

## 8<sup>th</sup> grade Lesson 19 - Introduction

# The Geography of North America

Mapmaking has been with us for many thousands of years. Humans have long understood that an aerial view of land was useful for finding one's way in the world. Maps directed traders to and along trade routes. They were highly valued by ship captains traveling across waters they had never sailed before. Still, maps were often unreliable. However, long ago when so much of the world was still unknown to many, any map was better than none.

Though Indigenous groups knew the continents well, most early European mapmakers of the Americas never left Europe. Mapmaking was therefore a challenge. They were skilled engravers, able to create the images of maps. **But they relied on many unreliable sources: records of those who had visited the area, maps of others, and traditions of mapmaking. Some of those traditions included filling in empty spaces with whatever they imagined. Sea monsters, mermaids, and imaginary islands fill the wide gaps of early maps. Sometimes mythical islands popular to the local culture would be placed somewhere near the European coasts.** However, there was no evidence of their existence at all.

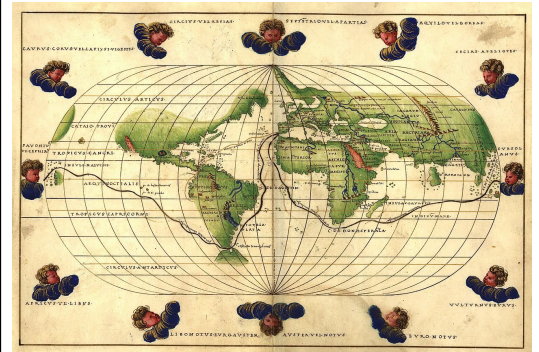
The early maps of Florida, created in the late 16<sup>th</sup> century, were based on reports from the first European explorers. These maps provide us with good examples of what mapmakers could and could not do. The coastline is the first thing ships at sea coming to land make note of. Explorers of the Florida coast learned early that this landscape was a peninsula. The shape in the maps is off, and rivers seemed written in randomly. These first maps cut off the southern tip of Florida.

Mapmaking has evolved using technology to present

**This entire lesson is missing the many innovations of our early explorers.**

By the dawn of the sixteenth century, the ancient art of navigation had begun to develop rapidly in response to oceanic explorers who needed to find their positions without landmarks, to determine the locations of their discoveries, and to establish routes between the new-found lands and home. Although the relationship of certain heavenly bodies to time of day and terrestrial directions had been known since ancient times, the first two decades of the sixteenth century saw the rigorous application of astronomy and mathematics to navigation.

Map makers used their discoveries and information to produce these maps, sans sea monsters, mermaids, and imaginary islands.



Agnese's world map from 1544



From 1570, a world map by Abraham Ortelius