

Sample TOK Lesson

Title: Mapping Annandale

- Objective: Simple introductory hands-on illustration of differences in perception of a relatively common situation among individuals of relatively similar backgrounds
- Opening Task: Ask students to draw a sketch map of the local area. In this case, the instructions were to draw a map of Annandale, and to include on it, at a minimum, the high school and their own residence. Anything else was gravy. The drawing was done in class in ten minutes, deliberately short and sweet to avoid research and focus instead on top-of-the head perceptions.
- Subsequent Discussion: At the next class session, sets of the student maps were passed out, with the names removed and replaced with numbers. The first question in the discussion was whether students could determine who had drawn which map. The maps were of widely varying quality, making some easy to identify (if you already knew the location of a student's house) and some nearly impossible. Most had little or no sense of scale and/or sense of direction (even though, as seniors, they are now driving).
- The second question was whether students could recognize anything in the content/quality of the map – other than its specific geography – that would link it to the individual who drew it. This proved fairly fruitful. Three samples are attached for illustration. They show not only differing perceptions, but suggest that there may be decipherable reasons behind those differences – whether or not the discussion successfully identified those reasons is, of course, a separate issue.
 - ✓ On map #3, for example, students remarked on the relative accuracy and precision of the layout of streets and highways, compared to all the other maps in the set -- including the precise compass arc of the Capitol Beltway, arguing that these characteristics fit the map-maker, who is particularly focused on mathematics and physics.
 - ✓ On map #7, for example, students noted that the geographic layout bears minimal or no relationship to the real world, but that the distortions enable the map-maker to delineate with great precision the individual chairs in the band practice room and the yard-stripes on the actual football field and the band practice area in the back parking lot – a perspective that comes naturally to a member of the high school's marching band.
 - ✓ On map #2, for example, students commented that the map-maker (who has collapsed a 45-minute commute from a neighboring county into a one-block drive) was the only student, significantly, to put a flag on the top of the high school, symbolic, they thought, of her strong interest in American history.

Attachments: As noted, sample student maps

