



Learning Project 3

Understanding Maps and Pictures



The visuals that connect the items in this Learning Project are maps or pictures. Not surprisingly, the majority of PA Test Items in this Learning Project are from the Social Studies PA. Maps are important tools in understanding historical developments and economic trends, as well as geographical issues. Maps or other depictions often include explanatory legends or graphical overlays to present a complex issue.

The map in Inquiry 3-1 shows a group of population shifts in one decade. In order to understand the story told by the map, learners will have to recognize both the size of the shifts and the population centers. The item asks the most generic question and one that can be readily discerned. Although it provides an opportunity to discuss why people move from region to region or to analyze the factors causing such large shifts, that understanding is not necessary to answer the question. It is a good opportunity both to expand upon the test item, and to show that a careful reading of the question is still one of the most necessary test-taking strategies.

Inquiry 3-2 features a photograph with a caption. It is a humorous depiction of the realities of driving early in the era of the automobile. The literary term *irony* is addressed in this item. Interestingly, *irony* does not appear in the reading test.

Inquiry 3-3 features a world map and requires test takers to understand certain aspects of equatorial and tropical geography. The vocabulary in both the question stem and the answer choices is highly technical, and an understanding of the words will be necessary for people to comprehend the question and recognize the appropriate answer. Resources for building a science vocabulary are found in Appendix E.

Inquiry 3-4 features two pictures or diagrams depicting certain phenomena. In both, the pictures complement the brief written passages. Learners could use one to clarify the other, depending on the types of learners they are. Visual learners will certainly find the picture easier than the written passage.

Inquiry 3-5 features a political cartoon. Each GED test has one, and many test takers are confused by them. It is important for people to understand that cartoonists use the same sorts of exaggeration and caricature featured in other cartoon forms. In addition, many political cartoons require an understanding of the use of symbolism. All of them require that the observer understand current political events. Cartoons used in the GED test tend to be very general, but they still require an understanding of the humor and the underlying message. Appendix A lists an excellent online source for political cartoons in the public domain.