

Claims Map Activity

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Goals: To help students see that a claim is a map for the reader (and ultimately the writer as well) and to illustrate what makes a claim effective

Have students count off by three. (They don't need to move into groups; they just need to remember their numbers.)

Put the numbers 1, 2, and 3 on the board.

Assign each number and its corresponding students a map to draw.

The first map should be very broad (a map of the entire United States, for example). The second map should be a bit narrower (a map of Colorado). And the third map should be very specific (draw a map from the classroom to dorm room). Give students 5 minutes to work on their maps.

Have students briefly look at each other's maps (there should be a different map on each side of any one student).

Then ask students to find specific locations on each other's maps. For example, ask how many students could find the instructor's hometown or another fairly obscure city in the U.S. (Damascus, MD, or Troy, NY, work well) on map 1. Chances are no one can.

Next ask students to find a remote location in Colorado for map 2 (the Brass Ass Casino in Cripple Creek works well for this one). Again, chances are no one can.

Then ask students how many of them could find their way from the classroom to another student's place of abode (dorms, apartment, etc.). Here, most students will be able to.

Lead a discussion about why the first two maps are less effective than the third. Points to make:

- 1) a generally focused map can't be used to locate a very specific site;
- 2) a map's scale must match its purpose;
- 3) from a map user's point of view, finding one's way is completely dependent upon the level of scale needed for the task—that is the level of detail must be appropriate for the kind of navigation being done: Are you trying to get a general idea of where a mountain range is or are you trying to get to someone's house?.

This activity connects nicely to the writing of claims. The level of focus in a claim will establish (or fail to establish) the purposes of the writer. In general, it is far more effective to write a map from the class to the dorm—that is, to a more specific claim—than to stay in generalities. Readers, like map users, need to know where they're going and how to get from here to there.