

# Lesson Plan: Mapping America's Story

A 3-day exploration into how the United States grew from 13 colonies to 50 states, designed for a 10-year-old student.

---

## Materials Needed

- Large piece of poster board or butcher paper
  - Pencil and fine-point black marker
  - Ruler
  - Scissors
  - Glue stick
  - Construction paper or tissue paper in various colors (at least 8 different colors)
  - Crayons, colored pencils, or markers
  - Access to the internet for short videos and maps
  - Printable outline map of the United States (for reference)
  - Notebook or paper for the "Design a State" activity
- 

## Day 1: From Colonies to a Country

### 1. Learning Objectives

- Ann will identify the original 13 Colonies on a map.
- Ann will explain in her own words why the Louisiana Purchase was so important for the country's growth.
- Ann will begin creating a layered map showing the first stages of U.S. expansion.

### 2. Engagement: The "What If" Hook (5 minutes)

Start with a fun question: "Ann, look at a map of the United States today. Now, what if our country had never grown? What if it was still just the original 13 Colonies along the Atlantic coast? What would be different about life today? Where would the capital be? Would we even have things like national parks in the west?" Discuss her ideas to get her thinking about the scale of the country.

### 3. Instruction: The First Big Steps (15 minutes)

Using an online map, point out the original 13 Colonies. Explain that they were like the "seeds" of the country. Then, tell the story of the Louisiana Purchase. Keep it simple and exciting!

- **Key Idea:** "President Thomas Jefferson bought a huge piece of land from France. It was a fantastic deal that instantly doubled the size of the country! No one even knew exactly what was out there, which is why he sent Lewis and Clark to explore."
- Watch a short, engaging video about the Louisiana Purchase (search for "Louisiana Purchase for kids").

### 4. Craft Activity: The Layered Map, Part 1 (25 minutes)

This will be the main project for all three days.

1. On the large poster board, have Ann lightly trace or draw the outline of the modern,
-

contiguous United States (the main body, without Alaska or Hawaii for now).

2. Choose one color of construction paper for the 13 Colonies. Have her trace the shape of that territory onto the paper, cut it out, and glue it onto the poster board map in the correct location. With the black marker, she can label it "The 13 Colonies (1776)."
3. Choose a second color for the Louisiana Purchase. Trace its shape, cut it out, and glue it right next to the colonies. Label it "Louisiana Purchase (1803)."
4. Talk about how much bigger the map already looks with just one purchase! This visual representation is very powerful.

## Day 2: Trails, Troubles, and New Territories

### 1. Learning Objectives

- Ann will be able to describe one major challenge pioneers faced on a westward trail like the Oregon Trail.
- Ann will identify the territories gained from Spain, Mexico, and Great Britain.
- Ann will continue adding to her layered map.

### 2. Engagement: Pack Your Wagon! (10 minutes)

Say, "Imagine your family is moving to Oregon in the 1840s. You have one small covered wagon for everything you own. You can only bring **five** essential items for the journey, not including food or water. What do you bring and why?" Discuss her choices. A tool? A book? A toy? This helps her connect with the difficult choices and harsh realities the pioneers faced.

### 3. Instruction: Filling in the Map (15 minutes)

Tell the story of how the rest of the country was filled in. Turn it into a narrative rather than just a list of facts.

- **Florida:** "The U.S. bought Florida from Spain. It was a swampy, difficult place to manage, so Spain was happy to sell it!"
- **Texas:** "Texas was its own country for a little while! After winning independence from Mexico, it decided it wanted to join the United States."
- **Oregon Country:** "Both the U.S. and Great Britain claimed this land. For a while, they agreed to share it, but eventually, they drew a line and peacefully divided it."
- **Mexican Cession:** "After a war with Mexico, the U.S. gained a huge piece of land that now makes up California, Nevada, Utah, and more."

### 4. Craft Activity: The Layered Map, Part 2 (20 minutes)

Time to add to the map! For each new territory (Florida, Texas, Oregon, Mexican Cession), Ann will:

1. Choose a new color of construction paper.
2. Trace the shape of the territory.
3. Cut it out and glue it onto the poster board map.
4. Label it with its name and the approximate year it was acquired.

At the end of the day, the map of the main United States will be almost complete! She can see with her own eyes how the puzzle pieces came together.

## Day 3: The Final Pieces and Statehood

### 1. Learning Objectives

- Ann will identify Alaska and Hawaii as the 49th and 50th states.
- Ann will demonstrate her understanding of land acquisition and statehood by designing her own theoretical 51st state.
- Ann will complete her layered map project.

### 2. Engagement: Far-Flung Places (5 minutes)

Show Ann pictures of Alaska's glaciers and Hawaii's volcanoes. Ask, "These places are so far away and so different from the rest of the country. How do you think they became part of the United States? Were they connected by land? Did we buy them?"

### 3. Instruction: The Last Frontiers (10 minutes)

Briefly tell the stories of the final two states.

- **Alaska:** "The U.S. bought Alaska from Russia. At the time, many people thought it was a silly purchase and called it 'Seward's Icebox' because it was just ice and snow. But they were wrong! It was full of gold, oil, and other valuable resources."
- **Hawaii:** "Hawaii was its own kingdom for a long time, but it eventually became a U.S. territory and then, much later, our 50th state in 1959."

### 4. Final Craft Touches: The Layered Map, Part 3 (10 minutes)

1. Have Ann add the final small piece to the main map: the Gadsden Purchase (a small sliver of land bought from Mexico, now part of Arizona and New Mexico).
2. On separate, smaller pieces of colored paper, have her draw, cut out, and label Alaska and Hawaii. She can glue them on the sides of the poster board, just like on a real map.
3. Her beautiful, layered map of how the U.S. grew is now complete!

### 5. Creative Application Activity: Design the 51st State! (20 minutes)

This is where Ann gets to show what she's learned in a fun, creative way. Tell her she gets to invent the 51st state. In her notebook, she should:

1. **Give it a name.** (Example: The Isle of Ann)
2. **Draw its shape and location.** (Is it an island in the Pacific? A colony on the Moon? A piece of land we buy from Canada?)
3. **Design its flag.** What symbols represent her new state?
4. **Write a short story (3-4 sentences) of how it became part of the U.S.** Did we buy it? Did its people vote to join? Was it discovered?
5. **List two reasons why it would be a good state.** (Example: It has rare minerals, it's a great vacation spot, it has a strategic location for science.)

Have her present her new state to you. This fun project assesses her understanding of the core concepts (how land is acquired, what makes a state valuable) without needing a formal test.