

Example Map Analysis Activity:**Scott's Great Snake**

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**Objectives:**

Participants will be able to...

- a) Identify bias in map making.
- b) Interpret the attitudes toward the Confederacy from a Union standpoint.
- c) Describe possible characterizations of the Union from a Confederate standpoint.

NOTE: Participants should have experience analyzing primary sources and have at least a rudimentary understanding of the issues and attitudes espoused with regard to the American Civil War.

Materials:

- Large copy of [Scott's Great Snake](http://hdl.loc.gov/loc.gmd/g3701s.cw0011000) for each small group of students/participants (<http://hdl.loc.gov/loc.gmd/g3701s.cw0011000>)
 - Copy of Scott's Great Snake Map Analysis Sheet for each student (attached)
- NOTE: Be sure to remove sample responses before making copies.

Overarching Question:

How can one identify bias in a primary source?

Background:

In the early months of the Civil War Union General Winfield Scott formulated a plan to deny the Confederacy necessary supplies by means of a naval and land based blockade. The hope was to strangle the Southern states, rob them of the means of continuing their rebellion, and thereby force surrender by the Confederate forces. This approach to the war became known as The Anaconda Plan, named after a large tropical snake that kills its prey by constriction. This map, made in 1862 by J.B. Elliot not only illustrates Scott's theory on how to win the war, but also shows details about what was happening in the states, both North and South.

Learning Sequence:

1. Divide the class into groups of 3-5 and provide a copy of the Analysis Sheet to each person. Present the background information.
2. Ask: “How might bias affect the information presented in a primary source?” Have individuals record their responses in Section 1 of the Analysis Sheet. Allow time for groups to share answers.
3. Ask the groups to continue through Section 1, discussing and answering the remaining questions.
4. Distribute copies of the map and ask groups to carefully examine the map for clues to determine for what purpose this map was made and what bias might have influenced J.B. Elliot's creation of the map. Have them record their responses in Section 2.
5. Ask the groups to continue through section 2 of the Analysis Sheet, discussing and answering the remaining questions.
6. Conclude by reviewing and discussing responses to Section 2 with the entire group.
 - i. Based on the evidence of the bias of the cartographer, where do you suppose this map might have been created? (It was created in Cincinnati, OH.) What perspective does it represent?
 - ii. Ask the class to describe or draw a different version, characterizing a selected state from a southern point of view.

Reflect:

How did the analysis of this primary source expand your understanding of bias as presented in media? How would your learning or understanding differed if you had listened to a lecture or read about bias rather than doing an analysis yourself?

Scott's Great Snake - Analysis Sheet
(with possible responses and suggestions)

Section I

1. How might bias affect the information in a primary source?

Bias is evident in both what the source includes and excludes. Photographs can show a person or an event in a positive light or negative light. Photographers can choose to include or exclude certain subjects. Cartoons not only show a humorous take on events but also reveal bias in whom they choose to make fun of. Information in primary sources may be manipulated by the creator and may only tell part of a story.

2. How might you look for bias in a photograph, print, or drawing?

Ask yourself the question 'What did this photographer/printer/artist want me to see in this work?' Consider who the audience might have been for this particular work and what the creator might have wanted them to see. Look for any attempt to convince an audience or persuade the viewer.

3. The title of the map you are going to examine is 'Scott's Great Snake'. What, if any, bias might you expect to find in this primary source based on its title.

Students could answer either way on this. Noting the word 'great' in the title they may be tempted to think that the author thought highly of Scott's plan and supported it. On the other hand they may notice that the map does not give the actual title of the plan and consider it a slight on the part of the creator on the merits of the plan.

Section II

1. For what purpose might this map have been created?

Illustration in a magazine or book. As a poster, pamphlet, or flier.

2. Does J.B. Elliot show any sort of bias in this map's illustrations or notations? If so how was the creator biased?

The creator shows favoritism toward the northern states by characterizing them as peaceful through idyllic illustrations. The southern states are shown as chaotic and desperate.

3. Choose one southern state and explain what the map says about life in that state at the time.

Example: Virginia's illustration shows a hornet nest from which hornets are streaming to every part of the south. The implication here is that Virginia is the center of all the trouble and chaos that is infecting the south.

4. How does the characterization of the southern states compare to that of the northern states?

The northern states are pictured as idyllic and peaceful while the southern states are chaotic, violent, and misreable.