Grades: 8th  
Subject: U.S. History, World History and Geography  
Time Required: 1 Day  
Author: Teaching with Primary Sources—MTSU

OVERVIEW
Federal engineers worked hard to create accurate maps to mark the positions of troops, cities, towns, railroads, rivers, roads, hills, and any other important features. These maps are excellent sources for understanding the geography of Civil War battles, and are also some of the best maps for recording the geography of southern towns in the 1860s.

The Battle of Nashville, which raged from December 15-16th, 1864, took place on the outskirts of Nashville, Tennessee during the American Civil War. This battle was an overwhelming victory for the Federal army, who took control of Nashville and shattered the Confederate Army of Tennessee as a result of this battle.

UNDERSTANDING GOAL
Through an examination of a map of the Battle of Nashville, students will gain skills in reading maps for information on the past.

OBJECTIVES
Students will list features on the map, such as rivers, railroads, streams, etc. and discuss the importance of those features as it relates to the Battle of Nashville. Students will also explore the importance of maps during this historical periods.

INVESTIGATIVE QUESTION
What can maps tell us about the past?

Social Studies
5.42: Describe the significance of the following Civil War events and battles on Tennessee: Siege of Fort Donelson, Battle of Stones River, Battle of Franklin, Battle of Nashville.
8.65: Describe African American involvement in the Union Army, including the Massachusetts 54th Regiment at Fort Wagner and the 13th U.S. Colored Troops in the Battle of Nashville.

Tennessee History
TN.29: Describe Tennessee’s role in the Civil War, including: siege of Fort Henry and Fort Donelson, Battle of Shiloh, Battle of Stones River, Chattanooga Campaign, Johnsonville Campaign, Battle of Franklin, Battle of Nashville.
Note: It may be helpful to teachers to establish context about the Battle of Nashville. This article from the Tennessee Encyclopedia provides a great overview of the battle and the effects of the battle’s aftermath.

Step 1: Print out copies of the Battle of Nashville map for your students. Alternatively, if you have access to tablets, laptops, or a computer lab, you can have your students pull the map up on the Library of Congress’ website.

Step 2: Divide your students up into groups. Instruct them to look at the map and identify transportation corridors such as railroads, streams, river, and roads. After they have had some time to discuss and identify these features, ask them the following questions: How does the lack of a map legend affect the way that you are able to read these maps? How do you know that the features you identified were transportation corridors? Do any of the names seem familiar to you? What do all of these transportation corridors tell you about Nashville’s location and importance during the Civil War?

Step 4: After your students have discussed the previous questions, have them again look at the map. Inform them that the features which look like small holes on the map are actually hills. Then inform them that the red dashed lines are picket lines (which represent the outermost position of Union soldiers) and that the red bracketed lines are where forts and breastworks were located. After disclosing this information, have them analyze the map again with these questions in mind: Why do the picket lines and forts seem to follow the hills? What were these lines protecting? Where are the different forts located? Why do you think they were located where they are? Did these forts help protect Nashville in 1864?

Step 5: Once your students have finished discussing their findings, instruct them to go back to their regular seats. Have your students pull out a piece of paper for an assignment which will be done at the end of class. Ask them the following questions:

1) In what ways would a Union soldier use a map like this one?

2) Why would Northerners need to produce maps of Nashville during the Civil War?

3) Why would Southerners not need to do so?

4) How can maps deepen our understanding of history?
EXTENSION IDEAS

Though this lesson plan focuses on one map related to the Battle of Nashville, the structure and methodology of the lesson plan can be adapted to fit any map that is available on the Library of Congress. Thus the teacher can use this content to address different topics of United States, Tennessee, and World History, or to further explore the major battles and themes of the American Civil War.

Schedule a day in your school’s computer lab, or assign each student a tablet/laptop if you have those available. Direct your students to the Library of Congress’ website. Once there, have them access the “Collections with Maps” feature on the website. This page shows all of the collections that feature maps within them.

Instruct your students to pick one map to analyze using the Library of Congress’ Primary Source Analysis Tool. The next class period, have your students present on their different maps or share their findings in small groups. Alternatively, the teacher could have their students type up a report on their chosen map. This option is also great because the teacher can then tape the maps and brief reports up in their rooms or in the hallway for other teachers and students to look at and observe.