

Activity Guidelines.

Aerial Maps

All ages

Group size: up to 30

Up to 2 hours



Ready

One of the activities I enjoy most is making a sculpture map of the countryside around the place where I am working with my group, using found objects.

There are several ways of doing this, but it is always advisable to check an OS map first...so that you at least know in what direction the main landscape features are.

There are three main elements to a sculpture map:

- ◆ Something that represents the group
- ◆ The cardinal directions, E,S,W,N.
- ◆ Noticeable landscape features – like hills, churches, roads, big trees, ditches, etc

- ◆ There is no fixed scale to a sculpture map. Depending on the skills and focus of the group you are working with a map can vary from messy and vaguely useful to highly accurate and artistic. Our job as leader is to guide the process and inspire the group to have fun and create something they are proud of!

If needed we can draw a circle around the central point by using two sticks and a piece of string or long stick to draw a perimeter to the circle, within which the map will be made

Get set

Choose an area where you can see at least some landscape features in the distance. With, or without a map in front of you, imagine you are a bird of prey, soaring high up above the land. Looking down you can see the countryside stretching out around you. You can see key features, like lakes, woods, villages, hedges, roads and estuaries. Spiralling back down, the land around you becomes fixed in your brain.

Go!

Representing the group

To make an aerial map we start by getting everyone in a toe to toe circle. A straight stick is then stuck a short way into the ground in the middle of the circle.

"You have heard of the North and south Poles? This is our Centre Pole! We are going to make a map of the important features of this landscape, here and now. We are all standing around the pole. Let's all find a small stick to make a ring of sticks around the central pole."

If needed we can draw a circle around the central point by using two sticks and a piece of string or a long stick to draw a perimeter to the circle, within which we will complete the map.

Marking out the cardinal directions

"The North and South poles are actual places, the East and West are more 'directions' than places. How do we find out where North is?"

Someone says, "Use a compass!"

"North is easy to locate with a compass, but remember that magnetic north is different to true north. In the Northern Hemisphere there are other ways of finding out which way North is. The most reliable way during the day is to measure the length of shadow thrown by a stick placed vertically in the ground. The shortest shadow is thrown when the sun is highest in the sky, due south. However, you need the sun to be shining!"

"The other way to find true North is to look for the star that stands still, the North Star, and most survival books will tell us to do that. What they won't tell us is one of the Paiute Nation legends from North America associated with the North Star."

"The story goes that one of three ancestral goats, who was a fantastic climber - in fact the best in the land - climbed to the top of a particularly high and dangerous pinnacle of rock one day. Having reached the top he found that he could not get back down without jumping, which would mean certain death. Staying on top of the spire would also mean death, from starvation, because not enough grass grew there to keep the goat alive. He was stuck at the tip of the rocks, not knowing what to do, unable to move. When the goat brother cried out for help from the top of the spire the Creator took pity him, carried his spirit high in the sky, turned it into a star and placed it where all the other stars move around it. So it is, to this day people navigate by this star, and some remember to give thanks to their goat brother, whose spirit unceasingly guides travellers."

"You may think that the best way to find out where East is involves getting up at dawn, but that doesn't necessarily reveal the position of East. The sun only rises due East at the equinoxes, around the 21st of March and 21st September. The best way to locate East is by finding North first, then drawing a line to the centre of your circle and then going equidistant past the centre to mark the South. East and West can then be marked off by crossing this line at right angles."

(After that long lecture it is time to mark out the four main directions!)

"Who is standing in the North of our circle?"

"Cleo, I want you to find a suitable something to be the North Pole. It can be a stick or a rock..." Have Cleo place it on the outer edge of space you are making the map in.

A line is then drawn in the earth from the North Pole to the centre Pole and beyond to mark out the South Pole. The person in the place of the South Pole can go off and get a South Pole. We can then mark out the East and West.

To mark out East and West I ask the participants to think of a colour that represents the direction to them, and to then go and find little bits of that colour in nature to place at the edge of the map...often it is sunrise yellows for the East and Sunset reds for west.

Noticeable features

When the cardinal directions are on the map on the ground then we can start adding noticeable features to the map. Exactly what type of noticeable features rather depends on where you are...it may be a village, school buildings, a road, a church, a river...you are probably limited only by your knowledge of your place and your model making skills. I like to ask the children what their favourite places are and then start asking groups of children to start making mini versions of aspects of the landscape as they mention and notice them.

Take time for people to stop and notice what is being built and how aligned the mini structures are within the map. To encourage correct alignment I ask the children to stand behind the map and look at what they are making, and make sure that it lines up with the central stick in the middle of the circle.

THIS ACTIVITY IS AN EXCERPT FROM MY BOOK [I LOVE MY WORLD](#)