

VERBAL MAP MAKING

Geographic map reading and mapping are taught in the first four grades of many schools. The only change necessary would be to continually emphasize that the map must reflect the structure of the territory. In addition, students can learn that we can construct verbal maps. Drills like the following examples would fit in to an English program.

1. Imagine that you have just been transported magically to some remote site. It could be next door or the moon. I want you to write, on one page, instructions on how we can join you. Remember this is a map and a structurally sound map must have the ability to lead us from one place to another. (Pass the finished papers around and let students comment on how effective the maps are.)
2. I want you to write a one page a description starting with, "This is how I..." It could be brush my teeth, take out the trash, walk my dog, etc. Remember, this also constitutes a map, and if your map is effective, someone else could use it to do the same thing. Once the work is completed, pass the papers around and find out if your classmates believed they could follow the instructions, or understand how the writer did what he did.
3. I want you to create a one page description of someone. It can be a classmate, an entertainer, or some other famous person. You can't use a fact that in itself identifies the individual, such as "he is president of the US". Ask students to read some of their "maps" and see if the person can be identified.

After lesson 3, discuss the following information with your class. Remind your students that when we give instructions, describe an object, situation, or person we are making a map. Our maps should be checked to see if they really reflect the territory. If they do not, then our maps will lead us astray. Eventually, we need to start dwelling upon correcting the maps we have made of the world outside of our skins and of the people around us. Ultimately, the maps we make of people can create problems if they are not accurate.

Further, we make maps of ourselves. The maps we make of ourselves determine, to some extent, our sanity. Have you ever said, "Some people live in a world of their own, and that world is not real?" Their maps of themselves are corrupted. That is, their maps do not reflect the territory, in this case, the real "them." "Have you checked your map of yourself lately?"