

MUDDLESOME MAPS

Before we go any further, let's have a word about maps. There's nothing a horrible geographer likes more than gawping at a muddlesome map. See for yourself. Wave a map under your geography teacher's nose and watch her go all giggly and goeey-eyed. Pathetic. OK, so maps are seriously useful for looking at the wicked world and getting from A to B. (And tracking down buried treasure.) But are they really as boring as they seem or is there more to maps than meets the eye? Time to put maps on the, er, map.

Wicked world maps

Remember how the Earth is shaped like a gigantic ball squashed in a bit at both ends? Well, you can also get ball-shaped maps of the Earth called globes. But a globe's not very good for folding up and popping in your pocket. So geographers have worked out a cunning way of showing the Earth on a piece of paper. They unfold the Earth's surface and cut bits out of it to make it lie flat. The posh word for this type of map is a projection. Here's how to make your own projection out of orange peel:

You will need:

OOPS!

What to do:

1 Peel the orange so the skin is still in one piece.

An orange, a knife and a good imagination.

2 Spread the skin out on a table.

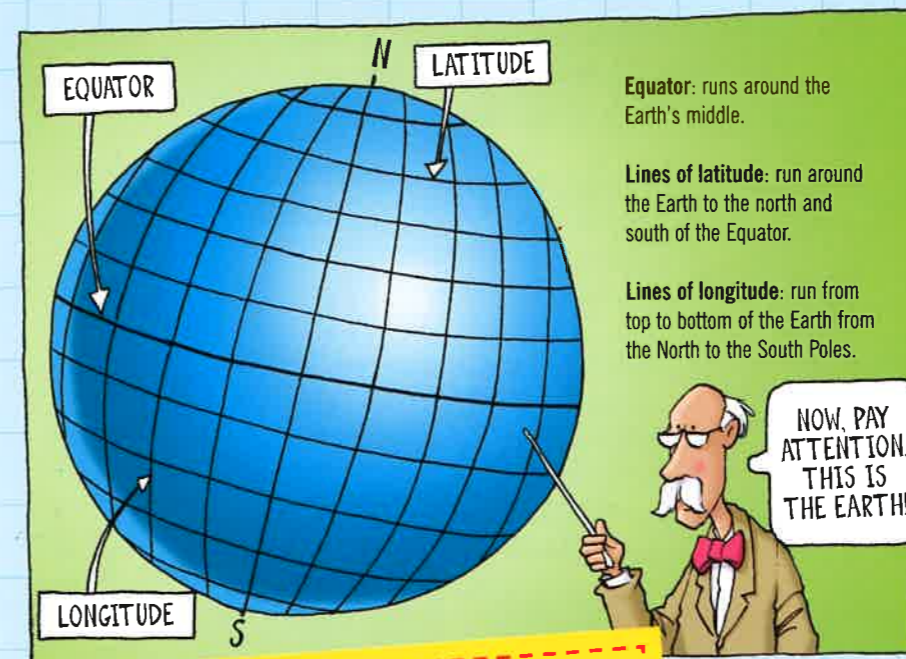
3 Cut out some pieces of peel so the skin lies flat.



Told you you'd need to use your imagination. In case it all goes horribly wrong, here's a handy diagram of a proper map projection.

Lining things up

To help them plot where on Earth places are on a map, geographers draw loads of criss-crossing lines. They're called lines of longitude and latitude. But you won't be able to see them on the ground. They're not really there, you see. Anyway, by giving a place's longitude and latitude, you can pinpoint exactly where it is. Very clever, if you ask me.



Equator: runs around the Earth's middle.

Lines of latitude: run around the Earth to the north and south of the Equator.

Lines of longitude: run from top to bottom of the Earth from the North to the South Poles.

Earth-shattering fact

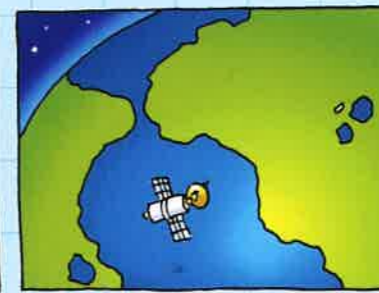
Horrible geographers call books of maps 'atlases'. They're named after an ancient Greek giant called Atlas, who had to lug the world about as a punishment. Bet that was a weight on his shoulders.

Map-making

Early maps were simply squiggles on pieces of paper, stone or silk but today, muddlesome map-making has gone horribly high-tech. Here's how a modern Earth map is made:



1 A plane or space satellite flies over the Earth, taking masses of snaps.



2 The snaps overlap to build up a brilliantly detailed picture.



3 Once all this info is in, it's fed into a computer and it plots it all on an awesomely accurate map.

WICKED WORLD FACTS

The oldest world map was made in Babylon about 2,600 years ago. It shows the Earth as a circle, with Babylon bang in the middle.

Ancient Polynesian explorers sailed thousands of kilometres using maps made from sticks and sea shells.

In 227 BCE, the Chinese emperor was nearly killed by a poisoned dagger hidden inside a rolled-up silk map. Luckily for him, the plot backfired.

Some of the gaps on early maps were filled with pictures of imaginary dragons and monsters.

A cartographer is someone who makes maps and not someone who drives a horse-and-cart.