



Day 1, 2 Age of Exploration Unit
120 Minutes

The World Map

(Adaptable for Grades 3–9)

Lesson Plan: Understanding the World—Foundations for the Age of Exploration (Grades 3–9)

Overview

Students will explore the world's continents, oceans, and major navigational concepts using several interactive tools. This lesson builds the geographic foundation needed to understand why exploration happened, how explorers traveled, and how geography shaped global contact during the Age of Exploration. It is heavy on learning to identify the continents and oceans and leverages the site's online games and contests to reinforce this knowledge.

Learning Objectives

Grades 3–5

Students will:

- Identify all seven continents and five oceans on a map.
- Explain why knowing world geography is important for explorers.
- Use the World Map Sigma activity to locate regions relevant to early exploration.
- Demonstrate basic navigation using cardinal directions and global landmarks.

Grades 6–9

Students will:

- Analyze how geography influenced trade routes, exploration, and colonization.

- Use Navigation Master to practice advanced navigation skills (latitude, longitude, bearings).
- Explain how limited geographic knowledge shaped European exploration in the 1400s–1600s.
- Compare modern and historical maps to understand evolving worldviews.

Materials Needed

- Devices with internet access
- World Map Sigma interactive activity
- Continents & Oceans Game
- Navigation Master Game (for middle–high grades)
- Projector or large display for whole-class modeling

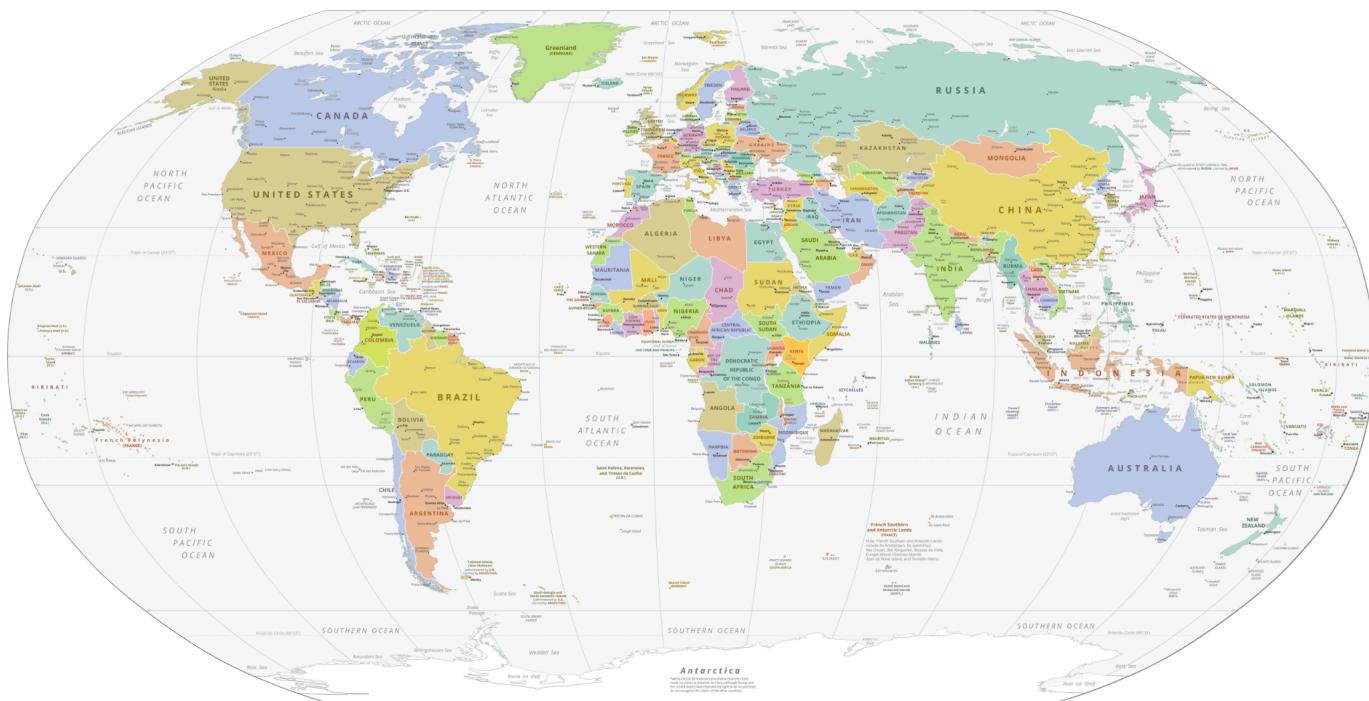
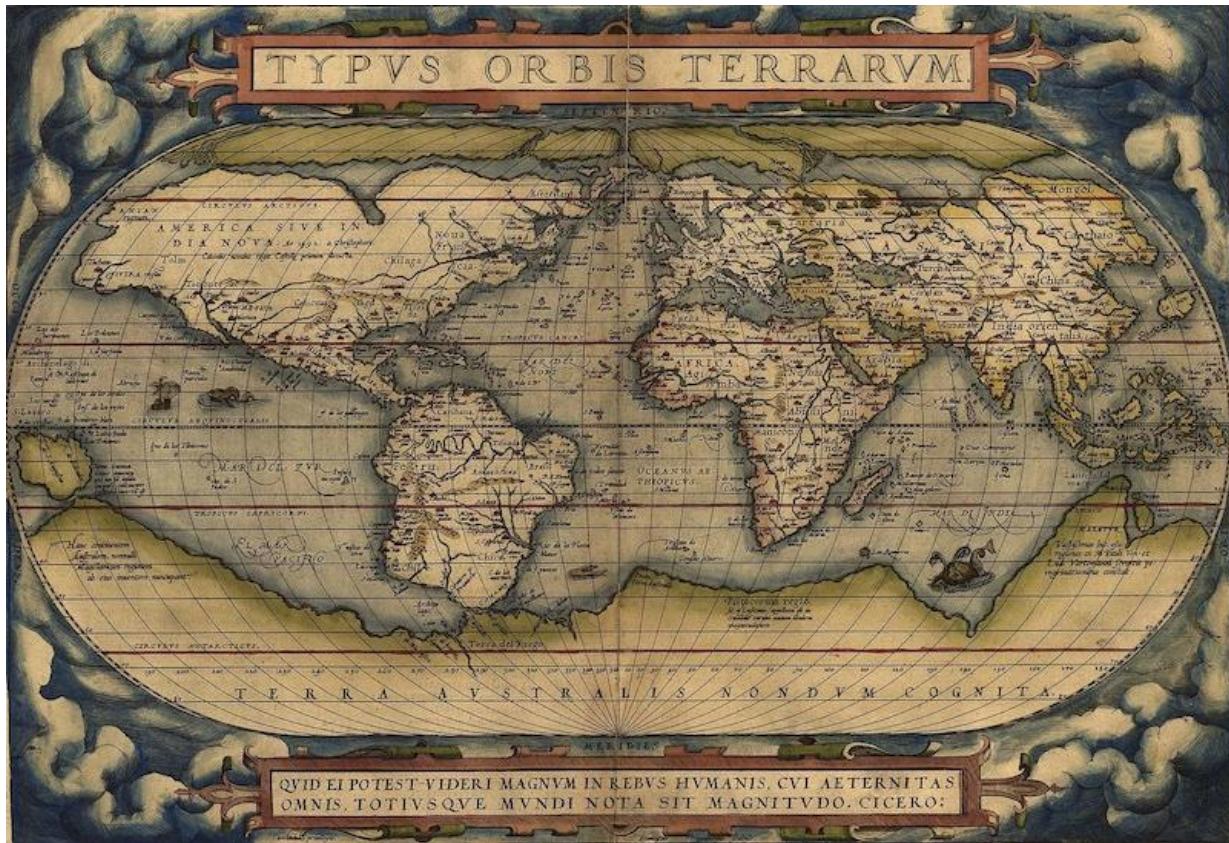
Lesson Procedure

1. Warm-Up (Whole Class Discussion – 10-15 minutes)

Teacher prompts:

- **“Why do you think explorers needed to understand the world’s layout?”**
- **“If you were sailing across the ocean, what would you need to know to avoid getting lost?”**
- **“How might the world have looked different to explorers 500 years ago?”**

Project an image of an old explorer map and one of a current world map. Have students compare and contrast.



Review the continents and oceans with students while projecting the modern map (20 minutes)

Use the continents and oceans slideshow.

<https://learnaboutamerica.co./worldmapgame/geo.pptx>

2. Mini-Lesson: Why Geography = Power During Exploration (10 minutes)

Key Points to Emphasize

- Explorers like Columbus, Magellan, and da Gama ventured into unknown waters.
- Without understanding continents, oceans, wind patterns, latitude, and compass directions, exploration would have been impossible.
- Early maps were inaccurate; explorers helped fill in the world's blanks.
- Geographic knowledge led to:
 - expanded trade
 - global cultural exchange
 - the spread of technologies
 - colonization and conflict

3. Activities

World Map Sigma (Grades 3–9) (30 minutes)

Have students use this program to build and color a world map with all continents and oceans labeled. As they drag the labels onto the map, an alert will appear telling students if they've dragged the label to the correct place. If so, they unlock continent-specific stamps they can use to decorate their map.

<https://learnaboutamerica.com/american-history/explorers-and-the-age-of-exploration/explorers-games-and-fun-stuff/world-map-sigma>

Extensions/Challenges for older kids

- **Interactive World Map and World Map Games** - This awesome application allows students to learn basic information about the nations of the world by scrolling over them. It also features several games that reinforce nation and oceans/seas identification. Very fun!

<https://learnaboutamerica.com/american-history/explorers-and-the-age-of-exploration/explorers-games-and-fun-stuff/interactive-world-map-and-world-map-games>

- **International Pizza Delivery** - In International Pizza Delivery, users must deliver pizzas to all corners of the world using their latitude and longitude skills. The object is to deliver as many pizzas as possible in three minutes. For each successful delivery, the user earns the flag of the nation in which the pizza was delivered to. These flags may be printed out at the end of the game

<https://learnaboutamerica.com/american-history/explorers-and-the-age-of-exploration/explorers-games-and-fun-stuff/international-pizza-delivery-latitude-and-longitude>

Teacher Tool

- **Latitude and Longitude Worksheet Maker** - This activity allows teachers to print customized world map worksheets in which students must identify the latitude and longitude of various shapes.

<https://learnaboutamerica.com/admin/pages/american-history/explorers-and-the-age-of-exploration/explorers-games-and-fun-stuff/latitude-longitude-worksheet-generator/:preview>

Continents and Oceans Online Game (Grades 3–9) (20 minutes)

Purpose: Reinforce memorization through interactive practice.

<https://learnaboutamerica.com/american-geography/usa-geography-games/continents-and-oceans>

Grades 3–5 Tasks

- Play the game twice; record improvements and identify any errors.
- Pair-share: Which continent was hardest to find? Which ocean is largest?

Grades 6–9 Tasks

- Complete the game under time pressure; aim for mastery.
- Reflect on how such knowledge would affect real navigation and mapmaking.

Navigation Master (Grades 6–9 Primary / Optional for 5th) (20 minutes)

<https://learnaboutamerica.com/american-history/explorers-and-the-age-of-exploration/explorers-games-and-fun-stuff/navigation-master>

Navigation Master is an interactive world-map activity where students analyze routes between two randomly selected global cities on different continents. Using a draggable and rotatable map-scale tool, they estimate both the direction and great-circle distance of the straight path between the cities. After submitting their answers, students receive an instant report card grading their directional accuracy and distance estimation, helping them build real geographic reasoning and navigation skills.

Purpose: Connect geographic knowledge to real navigational challenges.

Grades 3–5 (modified version)

Cardinal Directions (Grades 3 - 5) (15 minutes)

<https://learnaboutamerica.com/american-history/explorers-and-the-age-of-exploration/explorers-games-and-fun-stuff/cardinal-directions-game>

Cardinal directions is a simple game that reinforces the determination of cardinal directions (N, S, W, E, NE, NW, SE, SW) and left, right, up, down.
