

American Indians

Mapping State Stories

Overview: After completing this activity, students will better understand the historical, geographical, and political forces that influenced the configuration of state lines in the United States and how the borders between states influence the lives of the people living therein.

Subject Area: Social Studies

Age Group/Grade Level: 14-17 years, grades 9-12

Duration: approximately 60 min.

Background

Jaune (pronounced ZHA-aun) Quick-To-See Smith has painted several maps of the United States to show how the land already occupied by ancient Native communities was colonized by European settlers. In *State Names*, she included names of states that derive from American Indian words, such as Wyoming, from a Delaware (Lenape) word that means “mountains and valleys alternating,” and Kansas, from a Sioux (Dakota) word meaning “people of the south wind.” Smith is a member of the Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes of the Flathead Nation in Montana and works to raise recognition of Native American art and peoples.

State Names expresses her anger that the country’s lands were divided without regard for existing tribal territories. Smith has said, “We are the original owners of this country. Our land was stolen from us by the Euro-American invaders. I can’t say strongly enough that my maps are about stolen lands. Our very heritage, our cultures, our world view, our being. Every map is a political map and tells a story that we are alive everywhere across this nation.”

Discussion

Share Jaune Quick-To-See Smith’s *State Names* with students. Encourage discussion by asking the following questions:

- What do you see in this picture? Which state names *were* and *were not* included?
- The artist has excluded the state names that have no connection to American Indian words. What message does she communicate by doing so?
- Why do you think the artist chose to allow the paint to drip or run, rather than painting a more legible—and typical—surface?



Jaune Quick-To-See Smith, *State Names*, 2000, oil, collage, and mixed media on canvas, 48 x 72 in., Gift of Elizabeth Ann Dugan and museum purchase, 2004.28.

Activity

Have students research their state in order to answer the following questions:

- When and why was your state founded? By whom?
- What is the genesis of your state’s name? What was that land called before it became a state, territory, or colony?

Have students collect political, population, and language maps that reflect their state’s history, including the pre-European period. For help finding distribution of American Indian populations, consult the National Museum of the American Indian’s language map at <http://tinyurl.com/MapofLanguages>.

After they complete their research, have students reconvene and discuss:

- Looking back through history, how did your state’s borders change? What could have caused those changes?
- How was the land your state currently occupies allocated *before* it was a territory or state? Who inhabited areas of your state before European settlers arrived? How was the land used?
- How has the population changed? What do you think caused those changes?
- How have the changing borders affected the lives of people who lived there?
- What conflicting views about the land and its uses exist between Indians and non-Indians living in your state?

Have students create an artwork that tells the story of their state across the known history of that land using the understandings gained in this lesson.

For a full-size image of Jaune Quick-To-See Smith’s *State Names*, visit: http://americanart.si.edu/images/2004/2004.28_1a.jpg