

LET'S EXPLORE TEXAS: WALKABOUT

(adapted from National Geographic Lesson "Let's Explore Africa")

Purpose

To gain a spatial view of the state of Texas

TEKS Standards

Grade 4 Social Studies

(6) Geography. The student uses geographic tools to collect, analyze, and interpret data. The student is expected to: (A) apply geographic tools, including grid systems, legends, symbols, scales, and compass roses, to construct and interpret maps; (B) translate geographic data, population distribution, and natural resources into a variety of formats such as graphs and maps

Grade Levels: 3rd - 7th

Class Time: 1 class period

Materials: Giant Traveling Map of Texas, chains, spot markers, compass

Instructional Information

- This is one of the largest maps of Texas. Students walk on it and find geographic patterns.
- Texas is the second largest state in the United States.
- The map was created by the Texas Alliance of Geographic Education in partnership with National Geographic and is traveling all over Texas, going from school to school.

Student Activity/Assessment

Use the compass to orient the map, with the northern part of the map, aligned north. Students will stand on the side of map so they are facing north. The walkabout begins at the most southern place in Texas. Here are some ideas for guiding the geographic walkabout.

1. Begin by finding the point of Texas that is closest to you. Brownsville is the most southern city in Texas. It is on two of the borders. One is the border with the country of Mexico. The other border is the Gulf of Mexico.
2. Follow the coastline of Texas north and east to the large port city of Houston. It is the largest city in Texas and the 4th largest city in the United States. NASA Space Center is located near Houston.
3. From Houston, continue along the coastline of Texas north and eastward to the state boundary with Louisiana. Near the boundary is the city of Beaumont and the mouth of the Sabine River.
4. Trace the Sabine River northward, then walk along the short boundary with Arkansas (notice how straight the line is) until you reach the Red River. The city of Longview in East Texas is located in the region known as the Piney Woods.

5. The Red River separates Texas and Oklahoma north of Dallas and Fort Worth. Dallas is the 2nd largest city in Texas. West and north from Dallas-Fort Worth, land becomes drier with fewer trees and fewer people. In this region, large herds of buffalo roamed and Indian tribes, mainly Comanche, hunted and traded. They gained fast and strong horses to live on the Texas plains during the 1700s and 1800s. A large area is known a *Comancheria* because of the Comanche tribal dominance of the area during that period of history.
6. Amarillo and the area north and west is called the Panhandle. It shares straight line boundaries with both Oklahoma and New Mexico. The flat, high landscape extends nearly 200 miles southeastward. It is known as the *Llano Estacado* or Caprock because the top layer of it has a layer of *caliche* (ca-lee-chee), material that has not eroded like the land around it. It is very flat but on the edges are many canyons. Palo Duro Canyon is between Amarillo and Lubbock.
7. The western boundary of the state is marked by a line of longitude (103 degrees west) that is a straight line on the map. It is easy to follow south until it meets the southern boundary of New Mexico at a latitude of 32 degrees north.
8. The boundary of Texas also includes a small piece of land that extends even further west. El Paso, the most western city of Texas, is located in this area. El Paso is on the Rio Grande River that marks the international boundary between the United States and Mexico. This boundary separates the countries for 1,255 miles, from El Paso to Brownsville. Walk along the river that flows through desert areas, rugged rock formations, farmlands, and then the coastal region.
9. One feature along the river is a place where the course of the river takes a huge curve northward. This bend in the river is home to Big Bend National Park. The high desert is a rich habitat for desert plants such as the century plant and unusual animals such as the javelina.
10. The middle of the state has important cities, rivers, and landscapes. One of these is the state capital, Austin. While you are standing on Austin, look around in all directions to see the distance to the state boundaries.

Guiding Questions

What countries, states, and bodies of water border Texas?

Where do the borders of Texas follow rivers? Which ones can you name?

Where are borders marked as straight lines?

Walk across the state. How many steps does it take to travel from El Paso to Texarkana? How far north to south from Amarillo to Brownsville?

Assessment (informal)

Engage students in reviewing the boundaries with a game of Simon Says...

Simon Says. . . girls stand on a straight line boundary; boys stand on a river boundary; all face north, all face west; Team 1 sits along the coastline; Team 2 places markers on major cities; Team 3 stands in the Panhandle; Team 4 makes a circle around the title of the map.

Additional resource: *Empire of the Summer Moon* by SC Gwynne