

Parts of a Map

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Maps are one of the most important tools on Earth. They help us find places. They show us Earth's mountains and oceans. To read a map, you need to understand its different parts.

Maps are paper diagrams of the Earth's surface. The first part of a map you need to know is its **title**. The title tells you what the map is showing. A map of the streets in your town would have your town's name as its title. A **compass rose** helps you to find direction. Although it is not a flower, it is still important. A simple compass rose may look like a plus sign with arrows. At the ends of the arrows the four **cardinal directions** would be listed. They are **north, south, east, and west**. The top arrow would point to the top of the map, which is north. The bottom arrow points south to the bottom of the map.



The next important part of the map is the **symbols**. Maps show a smaller picture of the Earth's surface. You can't draw a life-size mountain on a small piece of paper. That is why cartographers use small pictures. Symbols are the points, lines, and patterns that are listed in the **map key**. The key is a box located in one of the bottom corners of the map. Symbols have different colors depending on the physical feature the drawing represents. For example, water features like rivers, lakes, and oceans are colored blue. Trees, woods, orchards, and shrubs are usually colored green. Red is used for important roads. What about buildings and mountains? Well, buildings are colored black, and mountains and hills are colored brown.

Cartographers also use a special way to measure distances on maps. They use **scale**. A scale is a smaller distance that is used to represent or show a larger distance. If maps were drawn showing the actual distance between places that it are on Earth, you would not be able to fold the road map. Forget about putting it in your parents' car. Most maps use a scale with inches and miles. They can also use feet and kilometers. For example, one inch may equal fifty miles. So, let's say you are trying to measure the distance between your hometown and New York City. What will you do? Well, you can use a ruler. Line up the ruler on the map so that the two points are in a straight line. It may not be perfectly straight, but close enough. Make sure the mark labeled zero is at your starting point. Now measure in inches to your ending point, New York City. How many inches do you have? Let's say you measured five inches. Well, for every inch, the scale says it is about 50 miles on land. You can add 50 five times or multiply 50 times 5. Your hometown is about 250 miles from New York City. You have just used a **bar scale**.

The last part of a map is called a **grid**. A grid is a system of vertical and horizontal lines. **Street maps** may use grids to locate streets within a town or city. Each vertical line is labeled along the top of the map with letters from the alphabet. The horizontal lines will be labeled along the sides of the map with numbers, usually starting from one. If you want to find a certain location, there is an **index**. An index is a list of the locations and their letter/number spots. For example, your street may be located at A5 on the grid. That means you find "A" and move your finger down the map until it lines up with "5." You have found your street.

If you remember these important parts of a map, it should be easy to find your way.

Name _____



Date _____

Parts of a Map

Questions

_____ 1. Symbols that show water are colored _____.

- A. Blue
- B. Black
- C. Red
- D. Brown

2. What is a scale?

3. Why is a compass rose on a map?

_____ 4. The top of the compass rose points to south on the map.

- A. False
- B. True

5. What is a map grid?

_____ 6. On a map of your town, your school building would be what color?

- A. Brown
- B. Black
- C. Green
- D. Blue

_____ 7. A _____ tells what area the map is showing.

- A. Title
- B. Symbol
- C. Compass rose
- D. Key

_____ 8. Cartographers use scale so they can draw longer distances on Earth in a smaller size on maps.

- A. True
- B. False

