LESSON 10 WHO OWNS THE LAND—A PLAT MAP COMPARISON

Overview
This lesson is designed to help students recognize changes in ownership and land divisions by comparing local plat maps for their community over several years. Working in pairs, with plat books from two or more years, students choose a parcel in the oldest plat book, and note the changes in ownership and lot size (due to subdividing), that have occurred from the oldest plat book to the most recent.

Objectives
Students will be able to:
1. Interpret a land description, and locate a parcel of property on a plat map.
2. Analyze map data and draw conclusions about lot sizes and ownership changes in the community, and how this might affect land uses and other aspects of the community.
3. Explain legal transfer of property.

Procedure
1. Make overhead transparencies of the map of interest from each plat book, for each year.
2. Instruct students on the history of Northwest Land Ordinance of 1787, land descriptions (described in plat book), surveyor’s role in dividing land for ownership and tax purposes, and system of township/range numbering within a township. (NOTE: You may want to invite a local history organization or surveyor into your classroom to teach your students about land descriptions and subdividing.)
3. Develop a color key that corresponds to each year, for each of the plat maps used for comparison.
4. Distribute highlighters and copies of plat maps to students. (NOTE: Plat books are generally updated every three to four years, and are typically available from a real estate office or a county extension office. Permission to reproduce maps or images may be required on copyrighted material.)
5. Students highlight the same land parcel on each of the plat maps, using the color key from #3 above.
6. Students should record the changes in ownership and size for their parcel for each year.

Assessment
Completed maps highlight changes using appropriate color code. Students should be able to answer comparative questions. (i. e. What period shows the most change? Has the land use for the parcel changed? How was this land being used (may have to hypothesize) in the first plat map, and how is this land now being used?)
Extensions
1. Research the ownership changes on their family’s property.
2. Research the historical significance of the Northwest Ordinance to the local area.

Michigan Content Standards Addressed

Language Arts
Standard 1. Meaning and Communication
   • All students will read and comprehend general and technical material.
Standard 4. Language
   • All students will use the English language effectively.

Social Studies
Standard 2. Geographic perspective
   • Students will use knowledge of spatial patterns on earth to understand processes that shape human environments and to make decisions about society.