

MY NORTH AMERICA RELIEF MAP

Build a country you can touch!

AHS Worldwide • Geography • Unit 1 Project • Middle School

EXPLORE
CREATE
LEARN

Real Places.
Real Learning.
Your Map.



YOUR MISSION

Pick one country — Canada, the United States, or Mexico — and build it out of salt dough on a cardboard base. Over eight steps you will raise its mountains, paint its regions, run its rivers, fill its lakes, cross its deserts, travel to its cold north, and finish its coasts. Label everything you learn along the way.

When you are done, you will own a map nobody else in the world has!



TWO UPLOADS — THAT IS ALL

- End of Step 4 — a photo or video of your map so far.
- End of Step 8 — a photo or video of your finished map.



CHOOSE YOUR COUNTRY

Check one:



CANADA



UNITED STATES



MEXICO

I chose this country because:

THE 8 STEPS TO YOUR MAP



1
Choose, trace, and press your country



2
Raise the mountains



3
Paint the open lands



4
Make the rivers flow
(UPLOAD)



5
Add lakes and basins



6
Cross the drylands



7
Travel to the cold north



8
Reach the coasts and finish
(UPLOAD)

Each step adds something permanent. Nothing gets taken apart.



WHAT YOU NEED

Gather these before Step 1. Most of it is already in your house!

ESSENTIAL SUPPLIES

- ☐ This booklet — you write in it every step
- ☐ Your printed two-page country template
- ☐ Cardboard, foam board, or a flattened box (about 18 x 12 inches)
- ☐ Flour, salt, and water for salt dough
- ☐ A mixing bowl and spoon
- ☐ Pencil and eraser
- ☐ Paint, markers, or colored pencils
- ☐ String, yarn, or paint for rivers and borders
- ☐ White glue or tape
- ☐ Scissors
- ☐ Toothpicks and scrap paper for label flags
- ☐ Index cards or scrap paper
- ☐ A phone or camera for your two uploads



NICE TO HAVE

- ☐ A physical map of North America to look at
- ☐ Cookie sheet or tray to carry your map
- ☐ Sandpaper for smoothing dried dough
- ☐ Clear glue or gloss for shiny water
- ☐ Cotton balls for snow and clouds
- ☐ Small twigs, sand, or dried leaves for texture



SALT DOUGH RECIPE

2 cups all-purpose flour
1 cup table salt
¾ cup warm water
1 tablespoon vegetable oil



SAFETY FIRST!

Ask an adult before you use the oven, and let them do the cutting if the cardboard is thick. Salt dough is not food — do not eat it, and keep it away from pets. Wash your hands when you finish.



COST

About \$0–5 if you already have flour, salt, and paint at home. Buying everything new costs about \$12.





CHOOSE, TRACE, AND PRESS

Your Country

Turn a map
into something
you can touch!

Today your country
stops being a picture
and becomes a real
3D map!



WHAT YOU NEED

- ☐ Your two-page country template
- ☐ Cardboard base, about 18 x 12 in
- ☐ Tape and scissors
- ☐ Pencil and eraser
- ☐ Salt dough (recipe on cover page)



QUICK TIP

Keep narrow areas of your map
(like Florida or Baja California)
a little thicker so they don't crack.

DO IT

- 1 Print and cut out your template pages.
- 2 Tape the two cut-out pages together.
- 3 Trace the outline on cardboard.
- 4 Mix your salt dough and press it inside your traced outline.
- 5 Smooth the dough as best as you can.
- 6 Let it dry 24–48 hours before moving to Step 2 – raise the mountains!



Print and cut out your template pages.



Tape the two cut-out pages together.



Trace the outline on cardboard.



Mix your salt dough and press it inside your traced outline.



Smooth the dough as best as you can.



Let it dry 24–48 hours before moving to Step 2 – raise the mountains!



IF YOUR COUNTRY IS...

- **Canada:** Keep the big islands, skip the tiny ones.
- **United States:** Build the main 48 states; Alaska and Hawaii are optional.
- **Mexico:** Keep Baja and the Yucatan thick so they survive cracking.



MAKE IT YOURS

- Pick a color story now: real earth tones, bright colors, or your country's flag colors.
- Give your map your own creative title that you like!
- Press a fingerprint into the dough somewhere as your maker's mark.



Real places. Real learning. Made by you.



STEP
2

RAISE THE MOUNTAINS

Add the high places to your country.

Mountains change the land, affect the climate, and create unique habitats!

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WHAT YOU NEED

- ☐ Your flat dough map from Step 1
- ☐ Soft dough (extra if needed)
- ☐ Toothpick or plastic knife (for texture)
- ☐ A small cup of water (for smoothing)



QUICK TIP

Don't make your mountains too large! You'll have more to add later, like rivers, lakes, and other land features.

DO IT

1

Look at the mountain ranges on your map or a real map. Decide where they go.

1



Look at the mountain ranges on your map.

2



Add dough to build mountain areas.

2

Use extra soft dough to build up the mountain areas. Pinch, shape, and layer the dough.

3



Use a toothpick to add texture and ridges.

4



Let it dry 24–48 hours.

3

Make the mountains look real. Use your fingers, a fork, or a toothpick to add texture and ridges.

4

Let the mountains dry for a bit. They will be firm, but still not painted. Your map is now ready for Step 3 – painting!



IF YOUR COUNTRY IS...

- **Canada:** Add the Rockies, Appalachians, and Arctic highlands.
- **United States:** Add the Rockies, Appalachians, and other major ranges.
- **Mexico:** Add the Sierra Madre ranges and the volcanic highlands.



MAKE IT YOURS

- Use different heights for your mountains.
- Add volcanic mountains if your country has them.
- Be creative! Real maps are a guide, but your land is unique.



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PAINT THE LAND TYPES

Bring your land to life with color!

Different colors show different types of land (grasslands, deserts, wetlands, etc.)



WHAT YOU NEED

- ☐ Your dried map from Step 2 (with mountains)
- ☐ Acrylic paint or tempera paint
- ☐ Paintbrushes (different sizes)
- ☐ A paper plate or palette
- ☐ A cup of water
- ☐ A paper towel (for cleaning brushes)

LAND TYPE COLOR KEY

- Grasslands (green)
- Drier areas (yellow)
- Deserts (orange/tan)
- Mountains (brown)

- Lakes & large rivers (blue)
- Arctic/tundra (white or very light)

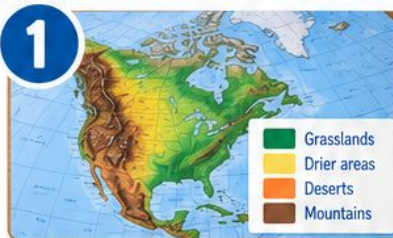
Use the map key or an example map to choose your colors!

DO IT

1

Look at a map key or example to choose your colors.

1



Choose your colors using a map key or example.

2



Paint the lowest areas first with green.

2

Paint the lowest areas first (such as plains and lowlands) with green. Keep the mountains brown.

3

Add other land colors, such as yellow or orange for drier areas. Let each color dry for a few minutes if needed.

3



Add other land colors, such as yellow or orange for drier areas.

4



Add and finish the remaining land colors.

4

Add and finish the remaining land colors. Use carefully and keep colors in the right places.

5

Add details. Use a small brush for edges and tricky spots.

5



Add details. Use a small brush for edges and tricky spots.

6



Let the paint dry completely before moving to Step 4 – rivers and lakes!

6

Let the paint dry completely (6–8 hours) before moving to Step 4 – rivers and lakes!



IF YOUR COUNTRY IS...

- **Canada:** Use greens for lowlands, yellows for prairies, orange/tan for drier areas, and white for Arctic areas.
- **United States:** Use greens for lowlands, yellows and tans for drier areas, and browns for the Rockies and other ranges.
- **Mexico:** Use greens for lowlands, yellows and orange for drier areas, and browns for mountain ranges.



MAKE IT YOURS

- Use the colors on a real map as a guide.
- You can mix colors to match your country's land types.
- Be creative! Real maps are a guide, but your map is unique.



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4 MAKE THE RIVERS FLOW



Add rivers to your country

Rivers connect places, people, and wildlife!

Use string, yarn, paint, or rolled dough to show the rivers on your map.



WHAT YOU NEED

- ☐ Your painted map from Step 3
- ☐ String, yarn, or thin rolls of salt dough
- ☐ White glue (if using string or yarn)
- ☐ Scissors
- ☐ A reference map of your country
- ☐ A pencil (to lightly plan your rivers)



QUICK TIP

Look at a real map to find the major rivers in your country. Rivers usually start in mountains and flow downhill to lakes or oceans.



Use a physical or online map as your guide!

DO IT

- 1 Look at a physical or online map of your country. Find the major rivers (for example, the Mississippi in the U.S., the Mackenzie in Canada, or the Rio Grande in Mexico).
- 2 Lightly draw the rivers on your map with a pencil.
- 3 Choose how you want to make your rivers: string, yarn, paint, or thin rolls of salt dough.
- 4 Add glue (if needed) and carefully place the rivers on your map. Press them down gently.
- 5 Make your rivers flow from high elevations (mountains) to lower areas (lakes, other rivers, or the ocean).
- 6 Add smaller rivers and tributaries if you like.
- 7 Let everything dry completely before moving to Step 5.



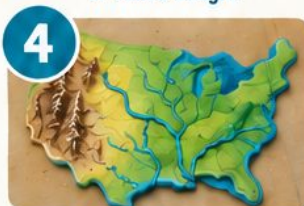
Plan your rivers with a pencil.



Add string, yarn, or rolled dough.



Use glue to secure the rivers (if needed).



Add smaller rivers and details.



Rivers bring life to your map!

Real rivers.
Real places.
Real learning!



RIVER IDEAS FOR EACH COUNTRY

Canada: Mackenzie, Yukon, St. Lawrence, Fraser (and many more!)

United States: Mississippi, Missouri, Colorado, Columbia, Rio Grande

Mexico: Río Bravo (Rio Grande), Río Balsas, Río Lerma, and more!



THINK ABOUT IT

- Where do most of your rivers begin?
- Do your rivers end in an ocean, gulf, or lake?
- How might rivers help people in your country?
- What might happen if a river in your country was polluted or disappeared?



MID-PROJECT UPLOAD

- Take a picture or video of your project. Upload it, so your Coach can see how it's coming along!



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5 ADD LAKES AND BASINS

Bring in the blue!

Lakes and basins make your map even more realistic!

Add the major lakes and other water features found in your country.



WHAT YOU NEED

- ☐ Your map from Step 4 (with rivers)
- ☐ Acrylic paint (blues and teals)
- ☐ Paintbrushes (small and medium)
- ☐ White glue or clear glue (optional, for shine)
- ☐ Toothpick (for small details)
- ☐ A reference map of your country



QUICK TIP

Look at a real map to find the major lakes, inland seas, and basins in your country. Paint them blue and consider using clear glue to make the water look shiny!



Use a physical or online map as your guide!

DO IT

- 1** Look at a physical or online map of your country. Find the major lakes and other important water features (for example: the Great Lakes in the U.S. and Canada, large inland lakes in Canada, or basins in Mexico).
- 2** Decide which lakes and basins to include. Focus on the largest and most important ones.
- 3** Use a small brush to paint the lakes and basins blue.
- 4** If you want a shiny water effect, let the paint dry and then carefully add a thin layer of clear glue.
- 5** Use a toothpick to help paint small areas or details.
- 6** Check your map. Are the lakes in the right places and the right shapes?
- 7** Let everything dry completely before moving to Step 6.
- 8** Be proud — you're making your map look more and more like the real thing!



Find the lakes on a real map and plan where to paint them.



Paint the larger lakes first.



Add smaller lakes and other water features.



Add clear glue (optional) to make the water shiny.



Let everything dry.



Step 5 complete! Your map is really coming to life!

Water brings maps to life!



MAJOR LAKES TO CONSIDER

Canada: Great Lakes (partially), Great Bear Lake, Great Slave Lake, Lake Winnipeg, and many more!

United States: Great Lakes, Lake Tahoe, Great Salt Lake, and more!

Mexico: Lakes such as Lake Chapala and other important basins.



THINK ABOUT IT

- Why do you think lakes and basins are important to the people, plants, and animals in your country?
- How might life be different without these water features?
- Can you find a lake or basin that surprised you?



MAKE IT YOURS

- Use different shades of blue for different lakes.
- Try adding texture or a glossy finish to make the water stand out.
- Label your major lakes with small flags or a key.
- If your country doesn't have many lakes, research and add other water features like basins or reservoirs.



Exploring the world. One map at a time.





ADD LABELS, A MAP KEY, AND A COMPASS

Make it clear and complete!

Labels help
others understand
your map!

Add a title, key, and
compass so your map
looks like a real one!



WHAT YOU NEED

- ☐ Your painted map from Step 5
- ☐ Permanent marker or fine-tip marker
- ☐ Small pieces of paper (for labels)
- ☐ Glue or clear tape
- ☐ Ruler (optional)
- ☐ Compass rose template (optional)



QUICK TIP

Keep your labels neat and easy to read.
You can write directly on the map or
use small paper labels and glue them
in place.



A compass shows
direction on a map!

DO IT

- 1 Decide on a title for your map. This is often your country's name (for example: "Canada," "United States," or "Mexico").
- 2 Add a compass rose to show direction (North, South, East, West). You can draw one or use a template.
- 3 Create a map key (legend) to show what your colors and symbols mean (for example: mountains, rivers, lakes, forests, deserts, and capital city).
- 4 Label the important features on your map (for example: major mountains, rivers, lakes, and any other special places).
- 5 Use a permanent marker or small paper labels. Write neatly!
- 6 Check your spelling and make sure labels are in the right places.
- 7 Make sure your map is easy to understand someone who hasn't studied your country.
- 8 Let the glue or marker ink dry completely before moving to Step 7.



Add a title to your map.



Add a compass rose.



Create a map key (legend).



Add labels to important features.



Label any other special places.



Step 6 complete!
Your map is looking great!



LABEL IDEAS FOR EACH COUNTRY

Canada: Rocky Mountains, Great Lakes, Hudson Bay, major rivers, capital city (Ottawa), and more!

United States: Appalachian Mountains, Mississippi River, Great Lakes, capital city (Washington, D.C.), and more!

Mexico: Sierra Madre Mountains, Gulf of Mexico, Baja Peninsula, capital city (Mexico City), and more!



THINK ABOUT IT

- Why are map keys important?
- What helps you decide which features to label?
- What are the most important places in your country? Why?
- If someone from another country looked at your map, would they be able to understand it?



MAKE IT YOURS

- Use creative label styles (print neatly, use small flags, or colored paper).
- Include symbols for special places (cities, national parks, landmarks).
- Add a border or decorative background to make your map stand out.
- If you have extra space, include a fun fact about one of the places you labeled!



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ADD THE FINISHING TOUCHES

Make it look amazing!

Small details make a big difference!



Add final details to make your map look realistic, creative, and complete!



WHAT YOU NEED

- ☐ Your map from Step 6 (with labels)
- ☐ Acrylic paint (additional colors)
- ☐ Small paintbrushes (for details)
- ☐ Toothpicks or cotton swabs (optional)
- ☐ Clear glue or gloss sealant (optional)
- ☐ Any extra materials for creative touches



QUICK TIP

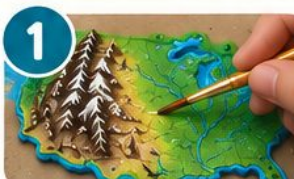


Look closer! Real places have amazing details!

Look at real photos of your country for ideas. Notice the colors, textures, and special features that make it unique. This is your chance to be creative!

DO IT

- 1 Look at your map. What areas could use more detail? (mountain peaks, forests, deserts, coastlines, islands, etc.)
- 2 Use small paintbrushes to add details like mountain peaks, trees, or different textures.
- 3 Add any remaining islands or smaller land features.
- 4 Touch up your colors. Make sure the land and water look bright and realistic.
- 5 You can use a toothpick or cotton swab to add tiny details (like snow on mountains or dots for islands).
- 6 If you want, you can add a thin layer of clear glue or gloss sealant to make the water shine.
- 7 Check that all labels are in place and easy to read.
- 8 Let everything dry completely before moving to Step 8.



Add small details (like snow on mountains).



Paint trees, forests, or other textures.



Add islands or small land features.



Touch up colors and make it bright!



Use a toothpick for tiny details.



Add clear glue for a shiny water effect (optional).



Check your labels.



DETAIL IDEAS

Here are some ideas (choose a few):

- ☐ Snow on mountain tops
- ☐ Trees or forests (small green dots/trees)
- ☐ Sandy deserts (tan or yellow)
- ☐ Rocks or canyons (brown shading)
- ☐ Small islands (dots or tiny shapes)
- ☐ Ocean waves (white lines)
- ☐ Your country's flag (small!)



THINK ABOUT IT

- What is your favorite part of your map?
- What was the hardest part? What did you learn?
- How did the final details change the way your map looks?
- What do you want people to notice most about your country?



MAKE IT YOURS

- Add something special that represents your country (a famous animal, plant, landmark, or symbol).
- Use your own art style and creativity!
- Make the water look realistic with shading or wave patterns.
- Be proud of your work — this is your unique map!



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FINISH, CHECK, AND BE PROUD!

You did it!

A little
polish makes
a big difference!



Check your work, make any
final touches, and get ready
to share your amazing map!



WHAT YOU NEED

- ☐ Your map from Step 7 (with labels)
- ☐ Clear glue or gloss sealant (optional)
- ☐ Small paintbrush (for touch-ups)
- ☐ Toothpicks or cotton swabs (for tiny fixes)
- ☐ Map key, title, and labels (completed)
- ☐ A clean, flat space to let your map dry



QUICK TIP

Look at your map like a real geographer — what can you improve? Small touch-ups can make your map look more realistic and complete!

Details
show you
care!

DO IT

1 Look over your entire map. Make sure you have all the important parts: land regions, rivers, lakes, labels, title, and map key.

2 Fix any spots that need more paint or detail.

3 Add final touches, like small mountains, trees, islands, or texture.

4 Make sure all of your labels are neat, spelled correctly, and in the right places.

5 If you want, apply a thin layer of clear glue or gloss sealant to protect your map and make the colors shine. Let it dry completely.



You're finished! Be proud of your hard work and get ready to share your map with others!



Check that all the important features are on your map.



Add any final details or touch-ups.



Clean up any rough spots.



Add clear glue or sealant (optional) for a shiny finish.



Real places.
Real learning.
Real pride!



FINAL UPLOAD

- ☐ Record a short video.
- ☐ Walk us through each feature of your map.
- ☐ Share one thing you learned while creating your map.
- ☐ Share one thing you would do differently next time.
- ☐ Upload your video for your Coach to review!



THINK ABOUT IT

- What part of this project was the most fun?
- What did you learn about your country while making your map?
- What would you do differently next time?
- How can maps help people understand the world better?



SHARE YOUR MAP

- Show your map to your family, friends, or learning community.
- Take a photo or video and share online.
- Tell one or two interesting facts about your country and your map.
- Be proud — you created something amazing!



Exploring the world. One map at a time.

