

# HOW<sup>the</sup> STATES Got Their SHAPES

Hosted  
By **BRIAN UNGER**



## EDUCATION GUIDE

Every state has a shape, and each of these shapes tells a great story about the American past. How were these boundaries decided, and how do they affect our lives today? What rivalries exist between states, and why? In ***How The States Got Their Shapes™***, host Brian Unger hits the road to uncover the hidden history on our map. In a compelling quiz show format, Unger talks to average Americans to test their knowledge of each state's history, revealing surprising stories about the people and places that make up each region. This series blends history and geography, showing how state lines have been affected by both human decision-making and environmental change. Students will gain new insights into American history through this fun and engaging series.

### **Curriculum Links:**

***How The States Got Their Shapes*** would be useful for U.S. History, Geography, American Culture, Social Studies and Current Events courses. It is recommended for 8th graders and above. Teachers and parents should watch each episode before recommending it to younger viewers.

### **Pre-Viewing Activity:**

Before watching an episode of this series, students can review the map of the United States. Students can also create a drawing of their own state or another state of their choice and compare/contrast their drawings with an actual map. Students can then discuss the notable features of the U.S. map and the geography of their state.

**Vocabulary:**

As you are watching an episode, write down a list of terms to define. Students can also define the following list of geography-related terms: deed, geopolitical, latitude, longitude, speculator and surveyor.

**Discussion Questions:**

Respond to the questions below during or following an episode of this series, and discuss the answers with the larger class or group after watching.



1. Which states or cities does Brian Unger visit in this episode? What did you learn about this location that you didn't know before watching?
2. Which facts or stories mentioned in this episode did you find most interesting or surprising?
3. How would you compare the state featured in this episode to your state? If your state was featured in this episode, what do think makes your state distinct?

**Did you know?**



**Did you know?** The Mississippi and the Missouri Rivers are the longest main stem rivers in the United States.

**Did you know?** In terms of square mileage, Alaska is the largest U.S. state and Rhode Island is the smallest.

**Did you know?** A state called Franklin was created in 1784 in an area that is in eastern Tennessee today. Franklin never became an official state, but the story is fascinating! Search **History.com** to learn more.

## Extended Activities:

- 1. Quiz Show!** Brian Unger challenges people to show their knowledge of their state's history in this series. Students can create their own set of trivia questions and test one another about their state's past. Some topics and themes to include: the year the state was founded, the state motto, key dates and key geographic features like rivers and monuments. Students can test one another in a game show format with judges, or in a more informal setting in small groups.
- 2. State Lines.** Using a large photocopy of the U.S. map, white out or erase the state names and cut the map into individual states. Then, identify each state by writing the names on the cut-outs. You can also play this game with a timer, challenging individuals or groups of students to name the states in the shortest amount of time.
- 3. Making Their Mark.** Each episode in this series discusses important leaders and people who have made their mark on a state. While watching, pick one person mentioned in an episode, or choose a notable person from their own state. Ask students to write a short essay about this person describing the way they influenced the history of this state or the nation as a whole.
- 4. On the Road.** Ask students to imagine that they were going on a journey similar to the one Brian Unger takes in this series. Students can design their own road trip to explore state boundaries in a short write-up describing the areas they'd like to explore and the questions they'd like to answer. Their projects should also include road maps showing the route they would take. Students can even design playlists of songs relevant to the state or states they'd like to visit.
- 5. Maps Over Time.** States and cities develop over time, with boundary lines changing and with new communities emerging each year. Working in small groups, ask students to locate and then compare and contrast old and newer maps of their state. When was their state founded, and how has it changed over time? What is the population today? Students can present their findings in a PowerPoint presentation or in oral presentations.

## Additional Resources:

### Websites:

Visit the *How the States Got Their Shapes* site: [www.History.com/shows/how-the-states-got-their-shapes](http://www.History.com/shows/how-the-states-got-their-shapes)

Learn more about U.S. states on History.com: [www.History.com](http://www.History.com)

Play the "Place the State" game: [www.History.com/games/puzzles/place-state/play](http://www.History.com/games/puzzles/place-state/play)

Explore your community through Geo-caching: [www.geocaching.com/](http://www.geocaching.com/)

View maps online at the Library of Congress website: [memory.loc.gov/ammem/gmdhtml/gmdhome.html](http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/gmdhtml/gmdhome.html)

### Books:

Nash, Gary B. and Carter Smith. *Atlas of American History*. (Facts on File, 2006).

Stein, Mark. *How the States Got Their Shapes*. (HarperCollins, 2008).