Instructional Strategy

Help, I'm TRAPPED in a map!

Developing spatial thinking in our students is critical to their ability to analyze and interpret any visual information they encounter. Interpreting maps, such as thematic maps, allows students to analyze much more complex information than would be possible if the same information were presented in a chart or table. But, too often, students fail to spend enough time completely analyzing the map. They hit the highlights and then move on, and ultimately fail to develop sophisticated spatial thinking abilities. The "Modes of Spatial Thinking", as outlined by Carol and Phil Gersmehl, are structured to assist students with complex map analysis. For younger students, most of the modes may be a bit too sophisticated. The TRAPPED Map Analysis technique is designed to provide a more simple structure for younger students to begin undertaking rigorous map analysis and begin sharpening their spatial thinking skills.

T	Topic	What is the topic of the map? This is usually found in the title. In addition, it is important to investigate the key in order to understand how the topic of the map is depicted.
R	Region	As you analyze the map, you may see that there are areas where places are similar and can be grouped together. These regions may very likely be defined by the topic of the map. It is important to think about WHY these areas may be grouped together. What do they have in common?
A	Association	Do some of the features on the map occur together? If so, think about WHY they occur together.
P	Pattern	Describe the distribution of the features on the map. Are some of the features clustered together? Are there strings, rings, or other patterns to describe where the features are located? Are some features clustered together, while others are spread out?
P	Processes	Once you have identified specific regions, associations and patterns, try to explain WHY the map features are arranged in the way they are. What geographic processes might be responsible for the distribution of features you see on the map?
E	Exceptions	Are there features which do not follow the pattern? Describe where they are located. Go back up to processes and explain why you think these exceptions might be where they are.
D	Description	Once you have completed your analysis, write a short description of the map. Describe the topic being shown on the map and explain the distribution of its features and the processes which might be responsible for that distribution.