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A Close Reading of a Map of Homestead
Geography
Minnesota

This is a guided activity requiring students to closely read a historical map and draw inferences.

Overview

Students will provide evidence of a close reading of a Sanborn fire insurance from 1891 and 1901 of Homestead, PA to identify key map features (legend, source, etc.), and make inferences about land use (residential, commercial, etc.), and demographic distribution (SES areas of the town). Then students will make inferences about life in Homestead.

Goals

- Gain awareness of historical maps, their uses, and their limitations.
- Practice basic map reading skills.
- Demonstrate analysis of map information and draw inferences.

Relevant State Standards (MN, 2011)

- 9.3.1.1.1: People use geographic representations and geospatial technologies to acquire, process and report information within a spatial context.
- 9.3.3.6.1: Geographic factors influence the distribution, functions, growth and patterns of cities and human settlements.

Lesson Plan

- Distribute response sheet “Homestead Historic Map Reading.”
- Teacher should deliver short lecture on Sanborn maps highlighting the purpose of the maps. To prepare this short lesson, refer to the resources linked below. Alternatively, students could be asked to research and read about Sanborn maps before the lesson. There is space on the response sheet to record essential information.
- Form groups of 3. Half of the groups will be given the 1891 map to assemble, the other half 1901.
- Demonstrate that the first sheet of the map set is an ‘overview’ map showing how the numbered sheets are to be assembled.
- Working in groups, students will:
 - tape together their map sheets and segments
 - complete the TODALSS and General/Basic map questions portions of the response sheet.
- Direct a 1891 group and 1901 group to combine and share their maps and discuss the differences they see.
- Lead a class discussion of the maps. Post on the white board the teacher-created maps to facilitate the discussion. This discussion should provoke questions and analysis that students could reference in their own written responses to the analysis questions of the response sheet.
- Students then complete the analysis questions and submit the response sheet. The teacher should determine the appropriateness of students working together on these questions.

Assessments

The analysis questions of the activity should be evaluated as the assessment. The evaluation should reflect student originality and depth of thought, and the use of ‘geographic logic,’ that is, to link their observation of a geographic pattern to geographic reasoning.

Technology required

This lesson can be completed without the use of computer-based technology. However, a variation would be to have students examine the individual map sheets on a computer instead of a printed version.

Materials

Preparation of materials: Use the links below to access the 1891 and 1901 Sanborn maps of Homestead. Download the full size .jpg files of all the sheets of the maps. Print the sheets in color, preferably onto cardstock (heavy weight) paper. To accommodate a class of 30 students, working in groups of 3, and half the class working with each map set, you will need at least 5 printed copies of each sheet (make extras). Trim the white margins off all map sheets. Some sheets have two or more map segments that must be cut apart. Then laminate all sheets and pieces.

For the discussion portion of the lesson, the teacher should also create their own maps to post on the white board.

Each group will need removable scotch tape to hold the map segments together, and ideally some transparency pens to mark on the maps if desired.

Each student will need a copy of the printed activity response sheet “Homestead Historic Map Reading.”

Other Resources

1891 Sanborn Map of Homestead:

<https://digital.libraries.psu.edu/digital/collection/maps1/id/10661/rec/3>

1901 Sanborn Map of Homestead:

<https://digital.libraries.psu.edu/digital/collection/maps1/id/10662/rec/5>

Sanborn Map background information:

Library of Congress <https://www.loc.gov/rr/geogmap/sanborn/san4a1.html>

Wikipedia https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sanborn_maps

History Associates Incorporated <https://www.historyassociates.com/notes-from-the-field-mapping-history-with-sanborn-maps/>

Bloomberg News <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2014-10-13/the-accidental-revelations-of-sanborn-maps>

(video) Tulane University Libraries <https://youtu.be/f7lI9KT5BCs>

(video) Louisiana Trust for Historic Preservation https://youtu.be/H3h1_XgSsGA

Additional maps:

1896 Sanborn Map of Homestead:

<https://digital.libraries.psu.edu/digital/collection/maps1/id/10637/rec/4>

1913 Sanborn Map of Homestead:

<https://digital.libraries.psu.edu/digital/collection/maps1/id/10625/rec/2>

Name _____

Homestead Historic Map Reading

Per. _____ Date _____

Notes on background information of Sanborn Maps: (this will come either from the teacher or student research, or both)

Identify the **TODALSS** for the map for the first map you read.

Title: _____

Orientation: (Is north indicated on the map by a compass rose or arrow?) Yes / No

Date: (When was this map created?) _____

Author: (Who created this map? Might be a person or publisher) _____

Legend: (a.k.a. key to indicate the meaning of colors or symbols) Yes / No

Scale: (indicates how distance is represented) Yes / No

Source: (this is the source of the data used to create the map)

General/Basic map questions:

1. a. What do the colors on the map tell you? (not the overview map)

b. Why is this information so important that it is in color?

2. a. List some common symbols and abbreviations and what they mean.

b. Why is this information important enough to be included on the map.

3. What does this map not tell you that you want to know? What geographic information is missing?

4. a. Where is the central business district?

b. How do you know?

c. Is the CBD location geographically logical? Explain in detail.

d. What are common business activities identified and why do these make sense geographically and historically?

e. Are there outliers from the CBD?

5. Can you discern residential areas of low and high incomes? How? Or, why is this tough?

Name _____

Homestead Historic Map Reading

Per. _____ Date _____

1891 Homestead Analysis Questions:

6. Write several solid sentences of your general impressions of your close reading of the map of Homestead in 1891. What's interesting? What's missing from the map? What inferences can you draw about life in Homestead? (Your response should demonstrate thoughtfulness and some originality.)

1901 Homestead Analysis Questions:

7. Note some changes from 1891.
8. Where is the general area of high income residences in 1901? How can you tell? What's the geographic logic behind this?
9. What are the implications of a rapidly expanding population and where they live? How would this change daily life
10. Write several solid sentences of your general impressions of your close reading of the map of Homestead in 1901. What's interesting? What's missing from the map? What inferences can you draw about life in Homestead? (Your response should demonstrate thoughtfulness and some originality.)