

Cora's Great American Map Adventure!

Materials Needed:

- Large physical map of the USA (puzzle map recommended)
- Printable blank outline maps of the USA and specific regions/states
- Computer or tablet with internet access
- Construction paper
- Markers, colored pencils, crayons
- Printouts of selected historical and current US maps (e.g., one from 1800s, one modern political)
- Index cards
- Optional: Modeling clay, blue yarn, small craft items for 3D map elements

Part 1: Welcome, Map Explorer Cora! (15 mins)

Warm-up "Map Mystery": Show Cora a small, unlabeled section of an interesting map (historical or unusual current one). Ask: "Cora, what do you think this map shows? What clues can you find?"

Introduction: Discuss: "What are maps? Why do we use them? Have you ever used a map?" Introduce today's adventure: "We're going on a Great American Map Adventure to explore the USA, past and present!" Briefly show examples: a colorful current political map, a simpler historical map, a physical map. Point out how they look different and show different things.

Part 2: Decoding the Secrets of Maps (20 mins)

Map Features & Symbols:

- Introduce key map elements: Title, Compass Rose (North, South, East, West), Legend/Key, Scale (simple explanation: it helps us know how far things are in real life).
- Discuss common symbols: Stars for capitals, dots for cities, blue lines for rivers, textured areas or colors for mountains.

Activity - "Symbol Sleuth": Give Cora a simple map with a legend. Have her find 3-5 symbols on the map and explain what they mean using the legend.

Part 3: Journey Across America - The Big Picture (30 mins)

US Puzzle Map Fun: Use a large puzzle map of the USA. As Cora puts it together, discuss:

- **Major Regions:** Northeast, Southeast, Midwest, Southwest, West. Lightly introduce one key characteristic of each (e.g., Northeast has big cities; Southwest is desert-like).
- **Key States and Capitals:** Start with your home state and capital. Then, find at least 9 other states and their capitals, like California (Sacramento), Texas (Austin), Florida (Tallahassee), New York (Albany). Ask: "Can you find [State]? What's its capital?"
- **Mighty Rivers:** Trace the Mississippi River, Colorado River, and Ohio River. Discuss their importance (travel, water, borders). "Imagine you're in a canoe on this river! What might you see?"
- **Majestic Mountains:** Point out the Rocky Mountains (West) and Appalachian Mountains (East). "How do mountains change how people live or where cities are built?"

Interactive Online Exploration: Use Google Maps or Google Earth (with supervision) to "fly" to some discussed locations like the Grand Canyon (Colorado River) or a peak in the Rockies. Switch between satellite view (physical) and map view (political).

Part 4: Time Traveling with Maps (25 mins)

Historical vs. Current Maps:

- Show a historical map of the US (e.g., from the 1800s) alongside a current political map.
- **Discussion:** "Cora, what differences do you see between these two maps? Are there states missing on the old map? Do the borders look different? Why do you think maps change over time?" (Talk about exploration, new states joining, territories changing).

Focus on a Historical Topic: Example: Show a map related to the Oregon Trail or Lewis and Clark's expedition. Discuss: "How did maps help these pioneers? What challenges might they have faced with the maps of their time compared to our maps today?"

Part 5: Exploring America's Diverse Landscapes (Physical Characteristics) (25 mins)

Region Deep Dive 1: The Rocky Mountain Region

- Use a physical map and online images/videos. Discuss:
- **Terrain:** High, rugged mountains, deep valleys, plateaus.
- **Climate:** Varies with elevation; generally snowy winters, cooler summers in mountains.
- **Vegetation:** Pine forests at lower elevations, tundra (small plants, no trees) at high altitudes.

Region Deep Dive 2: The Southeast Coastal Plain

- Use a physical map and online images/videos. Discuss:
- **Terrain:** Flat, low-lying land, sandy beaches, swamps, marshes.
- **Climate:** Hot, humid summers, mild winters.
- **Vegetation:** Palm trees, pine forests (different types than Rockies), marsh grasses.

Compare & Contrast: "How is living in the Rocky Mountains different from living on the Southeast coast just based on the land and climate? What kind of outdoor activities might be popular in each place?"

Part 6: People Across America (Human Geographic Characteristics) (20 mins)

Revisit Regions with a Human Focus:

- **Rocky Mountain Region:** Discuss human aspects like lower population density (fewer people spread out), big industries like tourism (skiing, national parks, hiking), mining, ranching.
- **Southeast Coastal Plain:** Discuss human aspects like port cities for shipping, agriculture (cotton, citrus, rice), tourism (beaches), and often higher population density in coastal cities.

Discussion: "How do the physical characteristics (mountains, coastlines, climate) we talked about affect what people do for jobs, how they build their homes, or what food they grow in these regions?"

Introduce a simple thematic map (if available, or discuss the concept): e.g., a population density map (shows where many or few people live) or a map showing major agricultural areas. "What does this map tell us about where people live or what they grow?"

Part 7: Cora's Custom Map Creation! (30-40 mins)

Challenge: "Cora, now it's your turn to be a master mapmaker!"

Task: Ask Cora to choose one US state or a small, defined region (e.g., "New England," "The Pacific Northwest Coast," or her home state if she prefers).

Provide a blank outline map of her chosen area OR have her draw a basic outline on construction

paper.

Instructions for her map:

1. Give her map a creative **Title**.
2. Include a **Compass Rose** (N, E, S, W).
3. Mark and label: The state(s) within her chosen area, the capital(s) if applicable, at least one major river, and one major mountain range or distinct physical feature (like a coastline or large lake) relevant to her area.
4. Add at least 2 symbols for physical features (e.g., draw little green triangles for a forest, blue wavy lines for the ocean, brown peaks for mountains) and create a **Legend** (or Key) to explain her symbols.
5. Optional creative touch: Add one symbol representing a human characteristic (e.g., a tiny building for a city, a picture of a crop for farming area, a fish for fishing area) and add it to the legend.

Offer craft supplies for creativity (colors, markers). If using optional 3D items: blue yarn for rivers, small crumpled paper for mountains, etc.

Part 8: Show and Tell & Map Detective Review (15 mins)

Cora Presents: Cora shares her map, explaining its title, the features she included, her legend, and one interesting thing she learned about her chosen area.

Review Game - "Map Facts Challenge": Use index cards with questions. If Cora answers correctly, she gets the card. Examples:

- "Name a major river system in the United States."
- "What is the name of the mountain range located primarily on the East Coast of the US?"
- "What symbol is often used on a map to show a capital city?"
- "Tell me one difference between a historical map from the 1700s and a map of the US today."
- "Name a physical characteristic of the [region Cora mapped or another discussed region]."
- "What is one way people use maps in their daily lives?"

Wrap-up: Congratulate Cora on her excellent work as a map explorer and cartographer! Reiterate that maps are powerful tools that help us understand our world, both past and present. Ask: "What was your favorite part of our map adventure today?"