TN Standard 5.39 Social Studies

Mapping Student Possibilities: Navigating Primary Resources

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Exploring the Physical Features of the United States

by Jennifer Gipson
Wilson County Schools

This is an Open Educational Resource (OER) designed to provide inquiry-based lessons aligned with Tennessee 5th grade Social Studies Standards. This project bridges the gap between the new state standards and actual classroom implementation. Each lesson will help students transition from passive readers to active geographers, fostering the critical thinking and civic literacy essential for the next generation of Tennesseans. The Tennessee Geographic Alliance, Tennessee Council for the Social Studies, and Wilson County Schools Social Studies Department were instrumental to the process.

TGA

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Exploring the Physical Features of the United States	
Grade Level:	5th
Duration Time:	3, 40 minutes class sessions

Brief Lesson Overview
In this lesson, students will explore physical maps of the United States to identify the major physical features of the U.S. They will work together with their group to label their own map, complete a note-taker, and prepare a presentation to teach the rest of the class about their group of features. The goal of the lesson is for students to get hands-on experience with primary source maps and deeply explore one type of US physical feature. By the end of the 3 day unit, students will have an understanding of the geography of the entire United States and will be able to identify and describe its major physical features.

Standard:List the full standard including standard number
5.39 Identify major physical features of the United States, including: • Rivers—Mississippi, Ohio, Colorado, Missouri, Rio Grande • Mountains— Appalachian, Alaska Range, Rockies, Sierra Nevada • Bodies of Water—Great Lakes, Gulf of Mexico, Great Salt Lake • Landforms—Coastal Plain, Mississippi River Basin, Grand Canyon, Great Plains
Success Criteria: I will know I am successful when I can…
I can identify on a map the major rivers, bodies of water, mountains, and landforms of the United States. I can describe facts related to each physical feature that I identified. I can teach my class about the physical features I researched with my group.

Assessment : Formative and Summative
Formative: Student Note-Taker, Student Poster, and Group Presentation **Summative**: 5.39 Test: Students will label the rivers, bodies of water, mountains, and landforms on an unlabeled map of the United States. Optional Multiple Choice Assessment

Resource Materials:(Include links sources-at least one source MUST be from the Library of Congress)
☐ Physical Features of the Contiguous United States Map from Library of Congress (LOC) ☐ 1874 Map of the River Systems of the United States from Library of Congress ☐ Articles for each landform: ☐ Rivers Group Articles: Mississippi River, Ohio River, Colorado River, Missouri River, Rio Grande ☐ Mountains Group Articles: Appalachian, Alaska Range, Rockies, Sierra Nevada ☐ Bodies of Water Group Articles: Great Lakes, Gulf of Mexico, Great Salt Lake ☐ Landforms Group Articles: Coastal Plain, Mississippi River Basin, Grand Canyon, Great Plains

Other Materials: (anything else a student would need to complete this lesson)

- ☐ Group Note-Taking Worksheets (each student needs their own copy)
- ☐ Posterboard (or computer for digital slides)
- ☐ Markers or Colored Pencils
- ☐ Blank copy of US Map (for group project)

Cognitive Interest Cue: directly related to the standard and learning outcomes

Direct students to look at your screen displaying both the LOC 1874 River Systems Map and the LOC Physical Features of the United States map without showing the titles. Ask students to look at each map carefully and notice what is the same or different about them. Ask which map they think is older and what clues tell them that? Ask what they think the purpose of each map is? Then reveal that the River Systems map is from 1874 and was meant to show the river systems in the United States. Even though its purpose was to show the rivers, it also gives us other important information about our country at the time, like who controlled the land at that time (look at how Canada is labeled!). Remind students that maps can help us learn about all sorts of information and tell them that today they will use them to learn about the physical features of the United States. End by asking which of these maps they think will be most helpful in their learning today.

Instruction: Step by step procedures for lesson

(Depending on the time of your class periods, this project could take 2-3 days. The days here are a suggested breakdown of the activities and project. Your students may need more time for day 1.)

Day 1: Research

1. **Cognitive Interest Cue and Success Criteria** (5 -10 min)
2. **Intro to Group Inquiry Project**:(10 min) On a screen, show students the physical features map of the United States and how to zoom in, move it around, etc. Tell students they will be using this map to locate each physical feature in their assigned group. Explain the steps of the group project that students will complete over the next two days.
3. **Group Inquiry Project (30 min):** Assign Students to one of 4 groups: Rivers, Bodies or Water, Mountains, or Landforms. (Keep groups to 4 students max each. Depending on class size, you can have multiple groups for the same feature. *See suggested scaffold about assigning group roles.)
    - Pass out blank maps, group note-taker (one for each student in group), and any other articles or websites they will need.
    - Give students some examples of memory tools. ("Cool Reptiles Make Much Oxygen" for Colorado, Rio Grande, Missouri, Mississippi, and Ohio Rivers from left to right. Appalachian**:** *"Apples on the Right", Alaskan: "All the Way Up".*)
    - (10 min) Students will locate their assigned physical features on the LOC U.S. map and label them on their blank U.S. map using the color coding and labeling specified on note-taker.
    - Students will work in their group to use the map resources and articles to fill in their Note-Taker.
        - (10 min)Students will create a memory tool (mnemonic device, song, chant, etc) to help them remember the names and locations of their assigned features. Encourage creativity. Give students some examples.
        - (10 min)Students will use assigned websites or articles to research basic facts about their assigned features and fill in their note-taker.

Day 2: Create

1. **Review goals of project and success criteria**.(5 min)
2. **Group Inquiry Project (30 min)-** Each group will create a poster (or slide presentation) to use to teach the class about their assigned physical feature. It should include a labeled map, a fact section, and the memory tool.
    - Help keep students on track, by having a visual timer with check-in points in the lesson. 10

minutes for labeling, 10 minutes to add facts (each person could write theirs on a strip of paper and glue them all on), and 10 minutes for writing the memory tool and adding "flair"(optional).

Day 3: Present

1. **Review Success criteria** (5 min)
2. **Presentations**:(40 min) Each group will have 10 minutes to teach the class about their physical features. They will guide the rest of the class to label their own blank maps. Then they will present their poster or slideshow and teach other students their memory device. The rest of the class will label the features on their own blank map as the group presents and can fill in their own note-taker during the presentation. By the end of the presentations, every student in the class will have labeled their blank map with all rivers, mountains, bodies of water, and landforms.

Assessment:

Students will use a word bank to label a blank map of the US that has unlabeled rivers, mountains, and bodies of water (this may be part of a larger unit assessment with standards 5.38 and 5.40, but will need to take place at a future date so that students have time to study.) There is an optional multiple choice test as well that can be used in conjunction with the map.

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Suggested Scaffolds

*Assign group jobs: Each person could research one feature and then share what they learned with the group. Assign a time-keeper to keep groups on track. Assign a reader for groups who need support with reading the research articles.

Use AI tool to rewrite articles in lower reading levels for students who cannot read at grade level.

Extension or Cross-Curricular Opportunities

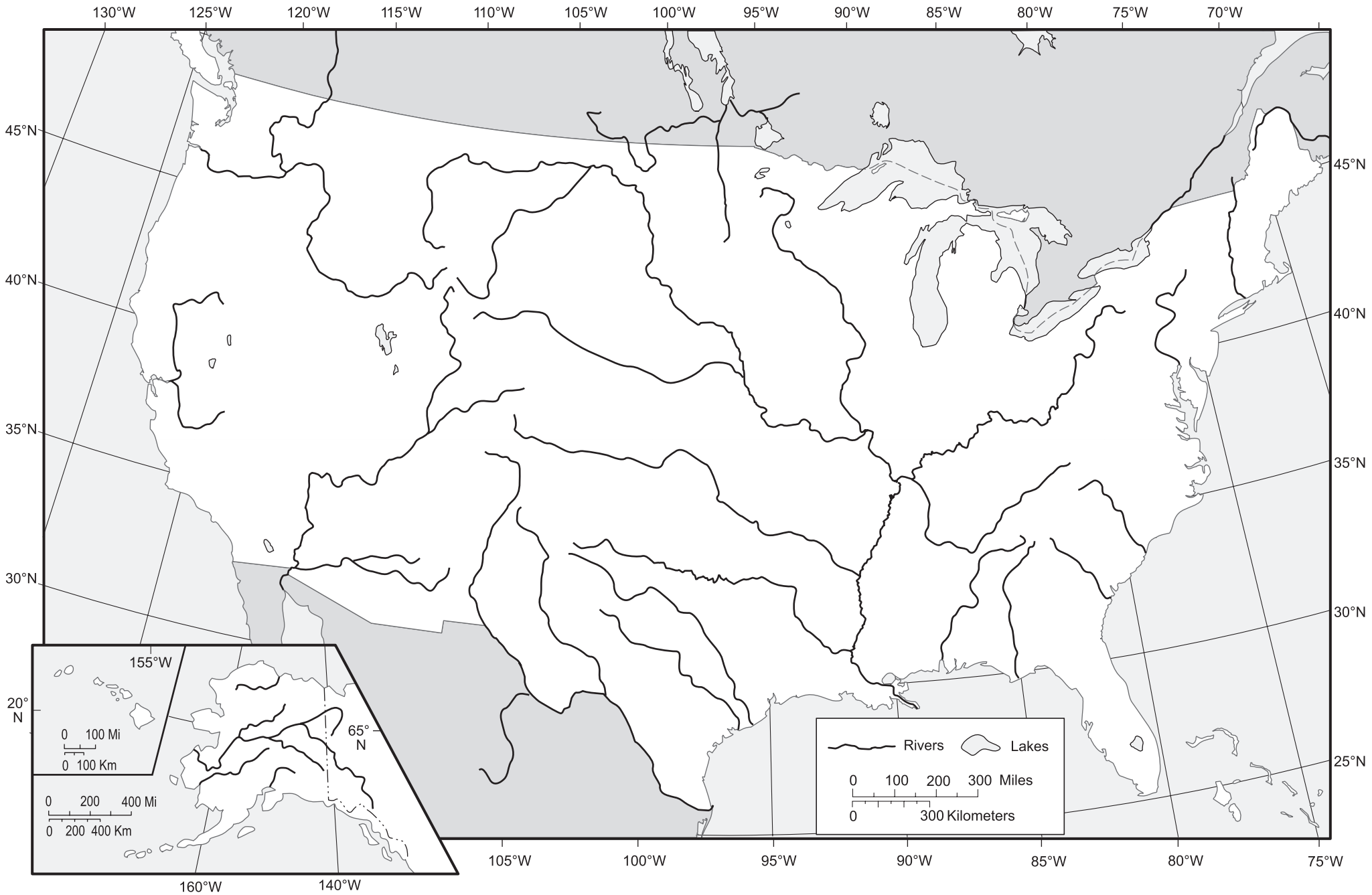
Students could each have to create their own poster or slide presentation and Day 3 would be a Jigsaw share instead of a class presentation. In this model, new groups would be formed on Day 3 with one representative from each physical feature group. Each person in the group would teach their new group about their assigned physical features.

Create a chat bot on School AI or other platform where students can converse with a "Geography Teacher" to learn facts about each physical feature they are researching.

Student groups could research all the physical features of one region of the United States instead of doing one type of physical feature.This would connect to 5.40.

The United States with surrounding countries and major rivers

5.39 Geography Test



National Council for Geographic Education
206-A Martin Hall
Jacksonville State University
700 Pelham Road North
Jacksonville, AL 36265-1602

Label these features on the map:

Coastal Plain	Great Lakes	Appalachian	Rio Grande
Mississippi River Basin	Gulf of Mexico	Alaska Range	Colorado
Grand Canyon	Great Salt Lake	Sierra Nevada	Missouri
Great Plains		Rockies	Ohio
			Mississippi

ARIZONA GEOGRAPHIC ALLIANCE

TN 5.39

U.S. Geography- Physical Features

Identifying and Describing Physical Features of the U.S.

Rivers

1. Identify and label the 5 major rivers on the U.S. map. Trace the rivers in dark blue and label clearly.
2. Create a memory device to help you remember the names and locations of the rivers.
3. Research each river and list facts about it.
4. Create a poster or google slide to teach the class what you learned. You will teach them where to label the rivers, your memory device, and a fact about each. Be creative!

Create a memory tool or Mneumonic to remember the rivers.

Facts about each river: Where are they located? How long are they? What other interesting things did you learn about them?

Mississippi River

Ohio River

Colorado River

Missouri River

Rio Grande

TN 5.39

U.S. Geography- Physical Features

Identifying and Describing Physical Features of the U.S.

Mountains

1. Identify and label the 4 major mountain ranges on the U.S. map. Use brown triangles to show the mountains on the map.
2. Create a memory device to help you remember the names and locations of the mountains.
3. Research each mountain range and list facts about it.
4. Create a poster or google slide to teach the class what you learned. You will teach them where to label the mountains, your memory device, and a fact about each. Be creative!

Create a memory tool or Mneumonic to remember the mountains of the US.

Facts about each mountain range: Where are they located? What is their size? What other interesting things did you learn about them?

Appalachian

Alaskan Range

Sierra Nevada

Rockies

TN 5.39

U.S. Geography- Physical Features

Identifying and Describing Physical Features of the U.S.

Landforms

1. Identify and label the 4 major landforms on the U.S. map. Use green shading to show them on the map.
2. Create a memory device to help you remember the names and locations of the mountains.
3. Research each landform and list facts about it.
4. Create a poster or google slide to teach the class what you learned. You will teach them where to label the landroms, your memory device, and a fact about each. Be creative!

Create a memory tool or Mneumonic to remember the landforms of the US.

Facts about each landforms: Where are they located? What is their size? What other interesting things did you learn about them?

Coastal Plain

Mississippi River Basin

Grand Canyon

Great Plains

TN 5.39

U.S. Geography- Physical Features

Identifying and Describing Physical Features of the U.S.

Bodies of Water

1. Identify and label the 3 major bodies of water on the U.S. map. Shade the bodies of water light blue and label each clearly.
2. Create a memory device to help you remember the names and locations of the bodies of water.
3. Research each river and list facts about it.
4. Create a poster or google slide to teach the class what you learned. You will teach them where to label the rivers, your memory device, and a fact about each. Be creative!

Create a memory tool or Mneumonic to remember the bodies of water in the US.

Facts about each body of water: Where are they located? What is their size? What other interesting things did you learn about them?

Great Lakes

Gulf of Mexico

Great Salt Lake

What other bodies of water did you notice?

World Geography Assessment: Standard 5.44- Identify the major physical features of the world.

Name: _____ Date: _____

Directions: Choose the best answer for each question.

1. This massive river flows south from Minnesota down to the Gulf of Mexico, acting as a major water highway for the central United States. Which river is described?

- ☐ A. Rio Grande
- ☐ B. Ohio River
- ☐ C. Mississippi River
- ☐ D. Colorado River

2. Located in the western United States, this steep, 1-mile-deep gorge was carved out over millions of years by the Colorado River. Which landform is described?

- ☐ A Great Plains
- ☐ B. Grand Canyon
- ☐ C. Mississippi River Basin
- ☐ D. Coastal Plain

3. This chain of older, rounded mountains stretches along the eastern side of the United States from Canada down into Alabama. Which mountain range is described?

- ☐ A Appalachian Mountains
- ☐ B. Rockies
- ☐ C. Alaskan Range
- ☐ D. Sierra Nevada

4. This major river flows westward from Pennsylvania, forming the border between several northern and southern states before joining the Mississippi River. What river is this?

- ☐ A. Colorado River
- ☐ B. Ohio River
- ☐ C. Rio Grande
- ☐ D. Missouri River

5. This river flows through the southwestern United States and carved out the famous Grand Canyon over millions of years. What river is this?

- ☐ A. Colorado River
- ☐ B. Mississippi River
- ☐ C. Ohio River
- ☐ D. Missouri River

6. This group of five massive freshwater lakes is located in the north-central United States along the border with Canada. What body of water is this?

- ☐ A. Great Salt Lake
- ☐ B. Gulf of Mexico
- ☐ C. Great Lakes
- ☐ D. Mississippi River Basin

7. This river is the longest river in the United States. It begins in the Rocky Mountains and flows east and south until it empties into the Mississippi River. What river is this?

- ☐ A. Rio Grande
- ☐ B. Ohio River
- ☐ C. Missouri River
- ☐ D. Colorado River

8. Located in the far northern state of Alaska, this high, icy mountain range contains Denali, the highest mountain peak in North America. What mountain range is this?

- ☐ A. Alaska Range
- ☐ B. Sierra Nevada
- ☐ C. Rocky Mountains
- ☐ D. Appalachian Mountains

9. This rugged mountain range located mostly in eastern California runs parallel to the Pacific Coast and contains Yosemite National Park. What mountain range is this?

- ☐ A) Appalachian Mountains
- ☐ B) Alaska Range
- ☐ C) Sierra Nevada
- ☐ D) Rocky Mountains

10. This flat, low-lying land stretch lies along the eastern coast and southern gulf coast of the United States, bordering the Atlantic Ocean and Gulf of Mexico. What landform is this?

- ☐ A) Great Plains
- ☐ B) Coastal Plain
- ☐ C) Mississippi River Basin
- ☐ D) Grand Canyon

11. This long river flows south through New Mexico and forms a natural international border between Texas and Mexico. What river is this?

- ☐ A. Mississippi River
- ☐ B. Rio Grande
- ☐ C. Ohio River
- ☐ D. Colorado River

12. This large, warm body of water is bounded by the southeastern coast of the United States and Mexico, and receives water from the Mississippi River. What body of water is this?

- ☐ A. Great Lakes
- ☐ B. Gulf of Mexico
- ☐ C. Great Salt Lake
- ☐ D. Atlantic Ocean

13. Located in the western state of Utah, this large body of water is much saltier than the ocean because water flows into it but cannot flow out. What body of water is this?

- ☐ A. Great Lakes
- ☐ B. Great Salt Lake
- ☐ C. Gulf of Mexico
- ☐ D. Lake Superior

15. This vast region of flat, grassy land stretches across the middle of the North American continent, east of the Rocky Mountains. What landform is this?

- ☐ A) Coastal Plain
- ☐ B) Great Plains
- ☐ C) Grand Canyon
- ☐ D) Sierra Nevada

Answer Key:

1.c 2.b 3. a 4. b 5. a 6.c 7.c 8. a 9.c 10.b 11. b 12.b 13. b 14. b