Lesson 1: Political Borders

GRADE LEVEL
6–8

OVERVIEW
This lesson prompts students to think about regions and borders by determining where they would place borders in an artificial continent, based on a set of physical and cultural features of the area. This is lesson 1 in a series of 10 lessons in a unit on Europe.

CONNECTIONS TO NATIONAL GEOGRAPHY STANDARDS
Standard 1: How to use maps and other geographic representations, tools, and technologies to acquire, process, and report information from a spatial perspective.

TIME
Opening - 15 minutes
Activity 1.1 - 20 minutes
Closing - 20 minutes

GUIDING QUESTION
Why are the borders of countries located in certain places?

KEY VOCABULARY
- Border: An imaginary line separating one political division, such as a country, state, province or county, from another
- Country: A recognized territory whose government is the highest legal authority over the land and the people living within its boundaries
- Region: An area with one or more common characteristics or features, which give it a measure of homogeneity and make it different from surrounding areas

CONNECTIONS TO THE CURRICULUM and STANDARDS
Note to Teacher: As you teach this lesson, identify other disciplines for which it may be used and other national standards it may address.

Opening
TIME: 15 minutes
Conduct a short discussion with the class about the words “border” and “region.” What do those words mean to students? Why do people define regions or countries in any given area? How are borders defined?
Explain to students that in their activity today, they will work in a small group to set borders and define regions in an area of land.

Activity 1.1: Drawing Political Borders
Students are given a set of maps that show physical and cultural features of a fictitious area. Students are asked to draw country borders in the area, based on how they think the land should be divided. This activity is intended as a discussion starter to bring out student ideas about how regions are defined, and how land and resources should be divided among countries. There are no right or wrong answers for this activity.
TIME: 20 minutes

MATERIALS REQUIRED
Student Handouts and Blackline Masters:
- Activity 1.1 Handout: Drawing Political Borders

INSTRUCTIONAL STRATEGY
Small-group work with class discussion

OBJECTIVES
Students will:
- Consider how physical and cultural features could be used to define country borders
- Discuss their ideas about which features are most important in establishing good borders

DIRECTIONS
1. Divide the class into groups of approximately four students each.
2. Hand out the student worksheet: Activity 1.1 Handout: Drawing Political Borders.
3. Instruct students to use the information in three of the maps—Religions, Mountains and Rivers, and Languages—to determine where they would place borders in the Outline map. The group should come to a decision together and should take notes about why they drew the borders where they did. Give students about 10 minutes to draw their borders.
4. As the teacher walks around and observes student groups working, ask questions to better understand what students are thinking, such as:
   a. Do you think physical features such as rivers are more important than cultural ones, such as language, in setting borders? Why or why not?
   b. What would happen if you split this physical feature between two countries? Would people in the countries be able to share the land and/or resources or would they constantly fight over its use?
   c. What would happen if a country has a mix of different cultural features (language, religion, etc.)? Will this impact how the people can live and work together in that country?
5. Ask groups to share their borders with the class along with their reasons. The teacher or a class recorder should make a list of the reasons on the board or chart paper.

Note: A transparency of each map could be made and placed on top of one another to show students the interplay of physical and cultural features.

ADAPTATIONS
- Have students do the activity individually and share their ideas with the class. They could come up with names for the countries that they create.
- Do the activity as a class, with everyone giving input and sharing ideas.
- Give each group an overhead to draw in their borders on (and shade), then share with the class via the overhead.
- For special needs students, create possible solutions and then have the students decide which one they think will work best and why.
Closing / Culminating Activity
TIME: 20 minutes

MATERIALS REQUIRED
• List of reasons for placing borders, from the class activity

INSTRUCTIONAL STRATEGY
Whole-class discussion

OBJECTIVES
Students will:
• Explain and compare their border selections based on physical and cultural features
• Discuss other factors that could impact where borders are established

DIRECTIONS
1. As a class, discuss the reasons borders were placed in different areas. Ask students to comment about whether they agree or disagree with the reasons other students gave. Remember, there are no right or wrong answers; students should discuss their ideas and impressions.
2. Ask students to brainstorm what other things might shape country borders (besides the physical and cultural features they looked at in this lesson). Students might list things such as wars between countries, natural resources, dividing land evenly between different groups, etc.
3. Tell students that they will complete a unit of lessons about borders in Europe, and that their ideas about where borders should be placed will be important for their study of Europe. Keep the list of reasons for the class to refer to in later lessons, to see if their ideas have changed.

SUGGESTED STUDENT ASSESSMENT
Participation and possibly application of these ideas on future activities

EXTENDING THE LESSON
• Ask students to think about borders in their community or state. How were the borders defined? Do they follow a physical feature in the landscape? Do they follow cultural differences between people on either side of the border? Use the book “How the States Got Their Shapes” by Mark Stein.
• Use this activity as a spring-board into the study of other areas such as Israel/Palestine or the African continent. Ask questions like the following:
  o What kinds of problems might come up for negotiators trying to create Peace in Palestine?
  o What affect did European Colonization have on the borders of Africa?

NOTE: The original lesson is from the National Geographic Draft Copy of Europe Unit Part 1: Introduction, Lesson 1. Changes/additions to this lesson were made by GENI. To see the original lesson (and lessons 2-5) from the draft copy of the unit, visit www.nationalgeographic.com/EuropeMaterialsPart1.pdf. For lessons 6-10, visit www.nationalgeographic.com/EuropeMaterialsPart2.pdf.
Drawing Political Borders

Use the blank outline map to draw political borders on this landmass. Take into account religions, physical features (mountains and rivers) and languages distributions as seen on the maps that follow.