

Teaching Guide

SEGMENT 2, WEBISODE 1

Please note: Each segment in this Webisode has its own Teaching Guide



Segment Overview



Let's Discuss

Before America became a new nation, its citizens were people of all nationalities and cultures. Many came to the North American colonies to escape oppressive governments, religious persecution, unemployment, and hopeless poverty. Although the colonists immigrated to America for a variety of reasons, their common goal was a new start in life, and the keystone of that new life was freedom. In *Letters from an American Farmer*, published in London in 1782, Hector St. John Crèvecoeur, a Frenchman, defined for the world the new breed of man who would risk all and brave the wilds of America for freedom.

Teacher Directions

1. Students, in small teams, discuss the following questions.
 - Before they became Americans, what nationalities were the settlers of the North American colonies?
 - Imagine the North American continent in 1750. What do you see in your mental image?
 - What did Crèvecoeur most admire about America?
 - What new ideas will the new American entertain? What new opinions will he/she form?
2. Discuss the following points with the students.
 - Settlers in North America came from England, France, Holland, Spain, and Africa. The Native Americans were already there. They immigrated thousands of years before from eastern cultures.
 - Except for along the seacoast, Northeast America was covered with forests. Settlements and forts dotted the wilderness. Uncleared lands surrounded farms. Indian trails served for roads, and they were not paved. Boston, New York, Philadelphia, and Charleston were the only cities.
 - Crèvecoeur most admired the opportunity available in America for anyone to own land and work for himself. He also praised the independent spirit of Americans; they wanted to leave the old ideas of Europe behind and think and act for themselves and not be governed by an aristocracy.



Teacher Directions

Activity One

1. Distribute the Student Sheet: *What is An American?* Students read the excerpts from Crèvecoeur's *Letters from An American Farmer* to discuss the following questions.

- How does Crèvecoeur contrast land ownership in Europe and America?
- At the time of his letter, what occupation did most Americans have?
- According to Crèvecoeur, what is an American?

Crèvecoeur notes that in Europe, aristocrats ("great lords") own most of the land and the common people own nothing. In the America of Crèvecoeur's day, most people are farmers. Crèvecoeur notes the diversity of the American population. He describes the American as being fundamentally different from Europeans in ideas and opinions. While many Europeans live in poverty, unemployment, and drudgery, the American is able to farm his own land and see the fruits of his labor.

2. Point out to students the ethnic diversity that Crèvecoeur notes. Ask students the following question.

Is America more ethnically diverse than in Crèvecoeur's day?

3. Working with teammates, students list the nations from which their ancestors came. Students compile a team list. Each team shares its list of nations of ancestry with the class.

4. Students write a paragraph answering the question "What is an American?"

Activity Two

1. Crèvecoeur published early maps of the northeastern United States in the 1787 French edition of his *Letters From An American Farmer*. Students locate maps from this book or other eighteenth century maps of America online.

2. Distribute the Student Sheet: *Maps of the Northeastern United States and Canada*. Crèvecoeur published the early map in a French edition of *Letters from an American Farmer* (1787).

3. In their teams, students compare Crèvecoeur's map with the modern map of the same region. The teams discuss the following questions.

- In what ways does the eighteenth agree with the twenty-first century map?
- What additional information does the modern map show?
- In what ways do the maps disagree?
- As a history sleuth, what conclusions can you draw from these differences in the maps?
- Write a brief paragraph summarizing your conclusions.

4. In their map study, the students should discover the following information. Review this information with the students.

History Sleuth, Cont.



What do you
Think?



Moving Toward
Freedom

The Atlantic coastline appears the same in both maps. Enough settlers had come and maps been drawn by the mid-eighteenth century to gain more accuracy. The early map shows the names of states, but most of the boundaries are missing. Many of these boundaries had not yet been established because the kings of England had granted overlapping charters. Lakes Ontario, Erie, and Michigan appear on both maps, but Lake Huron is missing from the eighteenth century map. The Appalachian Mountains appear on the early map in much less detail than on the modern map. People in the eighteenth century did not yet know the extent of these mountains. Only after more extensive exploration, settlement, and improved map-making techniques (including looking at the land from aircraft) could mapmakers produce maps of modern quality and accuracy.

Teacher Directions

1. Ask the students.

Do you think that Crèvecoeur's comparison between life in Europe and life in America is fair and accurate?

Note to the Teacher: Any student opinion is acceptable if logical and explained.

Teacher Directions

1. Ask the students the following questions.

- Can you think of some people whom Crèvecoeur failed to include in his view of the new American?
- What would these people think of his opinions?

2. Share the following information with the students in a general class discussion.

Crèvecoeur omits two important groups of people in his description of American life. Native Americans and African Americans might give a different view of American colonial life and opportunity. By the end of the eighteenth century, Indians had lost much of their land along the Atlantic Coast. They had already found out how little they could rely on the white settlers' promises. New York experienced many Indian uprisings during the Revolutionary War, including the one in which Crèvecoeur's wife Mehitable lost her life.

Note to the Teacher: You and the students can read about life in the Hudson Valley during the Revolutionary War on the web site Drums Along the Mohawk @ <http://www.nyhistory.net/~drums/>.

Moving Toward Freedom,
Continued

Few Africans would recognize Crèvecoeur's description of American life. While some African Americans in the middle and northern colonies had gained their freedom by the time of the Revolutionary War, many remained enslaved. A number of African Americans eagerly volunteered to join in the fight against the British, in the hope that the words "all men are created equal" also applied to them. Many fled to join the British, who had promised them their freedom. However, many African Americans had to wait years for freedom; those in the South had to wait until the Civil War.

Note to the Teacher: You and the students can read about African American life in the colonies in the book *Africans in America: The Terrible Transformation* or on the web site *Africans in America: The Terrible Transformation* <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/aia/part1.html>.

Teacher Directions

Use the following activities with your students.

Mathematics – At the time of the American Revolution, the population of the country was three million. Students research: What is the population of the United States now? How many more citizens does the United States have in 2000 than in 1780?

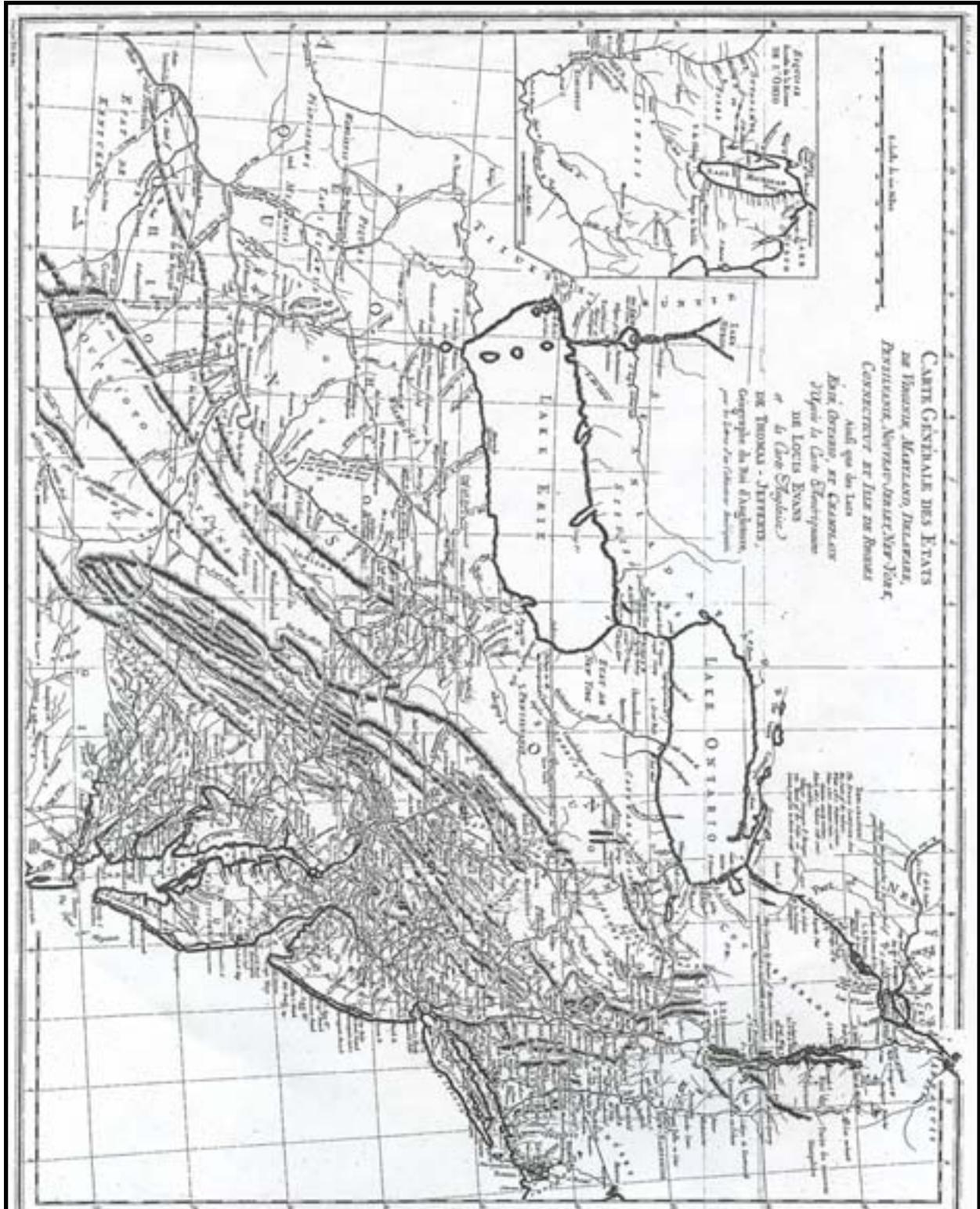
Geography – Students find maps of northeastern North America and Canada from other centuries to compare them to Lewis Evan's 1775 map and the twenty-first century map. Some places to look include a map of New France in *A History of US, The First Americans*, by Joy Hakim, page 150 and Hugo Allard's 1673 map in *A History of US, Making Thirteen Colonies* by Joy Hakim, page 83. Other famous mapmakers to investigate are John Smith in the seventeenth century and John Charles Fremont in the nineteenth century.



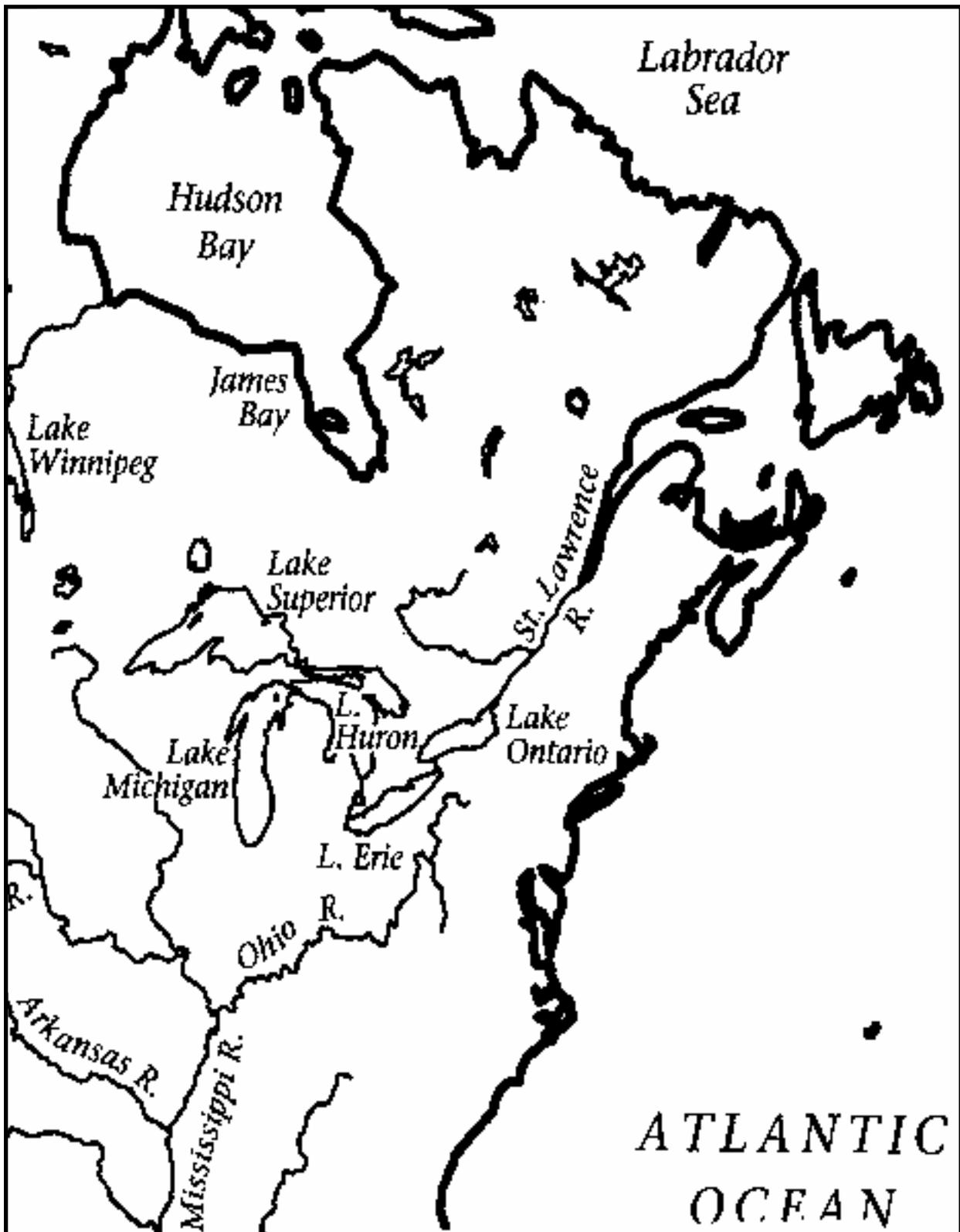
Connections

Maps of the Northeastern United States and Canada

Crèvecoeur Map



Northeastern United States and Canada



What Is An American?

Excerpts from *Letters From An American Farmer*

America is not composed, as in Europe, of great lords who possess every thing, and of a herd of people who have nothing. Here are no aristocratical families, no courts, no kings, no bishops, no ecclesiastical dominion, no invisible power giving to a few a very visible one; no great manufacturers employing thousands, no great refinements of luxury. The rich and the poor are not so far removed from each other as they are in Europe.

Some few towns excepted, we are all tillers of the earth, from Nova Scotia to West Florida. We are a people of cultivators, scattered over an immense territory, communicating with each other by means of good roads and navigable rivers, united by the silken bands of mild government, all respecting the laws without dreading their power, because they are equitable. We are all animated with the spirit of industry, which is unfettered, and unrestrained, because each person works for himself.

What then is the American, this new man? He is either an European, or the descendant of an European; hence that strange mixture of blood, which you will find in no other country. I could point out to you a man, whose grandfather was an Englishman, whose wife was Dutch, whose son married a French woman, and whose present four sons have now four wives of different nations. He is an American, who, leaving behind him all his ancient prejudices and manners, receives new ones from the new mode of life he has embraced, the new government he obeys, and the new rank he holds.

Here individuals of all nations are melted into a new race of men, whose labours and posterity will one day cause great change in the world. Americans are the western pilgrims, who are carrying along with them that great mass of arts, sciences, vigour, and industry, which began long since in the East; they will finish the great circle.

The American is a new man, who acts upon new principles; he must therefore entertain new ideas, and form new opinions. From involuntary idleness, servile dependence, penury, and useless labour, he has passed to toils of a very different nature, rewarded by ample subsistence. This is an American.