Skills: Mental Maps

**Picturing the World**

**Introducing the Map**
Tell students that there are two different ways to describe where a place is located: by absolute location or by relative location.

Share with students the idea of using grid coordinates to find a place on a map (see Weeks 5 and 6 for more information.) Tell students that locating places on a map by using lines of latitude and longitude is finding the absolute location.

Tell students that when most people look at a map, they use a more informal way of looking at it. They use the skill of relative location. People describe a place using the relation of one place to another. Ask students where the United States is located. They will probably say that the United States is located in North America, between Canada and Mexico. Tell them that what they have just done is describe the relative location of the United States.

Show students the world map. Talk about the relative location of North America to the rest of the world. This is also a good time to make the connection between the skill of relative location and the ability to make an accurate mental map.

Talk about the continent of South America and its relative location. Most students would say that South America is connected to North America. They may know that the countries of Central America make the connection between North and South America.

Have students look at other continents in the world, noting their shape, size, and relative location. Also, talk about the oceans and where they are located in relation to the continents. You may also want to discuss how Asia and Europe are actually one large landmass. Geographers call these two continents Eurasia.

**Introducing Vocabulary**

- **absolute location** description of a place using grid coordinates (latitude and longitude)
- **Eurasia** landmass made up of the continents of Asia and Europe
- **relative location** description of a place using the relation of one place to another

**Challenge**
Students should color the continents differently than the oceans to distinguish land from water. The map sketch of the world should resemble the shapes of the continents, and the locations of the continents should be in the correct relative directions. Students should label the seven continents and five oceans.