

Three Information Literacy Questions to Ask About a Map

1. What is this map about?

- Read the **title** to determine the place, date (of content/of production) and content or theme.
- Use the **scale**, **orientation** and **grid** to understand the distance, direction and geographic position represented.
- Use the **legend** to understand what the symbols, shapes and colors represent.

2. Why was this map created?

- Examine the scale for clues about intended use (de Blij 2005, 25-6)
- Examine the **context** in which the map is presented
- Find background on the **cartographer** or **organization** associated with it.
- Identify the intended audience, purpose or expected use.

3. What is incomplete, omitted or inaccurate?

- If conventions like scale, orientation and grid are absent, question the accuracy, readability and clarity of the map.
- Identify what the map projection distorts (de Blij 2005, 30-34) and determine if this affects the purpose.
- Determine if the simplification of the data is truthful to the original source (Foote 1999)
- When a map presents a large area, compare the information with that from other types of sources, since distances and sizes are likely to be distorted by a small scale map.
- Find the source of the map's data. Evaluate the authority of the source and the accuracy of the data.
- Analyze whether the colors display the data accurately. Few people can determine the logical sequence of contrasting hues, but most map readers understand that shades of gray represent a sequential order. (Monmonier 1991, 21-22)
- Compare the data used in the map with other data sources to judge the accuracy.
- Brainstorm questions that the map answers. Evaluate the completeness of the answers.
- Locate information that is relevant to the map's purpose but missing. Evaluate the impact this information might have had if it had been included.
- Are the conclusions you draw from the data credible in light of what you know and what you can learn elsewhere.
- Evaluate the map for point of view or bias by identifying information (e.g., names, pejoratives) that might be presented differently by another group, culture, society or government. (Monmonier 2006)

References

de Blij, Harm. 2005. *Why Geography Matters: Three Challenges Facing America*. New York: Oxford.

Foote, Kenneth E. 1999. "[Issues of Statistical Generalization.](#)" *The Geographer's Craft*.

<<http://www.colorado.edu/geography/gcraft/notes/cartocom/section6.html> > (accessed Apr. 16, 2008).

Monmonier, Mark. 1991. *How to Lie with Maps*, 2nd ed. Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Pr.

Monmonier, Mark. 2006. *From Squaw Tit to Whorehouse Meadow: How Maps Name, Claim, and Inflamm*. Univ. of Chicago Pr.

<http://www.noodletools.com/debbie/literacies/>