

In the Wake of Poseidon: Classical Imagery On Antique Maps



Mercator 1569 world map detail

Map Set Description: The maps featured in this lesson highlight the Golden Age of European Cartography while emphasizing their Classical details. The maps were selected to show the evolution of mapmaking as new knowledge became available. The maps also feature generous doses of the Classical Gods and their roles in controlling the heavens and the weather.

For Teachers and Students: These maps were designed to be used in a middle school setting, they are appropriate for the study of Ancient Civilizations as well as the study of basic Map Skills. This set of lessons would ideally come during the study of the Greeks and Romans or during a study of the age of exploration.

Each Map is paired with a set of activities that emphasize careful observation of details and making inferences based on the material. To get the most out of this activity students will need access to a digital image of the map, which can be accomplished by using laptops or by projecting the image.

Take time to discuss each image with students before releasing them to work individually or in pairs on the worksheets. Ask the students what details they notice and ask them to offer theories on why the mapmaker chose to include that particular detail, or ask them what the detail suggests about the era in which it was created. For example, “Why does the map show California as an island? Why do you think that is?” After the students have had time to work with the worksheets go over the material with the whole class and invite students to share their answers. In many cases the “thinking questions” will have unique individual answers which could generate great discussions.

Each map and worksheet should take 45-60 minutes to work on.

Name:

Ptolemy's World

Objectives: Learn the cardinal directions. Consider how maps were assembled and what was important to the mapmaker. The role of winds in the age of sail.

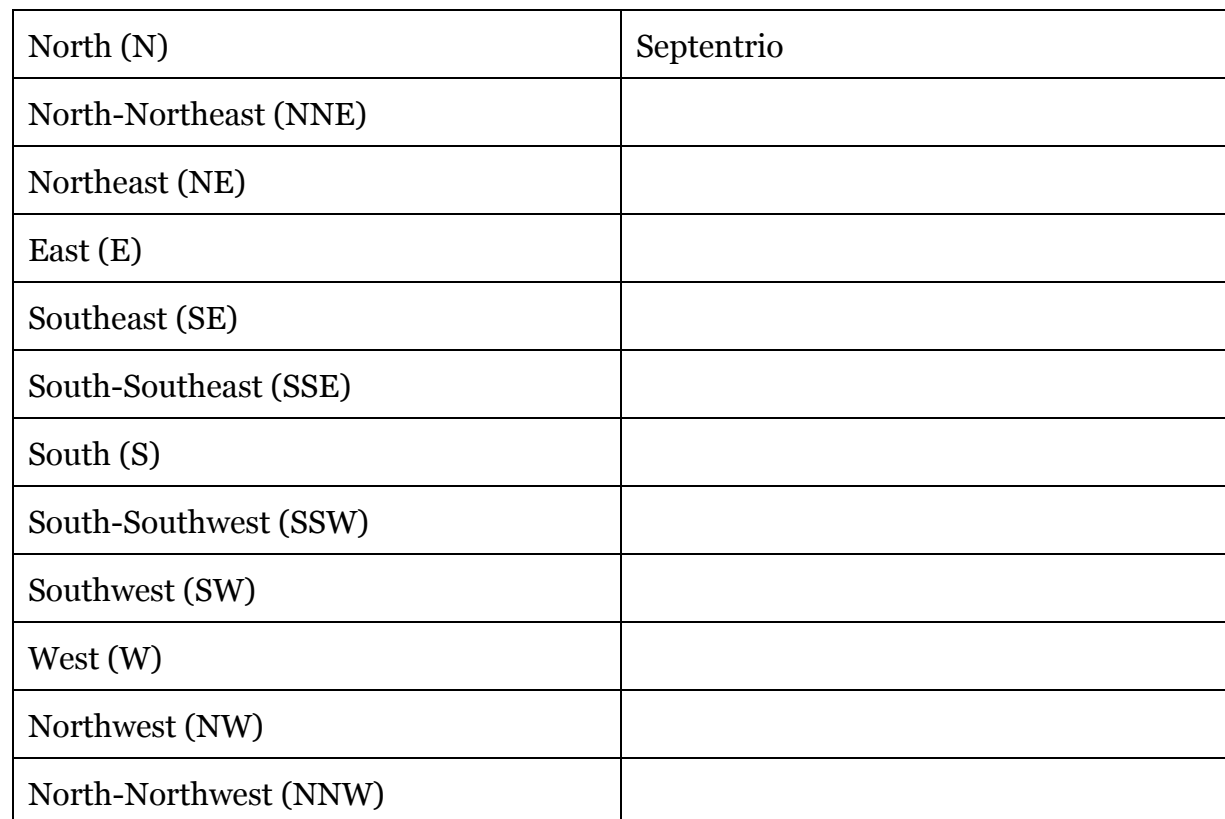
Instructions: Use this worksheet with the online map titled “Ptolemy’s Map”



Intro:

Claudius Ptolemy was born in the year AD 100. As a Greek living in Egypt under Roman rule Ptolemy was very much a man of the Ancient World. His famous map, depicts the world of the Roman Empire at the peak of its power and territory. From the Pillars of Hercules in the west, to the threads of the Silk Road in the east, Ptolemy gathered details from sailors and scholars to fill out the world. While his map is far from perfect it was the most authoritative document of its age, and continued to be an important source for the next thousand years. This version of the map dates from AD 1482, over 1,300 years after Ptolemy's lifetime!

Travel in the Classical World depended a great deal on winds, which could either move a sailor swiftly to his destination or blow him into trouble, as Odysseus discovered. The Romans recognized twelve cardinal winds, which line up to the directions on a compass. Use the compass rose to name the wind which matches each of the directions. The first is completed as an example, use only the first name of each wind.



Thinking Questions:

Ptolemy's map is rich in details and cities around the center of the map, while the edges of the map have few details. Why do you think this is?

On Ptolemy's map the winds are represented as heads. Why were winds so important to Ptolemy and his audience? Why would the winds have names and personalities?

Name:

Horoscopes and Hemispheres

Objective: To explore the connection between astronomy, astrology and cartography.

Instructions: Use these worksheets with the map titled “Novissima totius terrarum orbis tabula by John Seller”.



Intro:

Astrology, which is the study of the night sky to predict future events has a long association with mapmaking. All of the signs of our modern Horoscope are seen in the illustrations around the map. Our word Zodiac comes from the Greek for “circle of beasts”. The animal pictures helped ancient people locate stars and planets that gave them important information about when to plant or which way to sail.

The circles in the four corners represent different theories about the planets and sun. By the time this map was made most educated people knew the planets orbited the sun, but just to be safe the mapmaker includes the “Hypothesis Ptolemaica” or Ptolemy’s Theory on the lower left. Ptolemy was the ancient inspiration for the first set in this map.

Activity:

The seasonal elements of ancient astrology are as follows:

Spring (wet becoming hot) - Air - Aries, Taurus, Gemini.

Summer (hot becoming dry) - Fire - Cancer, Leo, Virgo.

Autumn (dry becoming cold) - Earth - Libra, Scorpio, Sagittarius.

Winter (cold becoming wet) - Water - Capricorn, Aquarius, Pisces.

The four seasons are depicted around the edges of the circles, starting with spring in the upper left and winter in the lower right. How are each of the seasons represented in the pictures? What are the people or gods doing? What do you notice about the plants? What animals are chosen to represent the four elements (air, fire, earth, water)? Describe what you see using the chart below.

Season	People / Gods	Plants / Trees	Element Animal
Spring			
Summer			
Autumn			
Winter			

Thinking Question: Why did the mapmaker include so many details that are not exactly geographic features? How would astrological details be helpful or make the map more appealing?

Name:

The Celestial Chariot Race

Objectives: To learn the Greek and Roman names for the Gods. To consider how solar system works.

Instructions: This worksheet is to be used with the online map titled “Planisphaerium Ptolemaicum”



Intro: Once again we see the long shadow of Ptolemy on mapmaking, this map playfully illustrates the Ancient Greek geographer's idea of how the planets orbited the Earth, or at least the five planets known at this time. The planets are not shown as they would appear through a telescope, but instead as their namesake gods in their signature vehicles. The Greeks and the Romans worshipped the same gods, but under different names. For example, the god of wine, women and song was called Dionysus in Greece and Bacchus in Rome (this was the god of autumn on the last map). As it happened, the Greek names endured in mythology while the Roman names endured

in astronomy.

Activity: Using the table below match the Greek God to their Roman equivalent, using clues in the pictures.

Greek Name	Associated with	Roman / Planet Name
	Eagles, lighting bolts, being boss	Iovis / Jupiter
Ares	Dogs, spears, big helmets, red stuff	/
Aphrodite	Swans, babies with bows and arrows, looking good	/
Cronus	Scythe, dragons, being a bad father	/
	Staff with snakes (caduceus), messenger	Iter Mer / Mercury
	Hunting, Women with bows	Luna aka Diana / Moon
	Horses, gold, chariots, getting a good tan	Solis / Sun

Thinking question: The bird women on the sides are called Harpies, and they represent destructive winds. What do you think is represented by the men and boys shown in the lower corners?

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The Wonders of the World

Objectives: To learn about the Ancient Wonders of the World and the roots of tourism.

Instructions: This worksheet is to be used with the online map titled “Nova Totius Terrarum”



Intro:

This map truly has it all! Across the top we see the known planets represented as gods, the elements grace the left border, while the seasons appear on the right. Harpies and cherubs brace scrolls, while a bevy of sea monsters menaces ships at sail. What makes this map extra special for students of Ancient History is its depiction of the Seven Wonders of the Ancient World. The Wonders list was essentially a tourist guide for Greeks living around 200 BC, these were the things to see. It should come as no surprise then that all of these wonders were fairly close to the Mediterranean Sea, where the Greeks sailed.

Activity: A guidebook of sorts written by a well traveled Greek described the wonders thusly,

I have gazed on the walls of impregnable Babylon along which chariots may race, and on the Zeus by the banks of the Alpheus, I have seen the hanging gardens, and the Colossus of the Helios, the great man-made mountains of the lofty pyramids, and the gigantic tomb of Mausolus; but when I saw the sacred house of Artemis that towers to the clouds, the others were placed in the shade, for the sun himself has never looked upon its equal outside Olympus.

— Greek Anthology IX.58

Thinking Question: Which Wonder seen on the map did the writer leave out of his passage? What purpose did that missing Wonder serve?

Thinking Question: The only Wonder with us today is also the oldest Wonder by far, the 4,500 year old Pyramids of Egypt. However, the Pyramids on the map look nothing like the actual Pyramids! Why do you think that is?

Thinking Question: Compared to a modern map there are some very significant missing or distorted pieces. What is wrong with North America and Australia, and what do you think this tells us about geography in 1638 when this map was made?

Geography Challenge: Which of the following modern place names appear on the map?

Canada	(yes / no)	Florida	(yes / no)	Haiti	(yes / no)
Cuba	(yes / no)	China	(yes / no)	Puerto Rico	(yes / no)
Italy	(yes / no)	California	(yes / no)	London	(yes / no)
Boston	(yes / no)	India	(yes / no)	Greenland	(yes / no)