Map your neighborhood

Show off all the cool stuff near your home with this fun, creative project.

Whether you’ve lived in your town your whole life or you just moved there recently, there’s always more you can learn about your neighborhood. One fun way to celebrate your favorite local spots is to draw a map of your neighborhood. Making a map is not only creative and useful, but it can also help you work on skills like observation, drawing, and writing. Here’s how to get started.

Look at examples
Maps help people know where to go and what to expect when they get there. The first step in creating your own map is to look at examples of other simple maps. A parent might have a map of your town you can look at, or they can help you find some online. What do these maps include? Can you find your street? What about your school or the playground?

Take a walk
Now it’s time to think about what you want to include in your map. Ask an adult to walk down your street with you, and bring paper and a pen so you can make notes or sketch as you go. Start by paying attention to your street: Is it straight or curvy? How do other roads intersect it? Then observe what and how many other houses, stores, and other buildings are on your street and other nearby roads.

What natural elements should be on your map? This could be a stream, pond, or local park. Next, figure out what other landmarks should be on your map. A landmark is anything you might use to identify a spot for someone who doesn’t know the area, such as a large rock or a stop sign.

Sketch it out
Use the information you gathered to sketch out your map. (It’s a good idea to draw it first with a pencil so you can adjust your map as needed before you add color.) Start by drawing a square for your home and labeling it. Then draw your street and any other streets in the neighborhood you want to include. Fill in your map with other buildings, landmarks, parks, and so on.

Include a key
A map key is a small box in the corner of a map that explains what different symbols on the map mean. For example, maybe you decide that all houses on your map will be red squares, while stores and other businesses will be yellow squares. Maybe roads are made of black lines, while a stream is blue and a walking path is purple. Draw out these different symbols in the key, then put a label next to each one to explain what it means.

Amazing map facts
Maps have been made and used by humans for more than 5,000 years. Impress your friends with this fun trivia.

Stone work
The oldest known maps were carved into stone tablets as early as the year 2,300 BC. (And the world’s oldest globe was actually carved on ostrich eggs!)

Excape route
During World War Two, a US playing card company made a deck of cards that had maps of escape routes inside. Soldiers could carry the deck and use the maps if they were captured.

Puzzle fun
Some of the first jigsaw puzzles showed pictures of maps. The puzzles were used to make it more fun for people to learn geography.

Camera tricks
Google Maps usually creates its “Street View” feature using a camera on top of a car. But to get to some hard-to-reach places, they’ve attached the camera to a snowmobile and even a tricycle.

Big book
The world’s largest atlas (or book of maps) is more than 6 feet tall and 4 feet wide and costs about $100,000.