

States and Capitals of the USA

NationalDayClassroom.com

National States and Capitals Day (September 22) is an excellent anchor for a social studies or geography lesson. Below is a breakdown of how it is possible to structure a classroom lesson around this day.



Included below is also a full PDF Lesson for download to use in your classroom setting any time of the year!

Target Grades: 3–6 (when states and capitals are typically introduced)

1. Key Learning Objectives

- **Identification:** Students will identify all 50 states and their respective capitals.
 - **Geography:** Students will categorize states by region (Northeast, South, Midwest, West).
 - **Critical Thinking:** Students will understand why certain cities were chosen as capitals (e.g., central location, transportation hubs, or historical significance).
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2. Activity Ideas

The "Why There?" Investigation

The URL notes that capitals aren't always the largest cities.

- **Activity:** Assign each student a "small" capital (like Montpelier, VT or Pierre, SD). Have them research why that city was chosen over a larger city like Burlington or Sioux Falls.
- **Fun Fact to Share:** Mention that North Dakota's capital, Bismarck, was chosen because of the Northern Pacific Railroad.

Regional Mastery

The National Day Calendar suggests dividing learning by regions to make it less overwhelming.

- **Activity:** Create a "Passport to the Regions." On September 22, focus on one specific

region. Students "visit" each state in that region by learning one unique fun fact (e.g., "The letter Q is not found in any state name").

The "State Fun Fact" Scavenger Hunt

Use some of the quirky facts from the article to spark interest:

- **Alabama:** Is "Sweet Home Alabama" a real place?
- **Delaware:** Are there really more chickens than people?
- **New Jersey:** Does it really have a volcano? (Beemerville Volcano).

Interactive Mapping

- **The "Blank Map" Challenge:** Give students a map with only stars for capitals. Have them fill in the state names and city names.
 - **Puzzle Race:** If you have physical wooden puzzles of the US, time students to see how fast they can assemble the country.
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3. Incorporating the Founders' Mission

Since the day was founded by **Dick & Jane Educational Snacks**, you can incorporate their philosophy of "learning through snacks and fun."

- **Edible Geography:** Use crackers or small snacks to represent cities on a desk-sized map.
- **Social Media Participation:** If your school allows, take a photo of your students' map projects and tag **#NationalStatesandCapitalsDay** to join the national celebration.

4. Essential "Quick Facts" for the Lesson

- **Date:** September 22.
- **Total:** 50 States, 50 Capitals.
- **Smallest Capital:** Montpelier, Vermont (population ~8,000).
- **Largest Capital:** Phoenix, Arizona (population ~1.6 million).
- **Only Letter Not Used:** The letter "Q".

Building on the above outline, below is a complete, step-by-step **"Capital Connection" Lesson Plan** designed for a 60-minute class session.

Lesson Title: The Capital Connection: Why & Where?

Grade Level: 3rd – 6th

Time: 60 Minutes

Materials: Blank US Map, "Mystery State" Clue Cards, Red & Blue Markers.

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The Cities "Capital vs. Largest" Mystery

- **The Question:** Ask students: *"Is the capital city always the biggest city in the state?"*
- **The Reveal:** Show them **New York** (Capital: Albany, Largest: NYC) or **California** (Capital: Sacramento, Largest: LA).
- **The Discussion:** Explain that capitals were often chosen because they were in the center of the state (to be fair to everyone) or near a **transportation hub** (like a river or railroad).
- **Fun Fact:** Tell them the letter "**Q**" is the only letter not found in any state name!

II. The "Region Race" Activity (20 Minutes)

- **Setup:** Divide the class into five groups, each representing a US Region (Northeast, Southeast, Midwest, Southwest, West).
- **The Task:** Give each group a list of their states and capitals. They have 10 minutes to:
 1. Label their region on a large blank classroom map.
 2. Find one "Fun Fact" for each state in their region (e.g., "Tallahassee, Florida is on one of the highest points in the state—203 feet!").
 3. Choose a "Regional Food" they would want to serve if they were hosting a party (e.g., Midwest = Cheese; South = Peaches).

III. "Mnemonic Master" Challenge (15 Minutes)

- **The Concept:** Teach students how to use "Memory Tricks" (Mnemonics) to remember tricky capitals.
- **Examples to share:**
 - **Maine (Augusta):** "A **gust** of wind blew the lion's **mane**."
 - **Minnesota (St. Paul):** "**Paul** was a saint and brought **mini** sodas for everyone."
 - **Idaho (Boise):** "If I'd-a-hoe, I'd make those **boys-see** the right way to garden."
- **Class Activity:** Have each student pick one state and create their own silly sentence or drawing to remember the capital.

IV. Game: "Mystery State" Bingo (15 Minutes)

- **Preparation:** Give students a 3x3 or 4x4 grid. They fill the squares with state names.
- **How to Play:** Instead of calling the state, call the **Capital**.
 - *Teacher calls:* "I am looking for the state whose capital is **Sacramento**."
 - *Students mark:* California.
- **The Twist:** For the final square, give a clue about the capital's history: "This capital was moved to its current location because the previous building burned down!" (Answer: Jefferson City, Missouri).

V. Extension/Homework: "The Travel Agent"

Ask students to imagine they are a travel agent. They must pick **one** state capital and create a "Postcard" that includes:

1. The Name of the Capital.
2. A drawing of a landmark there (like the Capitol building or a famous statue).
3. One reason why someone should visit that city.

Teacher Resources for this Lesson:

- **Songs:** Use the *Animaniacs* "States & Capitals" song or *Wakko's America* (available on YouTube) as a fun background track during the Region Race.
- **Visual Aids:** Use "Yo, Sacramento!" or similar mnemonic books to show students how to visualize the names.
- **Hashtag:** If students create posters, display them and use **#NationalStatesandCapitalsDay** to celebrate!

[Dick & Jane Educational Snacks](#) receives credit for the idea to celebrate National States and Capitals Day on September 22. Not only does it raise awareness about the importance of knowing all 50 states and capitals, it reminds people to have fun while learning.

