



How to Read a Map and Find Places

KS2 GEOGRAPHY

Ages 9-12 ⌚ 3 min read

What Is a Map?

A **map** is a picture of an area from above, like looking down from a bird's eye view. Maps show us where **landmarks**, towns, roads, mountains, rivers, and other important features are located. They help us understand the world and find our way around.

Maps come in different types. Some show **political boundaries** (like countries and cities), while others show **physical features** (like mountains and oceans). You might also find **weather maps**, **underground maps**, or **treasure maps**!

Understanding Map Symbols and Keys

Every map has a **key** (or legend) that explains what the symbols mean. A tiny image of a hospital, school, or park on a map isn't actually that size—it's a **symbol** representing where these places really are.

Think of it like a code. A red star might mean "capital city" and a blue line means "river". The key is your decoder ring that tells you what each symbol means.

Common symbols include churches (often shown as a cross), railways (lines with cross marks), and forests (little tree drawings). Always check the key first!

Using Grid References

Maps use a **grid system**—like a checkerboard—to help you pinpoint exact locations. The grid has **numbers** along one side and **letters** along another.

To find something using a **grid reference**, you read the number first (going across), then the letter (going up and down). It works like finding a seat in a cinema: find your row number, then your seat letter.

Think of it like playing Battleship. You call out a number and a letter (like "B5") to find where your opponent's ship is hiding.

Finding Directions on Maps

Most maps have a **compass rose** showing which way is **north, south, east**, and **west**. North is usually at the top of the map, but not always! Always look for the compass rose to know which direction you're facing.

Maps also have a **scale** that tells you the real distance. For example, **1 centimetre on the map might equal 1 kilometre** in real life. This helps you work out how far places actually are from each other.

Practice Makes Perfect

Learning to read maps is like learning a new language. The more you practise, the easier it becomes. Start with simple local maps, then try bigger ones. Soon you'll be finding places like a professional explorer!