Placing Those Illinois Names

Lesson Overview

Students become aware of city and village names in their state and improve their knowledge of the relative location of places. As students categorize names of cities and villages, they use the alpha-numeric reference system on a state highway map to locate places and to describe locations. Using reference materials, students also identify how cities and villages received their names. This lesson is written for students in the State of Illinois but it can be adapted easily.

Grade Level

4-8

Geography Themes

Location

- Location of places can be described using relative terms
- Location of places can be described using reference systems
- Reasons can be identified for the location of places

Place

- Places have physical characteristics
- Places have human characteristics

Geography Standards

The geographically informed person knows and understands...

(#1) how to use maps and other geographic representations, tools, and technologies to acquire, process, and report information from a spatial perspective.
(#3) how to analyze the spatial organization of people, places, and environments on Earth's surface.
(#4) the physical and human characteristics of places.

Materials Needed

For Teacher:

- Illinois Highway Map

For Students:

- Illinois Highway Map (See Special Information) - one per group
- Variety of reference books about Illinois (See Special Information)
- Highlighters (5 colors per group, with each set of five being exactly the same)
- Notebook Paper

Main Objectives of the Lesson

Students are expected to:

1. categorize city and village names on an Illinois Highway map;
2. find and describe the locations of cities and villages using the alpha-numeric reference system;
3. discover patterns in the distribution of cities and villages and explain reasons for the patterns;
4. determine reasons for the names given to locations in Illinois.

Suggested Teaching Procedure

Preparing for the Lesson

1. Obtain Illinois Highway Maps for the class. You will need one map per group of three or four students, plus one map as the Teacher Copy. See Special Information.
2. On the Teacher Copy, darken the grid lines of the alpha-numeric reference system so they show clearly.

Opening the Lesson

1. Have students form into groups of three or four. Distribute one Illinois Highway Map to each group. Have students study the map and discuss features and map symbols that they notice.
2. Have students identify the largest cities in Illinois and describe their locations in relative terms, e.g., Chicago is on the southwest shore of Lake Michigan; Springfield is in the center of the state; Cairo is at the confluence of the Ohio and Mississippi Rivers.
3. Point out the Index on the Teacher Copy of the Illinois Highway Map. Ask students what information is shown in the Index (names of cities, villages, county seats, and population).
4. Discuss the alpha-numeric reference system. Point out the order that is used: LETTER - NUMBER. Ask students where they will find the letters? (along the eastern and western edges of the map) Where will they find the numbers? (along the northern and southern edges of the map) Are the letters and numbers on the lines or in the spaces of the reference system grid? (in the spaces; cities are located within the squares delineated by the grid)
5. Demonstrate how to find a city using the alpha-numeric reference system. Have students find and point to various cities which you ask them to locate by giving the alpha-numeric reference. Ask students to find a city and to give its coordinates from the map (not the index).
6. Compare the alpha-numeric reference system to the global (latitude/longitude) system. Discuss different types of alpha-numeric systems: those lettering/numbering lines and those lettering/numbering spaces.
7. Have students locate the legend. Review how to determine the general population of a city by its dot symbol and by such things as the size and shape of a city's label.
8. Ask students what the difference between a city and a village is. (City = 2,500 people according to the World Book Encyclopedia; village = less than 2,500 at the time of incorporation. Even though population grows, the original designation usually stays with the name. For example, the Village of Lake Villa has a population of 2,857.)
9. Discuss reasons for the names of cities and villages. Many cities are named for a physical geographic feature. For example, Rockford was the site where the Rock River could be forded safely; Elk Grove was a grove of trees where elk congregated. If necessary, review a list of terms to help students become familiar with vocabulary that will aid them in identifying physical geographic names. Physical geography includes landforms, water bodies, natural vegetation, native animals, and natural resources.

Developing the Lesson

1. Distribute one shade of highlighter to each group. The groups should all use the same color highlighter so students can make comparisons between maps. For example, physical geography names might be highlighted by every group in yellow. In their groups, have students highlight as many cities as they can which use physical geographic terminology as their names on the Illinois Highway Map, e.g., Highland Park, Coal City, Springfield. Allow students to search the map and highlight names for 20 minutes.
2. Ask students to share the names of cities they highlighted and use the alpha-numeric reference system to indicate where the city is located. Ask students why a city or village might have the physical geographic name.

3. Some cities are named using cultural characteristics introduced to a region by the people who settle there. Tell students they will repeat the above steps, highlighting categories of names using cultural characteristics.

4. Repeat the procedure using one category at a time. Suggested categories include:

- Native American names and words, such as Wilmette, Cahokia, Peoria

- French names, such as Bourbonnaise

- People's names (first and/or last), such as Anna, Lincoln, Beardstown

- Exotic Names (names originating somewhere else in the world), such as Paris, Monticello, Cairo

- Categories of names which students determine, such as plant or animal names or additional ethnic categories

5. Circulate as students are working. They will have questions about such things as whether a name is of Native American or French origin. (Name endings also indicate ethnic groups which settled an area. For example, "burg" is of Germanic origin, whereas "berg" is a British origin. "-ton" is a British ending to city names indicating a town.) Help students determine ethnic origins, but encourage quick research using dictionaries for name origin.

Concluding the Lesson

1. Have students look for patterns of the highlighted city names. Some guiding questions are:

- Are there any relationships that can be made between type of category and its distribution on the map? For example, where are cities with water references located? (Those with "lake" are often in the northern regions; those with "port" are in areas that are often along rivers or on Lake Michigan.) Where are cities with "Mt." located? (often at higher elevations) Where are most of the French names located? (along the Illinois and Mississippi rivers - following their trade routes)

- Indian names appear scattered over most of the state. Why? (Native Americans lived in all regions of Illinois. Names often are in reference to their village or near a trail used by a particular group; some Indian names have meaning in the Indian language and describe a physical feature, such as Chicago - meaning wild onions.)

- Is there any pattern to exotic names? (There doesn't appear to be, but the region often resembles the area after which it was named or the name represents a place from which a group originally came.

2. Ask each group to list five city names which are new to them on a sheet of notebook paper. Next to the city name, the group should speculate as to how or why the city received its name. Have students check their speculations in reference books and record the results. (See Special Information.) If reference books do not specify the name origin, have students write to or telephone Chambers of Commerce to question the origin of the city name.

Extending the Lesson

1. Include a letter writing lesson, requiring students to write to a city or village to determine the origin of the name and to request a picture, brochure, or newspaper of the location. Create a bulletin board display of the items sent, connecting them with yarn to the location on an Illinois map.

2. If there are subdivisions being built near your city, have students investigate the origin of the names being given to subdivisions. For example, does or did "Fox Run" have foxes running through it before development? Determine reasons why developers give their subdivisions names and why the names may not be accurate descriptions of place characteristics.

3. If students are doing coordinate graphing in math, compare how graphing coordinates and using the Earth reference systems are similar and different. (Similar: some Earth reference systems use lines to give an exact location as a coordinate does; both have four quadrants. Different: in mathematics, the x axis coordinate is given first followed by the y axis coordinate; in Earth reference systems, the y axis coordinate (north or south) is given first followed by the x axis coordinate (east or west); mathematics uses + and - to indicate in which quadrant the coordinate is located, the global Earth reference system uses N, S, E, or W to indicate quadrant.)

Special Information

Illinois Highway Maps can be obtained FREE of charge from the Secretary of State's Office or at any of the Driving Test Facilities. Personnel are very cooperative in providing classroom sets.

Reference books about Illinois can be found in your school library, your local library, or at Visitor's Centers. Some that are very helpful in providing origin of name information and/or places to write are:

Black, Harry G. Trails To Illinois Heritage. Hammond,Indiana: HMB Publications, 1982.

Blashfield, Jean F. Awesome Almanac: Illinois. Fontana, WI: B & B Publishing, Inc., 1993.

Brevet's Illinois Historical Markers and Sites. Sioux Falls, South Dakota: Brevet Press, Inc., 1976.

Encyclopedia of Illinois. New York: Somerset Publishers, Inc., 1994.

Illinois Guide & Gazetteer. Chicago: Rand McNally & Co.,1969.