

## Exploration: Mapping the world - Ortelius



*Theatrum Orbis Terrarum*

In this activity sheet you will learn about early attempts to map the world. You'll also look at an example of an early map *Theatrum Orbis Terrarum* which is featured in the Mirror of the World website.

**In the spotlight**  
*Theatrum Orbis Terrarum*  
Abraham Ortelius  
1574

**Words to know**  
Cartographer, orientation

### Pages to visit

[http://www.mirroroftheworld.com.au/exploration/venturing\\_out/index.php](http://www.mirroroftheworld.com.au/exploration/venturing_out/index.php)

[http://www.mirroroftheworld.com.au/exploration/venturing\\_out/theatrum\\_orbis.php](http://www.mirroroftheworld.com.au/exploration/venturing_out/theatrum_orbis.php)

### The first atlas

Abraham Ortel, or 'Ortelius', was a **cartographer** (map maker) from the city of Antwerp in Belgium. He created the first real modern atlas, which brought together maps of most of the known world at that time. Ortelius had to change the size and orientation of many different maps so that they would all fit together. He then collected the maps into a book, just like a modern atlas. It was very successful, and sold over 7,300 copies in 42 years. In those days, that was a lot of books.

The reason that his atlas was so popular was that for the first time people could imagine what the earth looked like as a whole. They could see other parts of the world and their geographical details.

### Activity 1 – Get interactive!

Have a look at Ortelius' map in detail using the Zoom & Pan interactive link at the Mirror of the World website: [http://www.mirroroftheworld.com.au/exploration/venturing\\_out/theatrum/online.php](http://www.mirroroftheworld.com.au/exploration/venturing_out/theatrum/online.php)

Notice how his maps differ to the maps in atlases that we have today.

Have a closer look at the bottom half of the map. What do you notice about the big stretch of land? How accurate do you think it was?

Not all of the maps and details are correct, but Ortelius used the most up-to-date maps of his time. For example, Australia had not been mapped in 1574. On Ortelius' map we can see a massive continent in the south called '*Terra Australis Incognita*' – which means 'unknown southern land' in Latin. For explorers of the 16th century, the southern hemisphere was a very strange and mysterious place.

**Question time**

1. Why was Ortelius' atlas such a success?

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2. Look at the four maps – which parts of the world do they show?

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3. Which Asian countries do you recognise on Ortelius' map?

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4. Now look at the map that shows America. There is a big landmass to the bottom left. Can you guess what this is? What was it called then?

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5. Compare Ortelius' maps to a modern map of the world. Which countries and continents do you think are mapped correctly in Ortelius' map?

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6. Which parts of the world do you think are mapped incorrectly in Ortelius' map?

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7. Why do you think they are not mapped correctly?

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8. What are some features and details of Ortelius' maps that you don't see in atlases now?

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9. Many details in Ortelius' maps are incorrect. So why do we bother keeping Ortelius' book? What do we learn from these earlier maps? Discuss this with your class.

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**Activity 2 – Finding Ortelius**

1. In which city did Ortelius live?

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2. Which country is this city in?

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Find Ortelius' home city on a modern atlas.

Find a satellite photo of this city on the internet. Check on the Google maps website:  
<http://maps.google.com/>

**Activity 3 – Find your way around the world**

Imagine a time before we had maps or atlases. What would life have been like without them?

How would we know where to fly a plane or steer a ship, how to find a city or street, or how to visit another country? Would it be possible?

How would you explain to someone how to get to an unfamiliar place?

Write a list of instructions on how to sail from Antwerp (where Ortelius lived) to your home town. Use the directions east, west, north and south for orientation. You will also have to describe which countries and any landmarks they will have to pass.



**Activity 3 – Write like an explorer**

Imagine that you are going on a journey to *Terra Australis Incognita* and the only map you have is from Ortelius' atlas. How do you feel about travelling to an unknown continent? What would you expect to find? What would be some of the dangers? Discuss this in groups and then write an imaginative story about your journey together. Attach a separate sheet of paper for your story if you need or use the back of this page.

**Activity 4 - Rescaling a map**

Ortelius had to carefully recreate and rescale many maps for his atlas. Not an easy task. Do you think you would make a good cartographer? Let's see!

- There is a map of the world with a grid below.
- Find a piece of paper roughly twice the size of the map.
- Count the number of squares on the map.
- Draw a grid on your paper, with the same number of squares, labelled A-K etc. across and squares, labelled 1-7 down etc. Your new squares should be twice as big.
- Now copy the map one square one at a time, carefully making sure that each of your squares looks the same, only bigger.
- Finish your map by writing in the names of the seven continents and the major oceans. Your map will also need a title and a north point.

