

Maps and Mnemonics



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Making knowledge secure: Section Guide

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Practical advice from a colleague wrestling with how to ensure students learn and retain sense of place...

I've been working hard with my Year 11s to make their knowledge secure. This is so that they can feel confident forming their arguments, both in discussion in class and ultimately for their written answers in the exam. The new Making of America unit on the OCR SHP B specification has been a delight to learn about and plan. It's a completely new area of history for me, but one that I knew my Year 11s were excited about undertaking. We are all thoroughly enjoying it, but by a month or so in, they were struggling with how much geography there is to remember about this fascinating time in history. I've attended some excellent CPD sessions, both through OCR and at the SHP 2017 conference, as well as local meetings in York. All have suggested that maps would be key in teaching the Making of America; and they were right! Maps have proved so useful in really illustrating how the geographical space of

America helped to create and sustain the historical tensions that we are studying. However, in the low stakes memory tests we've been doing this term, students have found the original 13 states, the Northwest and Southwest Territories; Louisiana and the Far West difficult to differentiate when recalling them. This has resulted in confusion about where and when events were taking place. Late one night, whilst planning a lesson to try to respond to this, I happened upon a mnemonic for remembering the New England states (Never Make Cynthia Run) and thought...why not?! The activity was simple. To give a few examples: "Here's a labelled colour coded map – can you come up with a mnemonic for the southern states? Or the Far West states?" ...and so on. And they did! We shared the mnemonics, and a few giggles were had as one group's idea of 'Keep The Men Away' for the Southwest territories of Kentucky, Tennessee, Mississippi and Alabama was adapted to a more America-appropriate 'Keep The Monarchy Away'. Students then chose the mnemonics they liked to use for revision for another low stakes test the following week. Their results on this test show that they have all improved on the names of states. The challenge now is retaining this knowledge over a much longer period of time and I have already turned back to the HA website 'Making Knowledge Secure: Section Guide' to think about how best to move this on. Having looked at Carr and Counsell's (TH 157) work on timelines I think this might be an interesting place to go next.

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