Defining Regions of the United States

Overview:
In this lesson, students will think about how the regions of the United States are defined and characterized. They will map the regions from memory and will compare maps to see that regions are human constructions that do not generally have clearly defined boundaries. They will consider how their own region is defined and will conclude by writing essays explaining how the creation of regions can help us to organize and understand the country's geography and can also contribute to stereotypes.

Time:
2-3 class periods

Materials Required:
• Computer with Internet access
• Blank Xpeditions outline maps of the United States, one for each student
• Markers or colored pencils
• Writing materials

Objectives:
Students will
• list and map regions of the United States;
• compare maps to see if they have defined regions in the same way;
• list words that describe the regions on their lists;
• discuss and debate the characteristics of their own region; and
• write essays explaining how regional definitions help us to organize and understand the country and world and how these definitions can contribute to stereotypes.
• create a photo slideshow that “describes” a specific region using collected online photos

Suggested Procedure
Opening:
• Have students name some regions of the United States, and list those regions on the board.

Development:
• Give students blank outline maps of the United States, and ask them to label the regions they have listed, using their best judgment as to the regional boundaries.
• Have students compare maps. Do all the regions look the same, or have they been drawn differently? Why are there differences?
• Read to the class the geographic definition of a region: places that have "one or more common characteristics that give them a measure of unity and make them distinct from surrounding areas."
• Point out that regions are created by people to more easily define places that share similar characteristics. As students have discovered, the actual geographic boundaries of a region can be difficult to describe and are frequently open to debate.
• Ask students to list words that they think define each of the regions on the list. Their lists might include types of food, music, or accents. Discuss their lists as a class, and ask students whether they think these regional definitions are accurate or if they represent stereotypes that are not necessarily correct.

Optional activity:
• In groups, students collect online photos of an assigned region using Flickr, picturesofplaces.com, picturehistory.com and other sources. Students can use Comic Life, PhotoStory 3 or iMovie to create a visual depiction of their region.

Closing:
• Have students discuss and debate the region that they live in. How do they define their own region? What stereotypes do they think people from other regions have about their region?

Suggested Student Assessment:
• Ask students to write essays answering the following questions: How do regional definitions help us organize and understand the country and the world? How do they contribute to stereotypes?

Extending the Lesson:
• Have students collect and look through travel brochures for destinations in their own region. Ask them to report on the ways the brochures portray the region. Do students think this is a fair portrayal, or do the brochures present any inaccurate stereotypes? Why do
students think the creators of the brochures have portrayed the region in this way?