

The Capable County

Time Needed: One to two class periods

Materials Needed:

Student worksheets
 Access to your county's website or informational materials
 Projector (optional)

Copy Instructions:

Reading (2 pages; class set)
 Review Worksheet (2 pages; class set)
 Info Sheet (1 page; class set) **-OR-**
 Brochure Activity (3 pages; class set)
 Map Activity (1 page; class set)

Learning Objectives. Students will be able to:

- Identify counties as an extension of state government.
- Define Dillon's Rule and Home Rule.
- Identify the organizational structures and duties of county government, including the names and functions of county officials.
- Describe the types of services counties provide.
- Compare counties' revenue sources.
- Explain the effect of unfunded mandates on counties.

STEP BY STEP

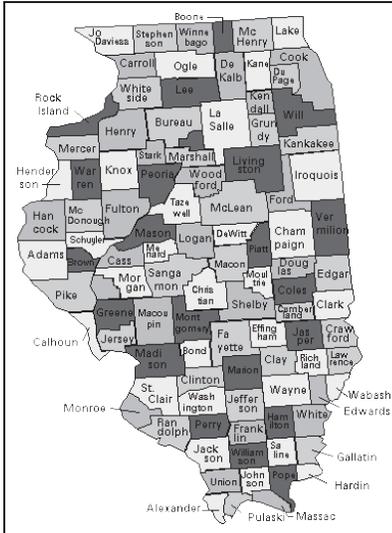
- ANTICIPATE** by asking students 1) if they can name the county they live in, and 2) if they can think of one service that the county provides people. Write the name of your county on the board. Call on students to share the county services they thought of.
 - DISTRIBUTE** the "Capable County" reading page (2-sided).
 - READ** the reading page with the class, pausing to discuss concepts as needed.
 - CHECK** for understanding by doing the yes/no active participation activity with the class. Students should answer "yes" or "no" simultaneously. Listen for mixed answers, and discuss the correct response.
- INFO SHEET OPTION**
- DISTRIBUTE** a "My County" Info Sheet to each student. Read the directions with the class.
 - ASSIGN** the Info Sheet. Monitor students progress as needed. When students have finished, you may want to have them share their findings with the class or share and compare their findings with a partner.
- BROCHURE OPTION**
- DISTRIBUTE** the brochure activity and any materials you will have students use, such as colored pencils. Read through the directions with the class.
 - ASSIGN** the brochure activity. Monitor students progress as needed. When students have finished, you may want to have them share their brochures with the class either by having students present their brochures or by posting the brochures in the classroom.
- PROJECT** the "Counties Fun Facts" activity. Uncover one question at a time and have the students guess which answer they think is correct by saying "A" or "B." Discuss any answers students find surprising.
 - REVIEW** by assigning the worksheet (2-sided).
 - ASSIGN** the map activity.

Select One

What is a County?

You already know that the United States is divided into smaller units of government called states. But what are states divided into? Counties! A **county** is the next smallest unit of government below a state. Counties make it easier to provide services directly to people. The *county seat* is the town or city in each county that serves as the home for the county government.

A county by any other name...
... is still a county. But in Alaska counties are called *boroughs*, and in Louisiana they are called *parishes*.



Counties in the state of Illinois

Counties Provide Services to You

You've probably benefited from county services without even realizing it. Have you ever driven on a road? Needed a copy of your birth certificate? Called 911? Although every county is different, maintaining roads, keeping vital records, and providing emergency services are the kinds of services that counties might provide. But that's not all. Here is a list of more services that counties might provide for their residents:

- Run elections
- Operate courts and jails
- Run hospitals
- Offer mental health services
- Provide clean water
- Keep property records
- Plan how land will be developed
- Give relief to the poor
- Run disease prevention programs
- Maintain parks

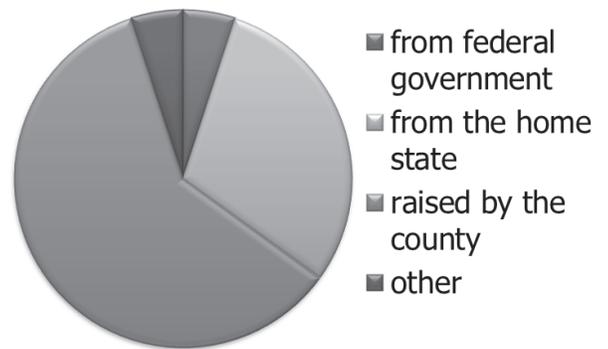
Paying for County Services

It takes money to provide all these services. Counties have three main sources of money to pay for it all: the federal government, the state, and the county itself. The smallest share of a county's money comes from the federal government. A bigger share—usually almost one-third of a county's money—comes from the state.

But the biggest source of money for a county is the county itself. Most of this money comes from **property taxes** people or businesses pay on land and buildings they own inside the county. Some counties also have a **sales tax** on items sold inside the county. Finally, counties raise money by charging **fees** for services the county provides. For example, a county may provide garbage collection, but people who participate have to pay for that service.



Revenue Sources

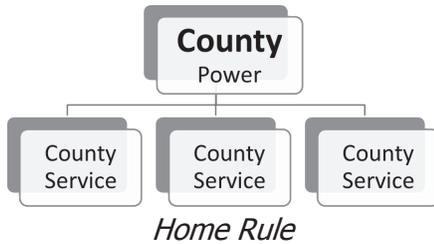
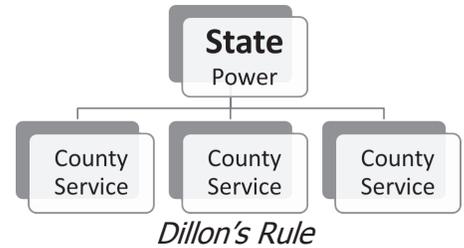


Sometimes the federal or state government make counties provide certain services but don't give counties any money to pay for those services. These demands are called **unfunded mandates** because they are mandated (ordered) but not funded (paid for). For example, counties are responsible for running elections, but they do not receive any money to pay for the elections. Counties must provide these services even if it means raising more money on their own.

The Capable County

County Power

Counties don't have magic powers. Instead, they get their power from one of two places. In some states, the state itself gives counties the power to carry out duties and provide services. Those states follow **Dillon's Rule**, which says that a county must get authority from the state legislature before it can provide services. These states see the county government as just another part of the state.

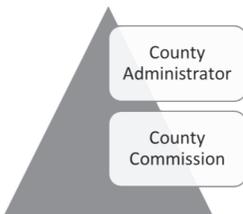


In other states, counties are considered to have natural powers of their own. Maybe this *is* a little like magic, but it's actually called Home Rule. Under **Home Rule**, counties have the power to make decisions for themselves about what services to provide. In these states, counties have some independence from the state. But don't get the wrong idea—even in these states, state laws always trump county laws.

Who's In Charge Around Here?

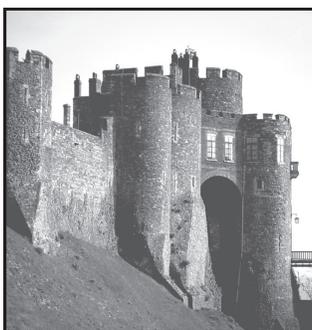
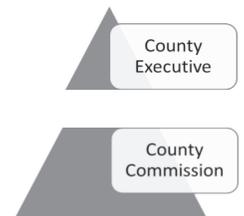
There are three ways a county's government might be organized:

Commission Only County citizens elect several people to sit on a commission (also called a board). This board has some "legislative" power because it passes county laws (which are called ordinances) and figures out the county's budget. It has some "executive" power because it decides what the county's policies will be and carries out the laws it passes. Commissions also share some of their power with elected officials who oversee specific departments, such as the sheriff, clerk, or county judge.



Commission/Administrator/Manager Under this system, the commission gives some of its "executive" power to an administrator. The commission chooses the administrator and has the power to fire that person. The administrator carries out the board's decisions.

Commission + Executive Under this system, an elected person separate from the commission has the county's "executive" power. This executive can sometimes veto decisions the board makes. This is more like a real legislative and executive branch, because the commission and the executive can check each other's power.



Counties Go *Way* Back

Well before the United States was formed, England was divided into units called "shires." English shires served the local community and represented the national government. The thirteen English colonies in America borrowed the shire system and adapted it to their needs. When the United States government was formed, the writers of the Constitution did not say how local government should be run. As a result, county governments continued and developed into the county system we have today. Vermont's county seats are still called shire towns!

Yes/No Active Participation Activity

Directions: Read each sentence aloud. Have students answer as a chorus, and listen for wrong or mixed answers. For “no” questions, elicit one- or two-word corrections that would make the answer “yes.”

- 1) Is a county smaller than a state? (Y)
- 2) Are counties called “counties” in every state? (N—*boroughs in Alaska, parishes in Louisiana*)
- 3) Do counties get any of their money from the state? (Y)
- 4) Do counties get most of their money from the state? (N—*from the county*)
- 5) Are fees the biggest source of income for a county? (N—*property taxes*)
- 6) Does the federal government sometimes require that counties provide a service? (Y)
- 7) Does the federal government sometimes not pay for the services it requires? (Y)
- 8) Does Dillon’s Rule say that a county has its own natural power? (N—*home rule; Dillon’s says power comes from the state*)
- 9) Do most county governments include a commission? (Y)
- 10) Do all county governments include a county administrator? (N—*some have an elected executive, some commissions/boards handle administrative duties*)
- 11) Do county governments have only “executive branch” powers? (N—*also legislative*)
- 12) Did our county system come from Germany? (N—*England*)

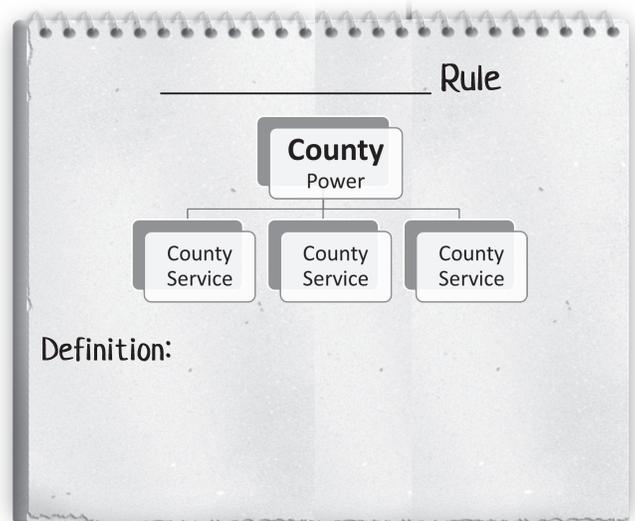
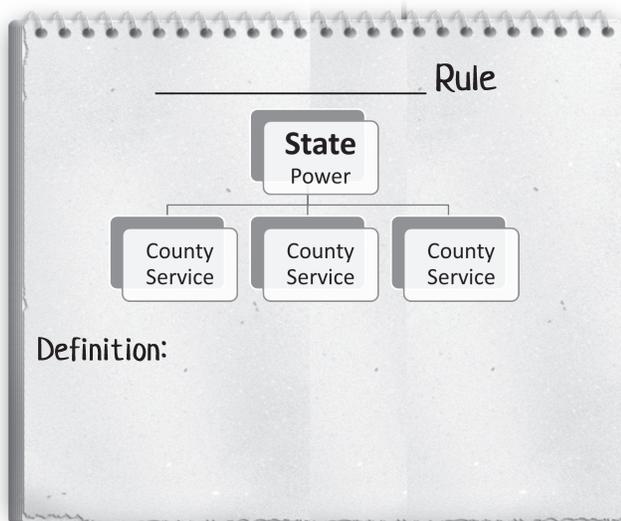
The Capable County

Name: _____

A. True or False? Circle true (👍) or false (👎) for each statement. If the statement is false, cross out the part that is wrong and correct it on the line below.

1. Counties in the United States come from an ancient American Indian tradition. _____ or _____
2. Rules for counties and local governments are spelled out in the U.S. Constitution. _____ or _____
3. Counties have adapted to meet the needs of the communities they serve. _____ or _____
4. Counties all across the United States are managed the same way. _____ or _____
5. Most of counties' money comes from the federal government. _____ or _____
6. The first counties were units of government created as "districts." _____ or _____
7. The main in-county source of income for most counties is the sales tax. _____ or _____
8. A county executive can be fired by the county commission. _____ or _____
9. Unfunded mandates are services the federal government demands and pays for. _____ or _____
10. A county commission can act as both a legislative and executive branch. _____ or _____

B. County Power. Label and define Home Rule and Dillon's Rule.



The Capable County

Name: _____

C. County to the Rescue! Help each person below find the county service they need.

 I broke my arm, and I need to go to the emergency room.

 Sniff! I need a copy of my grandma's death certificate.

 It's that time of year again—I need to get a flu shot. Ouch!

 I need counseling, but I can't afford it.

 Help! Someone is trying to break into my apartment!

 Can they really build a gas station next to my house?

 I cleaned out my shed and loaded my truck full of trash.

 I just turned 18, and I can't wait to vote!

 I need a copy of the deed to my house.

 The road by my house has a big pothole.

- A. Hospital
- B. Emergency Services
- C. Property Records
- D. Mental Health Services
- E. Waste Management
- F. Disease prevention
- G. Road maintenance
- H. Elections
- I. Land Use Planning
- J. Vital Records

D. County Crossword. Use the clues and the reading to complete the crossword puzzle.

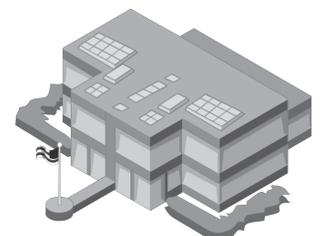


ACROSS

1. Some counties get their power from this.
3. The next smallest unit of government below a state.
7. A group of people in charge of a county
8. Money a person pays for a county service
9. Counties provide services directly to ____.
10. A word that means "not paid for."

DOWN

2. Carries out board decisions in some counties.
4. When a commission decides the county's policies, it is like this branch of government.
5. When a commission passes county laws, it is partly like this branch of government.
6. Something a county has been ordered to do.

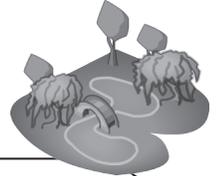


The Capable County

Name: _____



My County Government Fact Sheet



The Basics

County Name: _____ County Seat: _____

State: _____ When was it established? _____

Draw your state, and put a star where your county is located.

Draw your county seal.

Factoids

How many people live in your county?

What is the largest city in your county?

How large is your county (in square miles)?

The population in my county is...
growing or shrinking

My county is more...

rural or urban or mixed

My county has...

industry agriculture business

major university major tourist site

other: _____

County Government

My county has a ...

County Commission/Board

County Administrator

County Executive

Where are the county offices located?

How many departments or agencies are in your county government?

Pick three agencies or department and briefly describe the kind of work they do.

1) The _____ department
focuses on _____
_____.

2) The _____ department
focuses on _____
_____.

3) The _____ department
focuses on _____
_____.

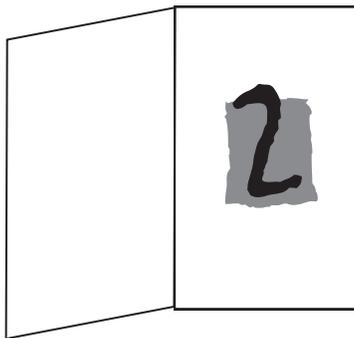
The Capable County

Market Your Own County! Every county should have proper promotional materials. Create a brochure about your county! Start by folding your paper on the lines, then include all the pieces of information listed below... Make sure your brochure is neat and eye-catching!



Page One The front page of your county brochure should be the title page. It should include the following things:

- ◆ Name of County
- ◆ County Seat
- ◆ State
- ◆ County Motto (optional)
- ◆ Seal



Page Two The next page you see when you open up the brochure should include the following things:

- ◆ How large is your county (in square miles)? Draw it!
- ◆ Population: How many people live in your county?
- ◆ Description of the population, including the following options: rural or urban, education, lifestyle of citizens, and types of careers held by citizens.

When the brochure is opened, you should see three pages that should include the following things:

Page Three

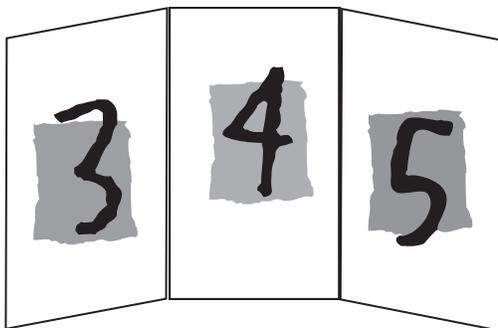
- ◆ County government structure: Describe how the county government works. Do they use Home Rule or Dillon's Rule? Is there a single county executive and/or a board/council? Pictures can help!

Page Four

- ◆ County Departments: List the departments or agencies in your county government.

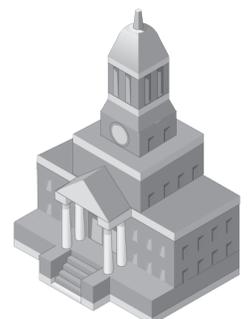
Page Five

- ◆ County Services: What are the four most important services your county provides for its citizens? Include pictures of these services.



Page Six The back of the brochure when it's closed up should include the following things:

- ◆ Fun facts about your county, like:
 - How old is your county?
 - Where does your county name come from?
 - What is your county famous for?
- ◆ Pictures to support your fun facts



County Departments

County Services:

Our county government is made up of...

3

4

5

Our County Geography

Fun Facts



Population Information

2

6

1

County Fun Facts

A

B

How many counties are there in the United States?

About 3,000

About 15,000

Which state has the most counties?

Texas

California

Which state has the fewest counties?

Rhode Island

Delaware

In 2010, the county with the fewest people had...

82 people

45 people

This county is located in

Texas

Alaska

In 2010, the county with the most people had...

Nearly 10 Million

Over 20 Million

This county is located in...

New York

California

The oldest county was organized in the year...

1634

1776

The youngest county was organized in the year...

1988

2001

The smallest county measures...

< 26 sq mi

< 2 sq mi

The largest county measures...

> 14,000 sq mi

> 88,000 sq mi

The largest county is located in...

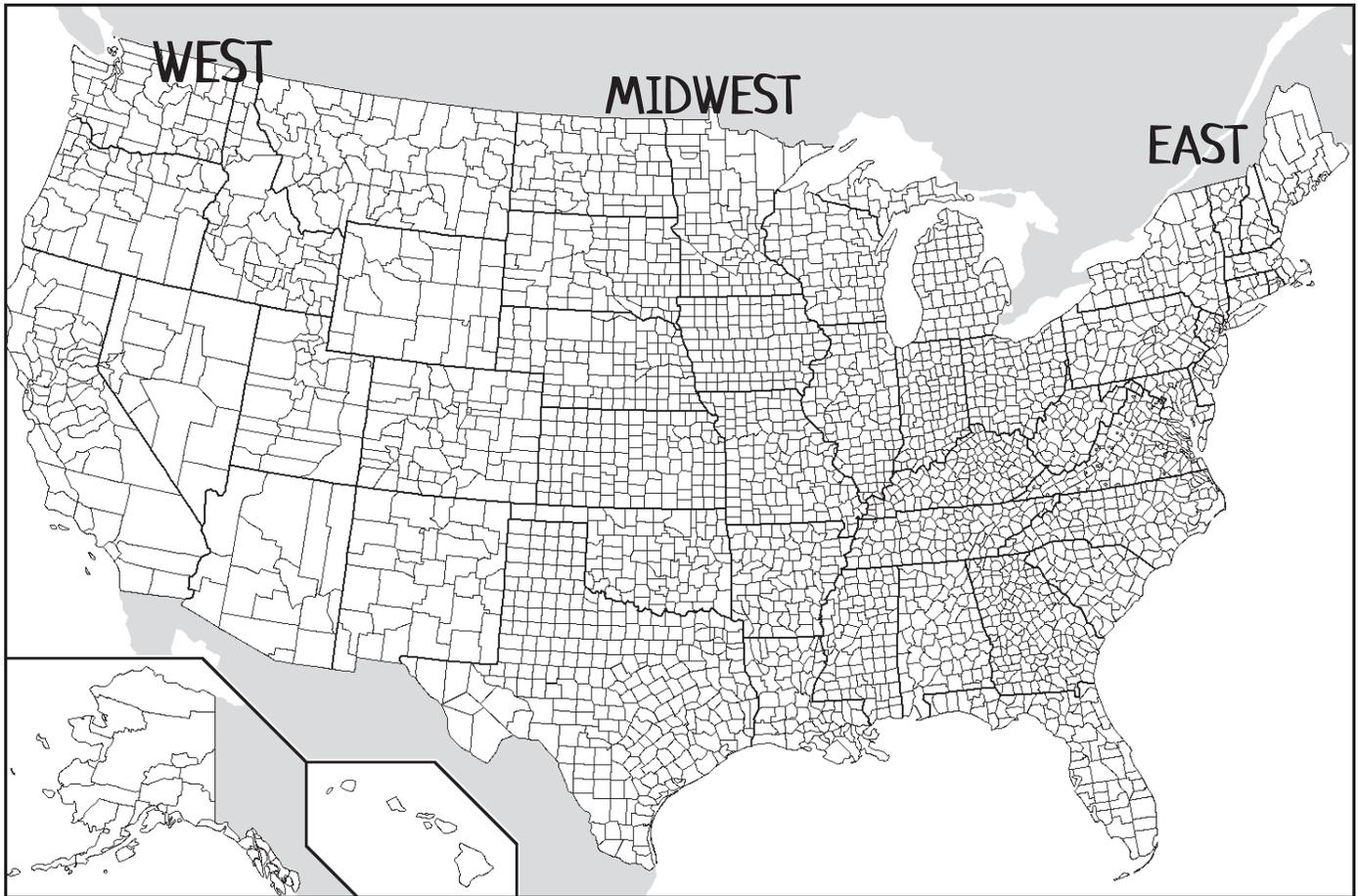
Texas

Alaska

The Capable County

Name: _____

County Geography. Study the map to answer the questions about how counties developed.



1. Giddy Up! There once was a rule that counties had to be small enough that from any part of the county you could reach the county seat in one day's ride on horseback. In which part of the United States did this rule apply?

WEST MIDWEST EAST

2. Every Inch. Originally, county lines were drawn to include all the land that a person owned. This means that the lines were very squiggly! In which part of the United States do we see small, squiggly counties?

WEST MIDWEST EAST

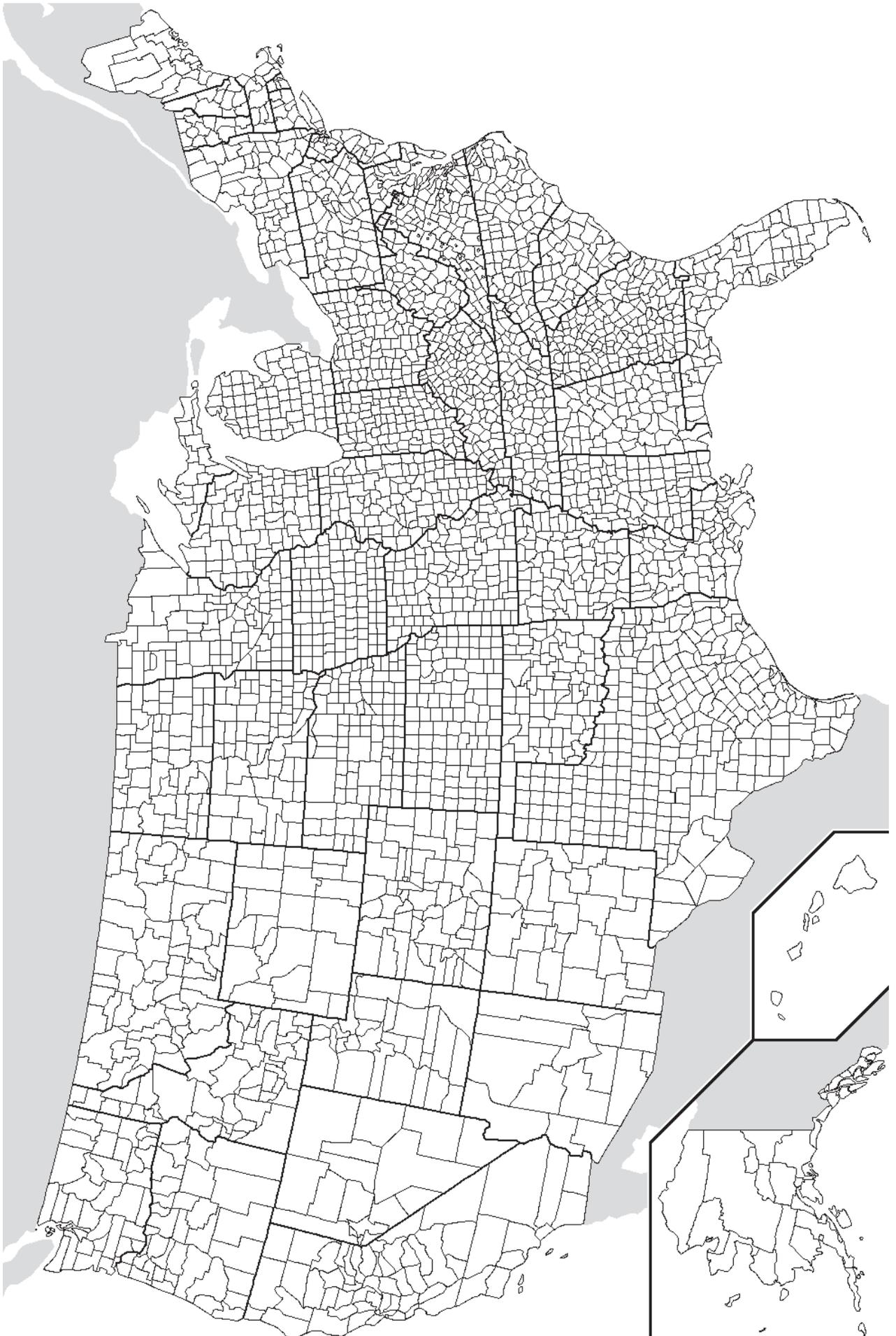
3. Simple Squares. As Americans moved toward the West, counties were divided into even plots of land in the shape of squares or rectangles. Nobody lived there yet, and this made it easy for surveyors to divide the land. In which part of the United States did this rule apply?

WEST MIDWEST EAST

4. Choo-Choo! With the spread of the railroad, new counties being formed could be extremely large. In which part of the United States do we see the effect of the railroad?

WEST MIDWEST EAST

5. Your County. Find your county on this map. Color it in and create an arrow to point to it.

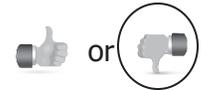


The Capable County

****TEACHER GUIDE****

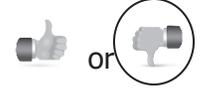
A. True or False? Circle true (👍) or false (👎) for each statement. If the statement is false, cross out the part that is wrong and correct it on the line below.

1. Counties in the United States come from an ancient ~~American-Indian~~ tradition.



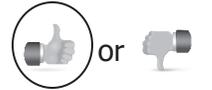
English

2. Rules for counties and local governments ~~are spelled out~~ in the U.S. Constitution.

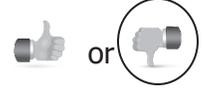


are not spelled out

3. Counties have adapted to meet the needs of the communities they serve.

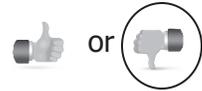


4. Counties all across the United States are managed ~~the same way~~.



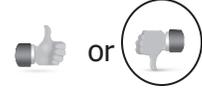
differently

5. Most of counties' money comes from the ~~federal government~~.



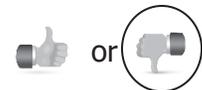
county fees and taxes

6. The first counties were units of government created as "~~districts~~."



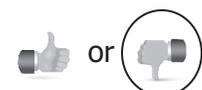
"shires"

7. The main in-county source of income for most counties is the ~~sales tax~~.



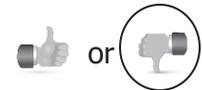
property tax

8. A county ~~executive~~ can be fired by the county commission.



administrator

9. Unfunded mandates are services the federal government demands ~~and pays for~~.



does not pay for

10. A county commission can act as both a legislative and executive branch.



B. County Power. Label and define Home Rule and Dillon's Rule.

Dillon's Rule

Definition:
The state must give approval for the county to provide services.

Home Rule

Definition:
The county has the power to make its own decisions about providing services.

County Fun Facts: Active Participation

How many counties are there in the United States? **A** About 3,000

Which state has the most counties? **A** Texas (254 counties)

Which state has the fewest counties? **B** Delaware (3 counties)

In 2010, the county with the fewest people had... **B** 82 people

This county is located in... **B** Texas

In 2010, the county with the most people had... **A** nearly 10 million

This county is located in... **B** California (Los Angeles County)

The oldest county was organized in the year... **A** 1634 (colonial Virginia)

The youngest county was organized in the year.. **B** 2001 (in Colorado)

The smallest county measures... **A** 26 sq/mi (in Virginia)

The largest county measures... **B** over 88,000 sq/mi

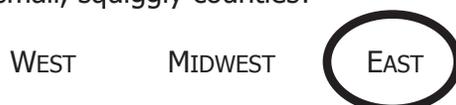
The largest county is located in... **B** Alaska

County Geography

1. Giddy Up! There once was a rule that counties had to be small enough that from any part of the county you could reach the county seat in one day's ride on horseback. In which part of the United States did this rule apply?



2. Every Inch. Originally, county lines were drawn to include all the land that a person owned. This means that the lines were very squiggly! In which part of the United States do we see small, squiggly counties?



3. Simple Squares. As Americans moved toward the West, counties were divided into even plots of land in the shape of squares or rectangles. Nobody lived there yet, and this made it easy for surveyors to divide the land. In which part of the United States did this rule apply?



4. Choo-Choo! With the spread of the railroad, new counties being formed could be extremely large. In which part of the United States do we see the effect of the railroad?



5. Your County. Find your county on this map. Color it in and create an arrow to point to it.