What geographical features became natural boundaries between states?
9. How did the construction of railroads impact how borders were decided?
10. How did slavery impact state lines?
11. Why are some states equal in height or width?

Geography Activities:

- Study the colonial era map on page 2. Which territory contains the state you live in? What features form its borders?
- Use the State by State map to check whether you identified states on the cover correctly. List the states that border your state.
- Look at a map of the Erie Canal. Find the state borders along the canal. How many states border the canal and the Great Lakes?

Research: Revolutionary War, Northwest Territory, Erie Canal, nitroglycerin, transcontinental railroads, Missouri Compromise

"Mapping It" (Pages 6-7)

Vocabulary: latitude, longitude

Geography Activities:

1. Which state contains the intersection of 40°N latitude and 90°W longitude?
2. Which state borders fall at 40°N latitude

3. What is the approximate latitude of the lake in Utah?
4. Approximately how many degrees separate the northern border of the U.S. from the southern border?
5. Locate Alaska and Hawaii on a globe or world map. Describe their locations in terms of longitude and latitude.

“Let’s Make a Deal” by Will Bremen (Pages 8-9)

Complete the activity.

Research: 1783 Treaty of Paris, Louisiana Purchase, Convention Treaty of 1818, Adams-Onis Treaty, Webster-Ashburton, Texas Annexation, 1846 Oregon Territory, Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, Gadsden Purchase, Hawaiian Annexation

“Maryland Just Can’t Win” by Laura Phillips (Pages 10-12)

Comprehension:

1. Why was Maryland created?
2. What was the original border between Maryland and Pennsylvania?
3. Why was this border problematic?
4. Why did each colony believe Delaware should belong to it?
5. How did religion play into the decision to lease Delaware to Pennsylvania?
6. What compromise did the two colonies make?
7. Why did Lord Baltimore wish to renegotiate?
8. What action finally settled the border dispute?
9. What caused the conflicts over the border between Maryland and Virginia?
10. How was each conflict resolved?

Writing Activity: Write a letter to a king, commission, or the Supreme Court arguing Maryland’s case.

Research: King Charles I, Philadelphia, Lord Baltimore, King Charles II, Charles Mason and Jeremiah Dixon

“Texas: The Supersized State” by Ruth Spencer Johnson (Pages 13-15)

Comprehension:

1. How was the eastern border of Texas defined?
2. Which groups resided in Texas in the early 1800s?
3. Why was Mexico concerned about American immigration to Texas?
4. What actions did Mexico take to control the American population in Texas?
5. What was the result?
6. Why wasn’t a boundary line established between the new republic and Mexico?
7. Why did many Texans want to become part of the United States?
8. Why was there opposition to Texas becoming a state?
9. How did the Missouri Compromise impact Texas?
10. What was the result of the annexation of Texas?
11. What were the results of the war with Mexico?
12. How did the need for Texas to pay war debts impact its final borders?

Research: Republic of Texas, Manifest Destiny, U.S.-Mexican War, Rio Grande

“California: Think Big” by Kathiann M. Kowalski (Pages 16-18)

“What bout Baja?” (Page 18)

Vocabulary: Sierra Nevadas

Comprehension:

1. What makes California different from other states?
2. Why did the United States want to purchase the area that became California and New Mexico?
3. How did Polk provoke Mexico into attacking?
4. What happened after gold was discovered at Sutter’s Mill?
5. What topics were covered at the convention in Monterey?
6. Why were the current borders selected?
7. Why have these borders remained intact?
8. Why is the Baja region still part of Mexico?

Discussion Activity: Was President Polk justified in prompting the war with Mexico?

Research: President James K. Polk, James W. Marshall, Sutter’s Mill, Mormons

“What’s Up with West Virginia” by Laura Phillips (Pages 19-21)

Comprehension:

1. What was Virginia’s original western boundary?
2. What changed this boundary?
3. What geographic features form West Virginia’s borders?
4. Why did West Virginians want to have their own state?
5. What events made this possible?
6. How was the northern boundary determined?
7. How was the eastern boundary determined?
8. Why did Virginia believe three counties should be given back to it?

Research: French and Indian War, Civil War, Baltimore and Ohio Railroad

“Solving Michigan’s Puzzle” by Ruth Spencer Johnson (Pages 22-23)

Comprehension:

1. Why was the Toledo Strip considered important?
2. How did congressional actions fuel the dispute?
3. What caused the situation to escalate?
4. Why did national politics impact President Jackson’s position?
5. What was the “Toledo War”?
6. What was the final compromise?
7. How did both parties benefit?

Writing Activity: Do you believe the compromise turned out to be fair? Why or why not?

Research: Upper Peninsula, Toledo Strip, Northwest Ordinance, President Andrew Jackson, “Toledo War”

“Did You Know?” illustrated by Chris Ware (Pages 24-25)

Research: John Quincy Adams, John Hardeman Walker, Stevens T. Mason, James Gadsden

“Alaska’s Panhandle Problem” by Kathiann M. Kowalski (Pages 26-27)

Vocabulary: fjords

Comprehension:

1. How did the settlement of Alaska begin?
2. What other groups were settling in the region?
3. What borders were set by the treaty between Russia and Britain?
4. Why did Russia decide to sell the region?
5. What caused the border dispute with Canada?
6. How was the dispute resolved?

Social Studies Activity: Create a timeline indicating the major events, including treaties, that shaped the state of Alaska.

Research: William H. Seward, Klondike Gold Rush

“Colorado: Part of a Plan” by Kathiann M. Kowalski (Page 28-29)

Comprehension:

1. What territories was Colorado carved from?
2. Why did the people of Denver and the surrounding area want their own government?
3. Why was the Jefferson Territory considered illegal?
4. What prevented Congress from allowing the Utah Territory to take over western Kansas?
5. Why did Congress establish the Territory of Colorado?
6. Why didn't Congress allow the new territory to have more land?

Math Activity: Use a ruler and the scale on the map on page 29 to answer the following questions.

- What is the perimeter of Colorado?
- How long is the northern border of Oklahoma?
- How long is the Oklahoma panhandle?
- What was the perimeter of the Utah Territory?
- How long is the northern border of New Jersey?

Research: William Larimer Jr., Kansas Territory, Jefferson Territory, Utah Territory

“Got Maps? Yes, We Do!” by Lee Ann Potter (Pages 30-32)

Vocabulary: cartographic, gore, portolan, vellum

Comprehension:

1. What makes the collection of the Geography and Map Division of the Library of Congress important?
2. What are the possible purposes of panoramic maps of cities?
3. What are some possible purposes of war maps?
4. Why did the ancient sailors draw maps?

Math Activities:

- How many more maps than atlases did the collection have in 1897?
- What percentage of the total collection was maps?
- Approximately how many non-electronic items make up the total collection today?
- What percent of those are globes and gores?

Art Activity: Draw a scale map of a room in your home or your classroom. Be sure to take careful measurements. Add a map key, compass rose, and scale. Hide an object in the space and give someone directions to find it by using your map.

Research: Geography and Map Division of the Library of Congress, Claudius Ptolemy, mid-Atlantic Ridge

“Map Mania” by Meg Chorlian (Pages 34-37)

Comprehension:

1. What is Mark Stein’s background?
2. How did Stein conduct his research?
3. Why is there a semicircle at the northern end of Delaware?
4. Why is there a two-line border in the Hudson River separating New York and New Jersey?
5. How did each side benefit from this compromise?
6. Why did John Hardeman Walker go to Washington, D.C.?
7. What prompted Stein to write his book?

Research: How the States Got Their Shapes by Mark Stein, Steve Martin, Goldie Hawn, American University, U.S. Geological Survey

“Name That State” by Will Bremen (Pages 38-39)

Complete the Activity.

“Borders, Naturally” by Marcia Amidon Lusted, illustrated by Bryan Langdo (Pages 40-41)

Research: Strait of Gibraltar, the Alps, Hannibal, the Urals

Activities for the Entire Issue:

1. Many of the disputes over borders involve territory that was seen as valuable. What makes one piece of land more valuable than the next? Select an area described in this issue. Conduct further research to find out why it was valuable. Decide if the final resolution was fair to both sides and explain why or why not.
2. Create a timeline showing the date each state became part of the United States. Include secession and readmission dates for the southern states that left at the beginning of the Civil War.