

Geographic Educators of Nebraska

Advocating geographic education for all Nebraskans

Historical Geography of Nebraska's County Names

Use the county names to trace the human footprint on the landscape of Nebraska by having students line up on the sides of the map holding a cone. They then find counties on the map to coordinate with instructions.

Students will develop their mental map of Nebraska by discovering some of the history of Nebraska's county names.

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Grade Level	Any
Class Period(s)	1 (20-40 minutes)

Nebraska Social Studies Standards

SS 4.3.1

Students will explore where (spatial) and why people, places and environments are organized in the state.

SS 4.3.1.a Read local and state maps and atlases to locate physical and human features in Nebraska.

SS 4.3.1.b Apply map skills to analyze physical/political maps of the state.

SS 4.3.1.c Analyze why things in Nebraska are located where they are in Nebraska.

Nebraska Science Standards

Nebraska Language Arts Standards

Nebraska Math Standards

Overview

Historical Geography of Nebraska's County Names provides students an opportunity to develop a mental map of the state of Nebraska, while at the same time discovering the naming conventions for the state's counties.

Purpose

In this lesson students will develop a mental map of Nebraska by discovering some of the history of Nebraska's county names.

Key Vocabulary

County – The largest administrative division of a state.

Materials

- Giant Nebraska Map
- Colored Cones
- Blue Rope
- Red Rope
- Teacher Guide/Key

Objectives

The student will be able to:

1. Develop a mental map of Nebraska by discovering some of the history of Nebraska's county names.

Procedures

1. Begin the lesson by having the students form a circle around the map. Each student should have a cone from the Nebraska Map Materials Tub.
2. Using the teacher guide, direct the students to identify the names and locations of Nebraska counties relating to Physical Features, Plants/Animals, Native American Tribes/Words, Missouri/Platte River (Locations), French Words, Oregon/Mormon Trail (Locations), Revolutionary War Generals, Nebraska Governors, Presidents, Civil War Generals, and the only county named after a female.

Assessment

As an introduction to the counties of Nebraska, the assessment related to this lesson is formative. A class discussion and the use of movement to the different counties of the state will provide the teacher with data relating to the students' understanding of Nebraska, county locations, and names.

Extensions

Extending upon the learning of the county names would be to have students conduct historical research on a county of their choosing.

Sources

Dr. Randy Bertolas, Wayne State College.

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Lesson Procedure:

1. **Physical Features** (5 students with cones step up): Before humans, there was just the landscape. Place your cones on a county named for a physical feature.
(*Box Butte, Rock, Saliine, Scotts Bluff, & Valley*)
2. **Plant or Animal** (5 new students with cones step up): Then came living things. Place your cones on a county named for any type of plant or animal.
(*Antelope, Buffalo, Cedar, & Red Willow*)
3. **Native American Words** (7 new students with cones step up): Then the first human beings came to Nebraska. Place your cones on a county named for a Native American tribe or word.
(*Cheyenne, Dakota, Keya Paha, Nemaha, Otoe, Pawnee, & Sioux*)
4. **Missouri and Platte Rivers** (ask for several students in each rope group): Take the blue ropes and lay them on the map to trace the Missouri and Platte Rivers.
5. **French Words** (2 new students with cones step up): French fur trappers were some of the earliest Europeans to traverse Nebraska, yet left relatively little place-name evidence behind. Place your cones on a county named for a word in French.
(*Loup “wolf” & Platte “flat”*).
6. **Oregon and Mormon Trails** (ask for several students in each rope group): Take two different colored ropes (red & blue) and lay them on the map to trace the Oregon and Mormon Trails. These trails were used as the primary routes across Nebraska during the Great American Migration of the 1830’s to 1860’s. Why did these routes follow opposite banks of the Platte River as they headed westward?
(*Hostility between Mormon and Non-Mormon groups.*)
7. **Revolutionary War Generals** (3 new students with cones step up): Who should new counties be named after in territorial (1854-1867) Nebraska? Place your cones on a county named for an American Revolutionary War (1775 – 1783) General.
(*Knox, Wayne, & Washington*)
8. **Nebraska Governors** (4 new students with cones step up): Looking at the distribution of counties named for governors can give insight into settlement patterns. Nebraska becomes a territory in 1854. Place your cones on a county named for one of Nebraska’s Territorial Governors.
(*Burt, Cuming, Richardson, & Saunders*).
(6 new students with cones step up): Nebraska became a state in 1867. Place your cones on a county named for one of Nebraska’s State Governors
(*Butler, Boyd, Dawes, Furnas, Nance, & Thayer*)
9. **U.S. Presidents** (12 students with cones step up): A total of 24 Presidents have had U.S. counties named in their honor. Place your cones on a Nebraska county named for a U.S. President.
(*Adams, Arthur, Fillmore, Hayes, Garfield, Grant, Jefferson, Lincoln, Madison, Pierce, Polk, & Washington*)

10. **Civil War Generals** (10 students with cones step up): Place your cones on a county named for an American Civil War (1861-65) General.

(Custer, Grant, Hayes, Hooker, Howard, Logan, McPherson, Sheridan, Sherman, Thomas)

Two things to note: Why only Union Army Generals? Where are these counties clustered and why?

(The Sandhills are opening up to settlers)

11. **Only County Named after a Woman:** Relatively few of the 3,144 counties in the United States are named after a woman. In Nebraska there is only one. Place your cone on it.

(Merrick County was named after Elvira Merrick, wife of a territorial legislator. The first county seat of Elvira disappeared when the railroad went through Central City instead. Of the roughly 3,000 counties in the United States, perhaps 50 are named for women.)