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Student Reading 1.1: What are Maps for?

Early Saturday morning Mom called upstairs to Jimmy, “Jimmy, we have to get going. Today is the day we are off on our adventure!” Jimmy had been excited all week to begin their trip - they were driving to Tennessee to see his grandparents. It would take them several hours of driving to get there. Jimmy was a little bit worried about being bored on the long drive. He took his suitcase down to the car, got settled in and fastened his seatbelt. And they were off!

Mom sat in the front seat next to Dad, who was driving, and Jimmy sat in the back seat. He started reading the book he had brought along. He could hear Mom giving Dad driving directions. After about an hour of driving, Jimmy put his book down. When he looked out the window, he saw they were in the countryside, far from the buildings and roads with which he was familiar. “Mom, how do you know we are going the right way?” Jimmy asked. “I am using this **map.**” Mom replied. She handed Jimmy a very large piece of paper with lots of lines and words all over it. Jimmy looked at it for several minutes, but nothing seemed to make sense. He saw letters and numbers and names and symbols, but



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they all seemed to jumble together. “Mom, this thing makes no sense! How is it helping you?”

“Well, Jimmy,” mom explained, “this map shows all the roads we will use to get to Grandma and Grandpa’s house. It helps me decide where to turn, and how far to go.” Jimmy looked again at the paper in his hands. “How do you know that’s what it shows?” he asked his mom. “Well, first, I can tell it shows the section of the country that I want it to by looking at the **title**. See how this one is titled, “Ohio/ West Virginia”? That tells me it is the map I need. I can find the street where we live on the map, then find the street where Grandma and Grandpa live, and find the best route to get from one to the other.” Jimmy looked at the map, trying again to make sense of it. He saw the word “Cincinnati”, so he knew his house was somewhere in that section of the map, and he saw the word “Parkersburg”, which he recognized as the city where his grandparents lived, so he knew their house was somewhere in that map section. “Okay, so I can see that. But how do you know which way to turn?” Jimmy asked Mom. “Well, look down in the bottom corner of the map. Do you see that cross-shaped figure? That is a **compass rose**. It shows the **cardinal directions** of north, east, south and west. That tells me that we need to drive to the east to get where we want to go.”



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“Oh, that makes sense. But what the heck is this little picture here?” Jimmy asked as he pointed to a small drawing on the map that looked like a group of trees.

“Well, if you need to know what a symbol on the map stands for, you look at the **map key**.” Mom said. “It has the definitions for each symbol.” Jimmy looked at the map key and found that the symbol of trees showed where there was a state or national forest.

“Okay, this is starting to make a lot of sense. But you said you found our street on this map. That must have taken a long time! There are a lot of streets here. How did you know where to look?” “Oh, well, do you see the letters and the numbers along the edges of the map? They really help me find things. Here, you try it. On the back of the map there is an Index, just like one you might find in a book. Here you can look up our street name. Try it and let me know what you find.” Jimmy looked through the ‘F’ listings until he found the name of his street - Flowerwood Court. Next to the name he saw B4. When he told his mom this information, she showed him how to find the B column across the top of the map and put his right index finger there, and then find the 4 row along the side and put his left index finger there. He then slid his fingers along the column and row



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until his fingers met in a square that had been drawn onto the map. “Now look in that square and you will find our street.” Mom said. Jimmy looked carefully, and saw that Mom was right! “This is called an **alphanumeric grid**, Jimmy. ‘Alpha’ means a letter and ‘numeric’ means a number. You use both a letter and a number to find the right square on the map.” Jimmy spent about an hour finding things that were familiar to him on the map, and identifying what grid square contained familiar locations. He looked up his school, his church, and friends’ houses. Before he knew it, it was time to give the map back to Mom so they could find the way to Grandma and Grandpa’s house. This long drive had not been boring at all! Jimmy couldn’t wait to spend more time exploring maps.

