



How did European perceptions of California geography change over time?

Mapping California: Evolving European Understandings

Background Information

While Europeans rather quickly developed a rather accurate sense of the geography of the Caribbean and the Atlantic coasts, it took them centuries to accurately map the Pacific coast of North America. Partly as a result of the popular novel entitled *Las sergas de Esplandián* by Garci Rodríguez de Montalvo, Europeans for a remarkably long time believed that California was an island.

Lesson Description

Students will look at several maps of California to see what Europeans knew about California geography and then place them in rough chronological order.

Grade Range: 4th

Time to complete lesson: 60-90 minutes

Resources needed:

- Graphic organizer (provided)
- Maps of California (provided)

Lesson Author: John Bassett





By the end of this lesson, students will **know:**

- It took Europeans nearly three centuries to accurately map the California coast and to get a reasonably accurate sense of California geography.
- People can learn about the past by studying maps

By the end of this lesson, students will **be able to:**

- Critically examine maps to observe changing understanding of the physical geography of California and the west coast of North America
- Place maps in rough chronological order.

Supported Standards

CHSS.4.1 Students demonstrate an understanding of the physical and human geographic features that define places and regions in California





Lesson Plan

Set Up:

Set up the room as a map room prior to the class entering. Maps should be randomly numbered and displayed with no other identifying information.

Introduction:

- 1) When the students come in, explain that major libraries, like the Huntington or the Library of Congress, often have rooms where maps are displayed.
- 2) Explain that we have done the same, and that students will have to determine in what order the maps were probably produced.

Activity (60-90 minutes):

- 1) Working in partners or small groups, students look at each of the maps. For each map, the students will determine the following and record their thoughts on their graphic organizer (Material #1):
 - What does the mapmaker get right
 - What does the mapmaker get wrong
 - What does the mapmaker simply not know.
- 1) When the students have had an opportunity to look at all the maps, have them attempt to determine in what order they may have been made

Conclusion:

- 1) Have the students share out what they noticed about the maps.
- 2) Share the order of the maps
- 3) Optional: Discuss the influence of Rodriguez book and the probable origins of the term California from that book.



Names: _____

Material #1

Map	What did the mapmaker get right?	What did the mapmaker get wrong?	What did the mapmaker just not know?



Map	What did the mapmaker get right?	What did the mapmaker get wrong?	What did the mapmaker just not know?



Maps

- 1) [1600 World Map by Richard Hakluyt](#)
- 2) [1652 Map of North and South America](#)
- 3) [1700 New Map of the Terraqueous Globe](#)
- 4) [1704 Map of North America](#)
- 5) [1763 British Map of the Americas](#)
- 6) [1781 World Map](#)
- 7) [1846 Map of Mexico showing southern part of US](#)
- 8) [1848 Map of the United States](#)