

The Capable County

Time Needed: One Class Period

Materials Needed:

Student worksheets

Copy Instructions:

Student packet (*4 pages double-sided; 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
- Identify the types of services counties provide
- Compare counties' revenue sources
- Identify 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.
- DISTRIBUTE** the brochure activity and any materials you will have students use, such as colored pencils.
- READ** 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 .

Yes/No Activity

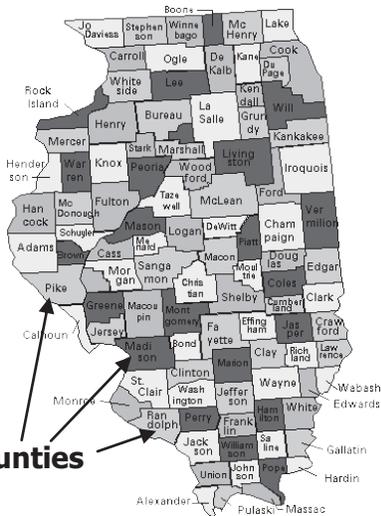
Directions: Read each sentence aloud. Have students answer as a chorus, and listen for wrong or mixed answers. For "no" questions, elicit one- or two-word corrections that would make the answer "yes."

- 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: _____

The State of Illinois



Counties

A county by any other name...

... is still a county. But in Alaska counties are called *boroughs*, and in Louisiana they are called *parishes*.

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.

Counties Provide Services to *You*

You have 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.

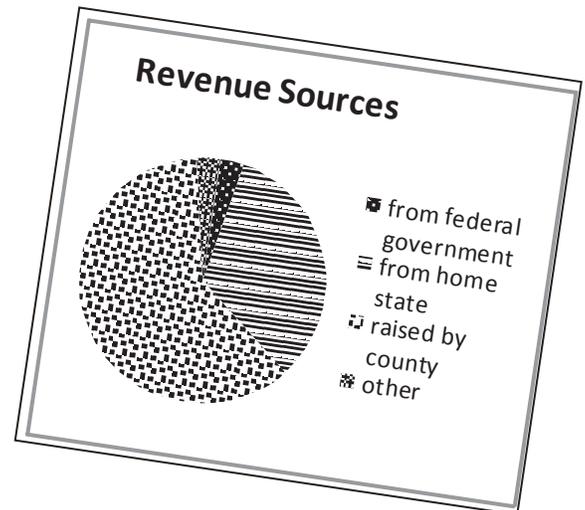
Here is a list of more services that counties might provide for the people who live in them:

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

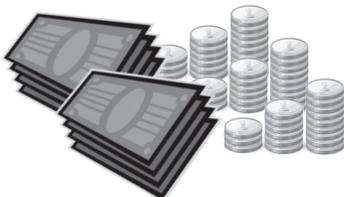
Paying for County Services

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 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 sign up have to pay for that service.



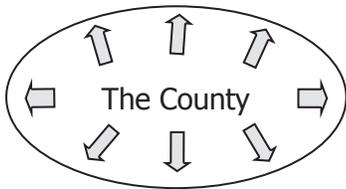
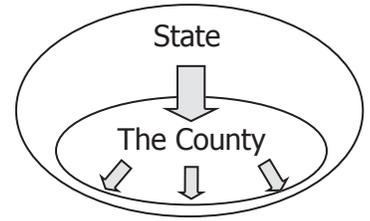
Sometimes the federal or state government make counties provide certain services but doesn't give counties any money to pay for those services. These demands are called **unfunded mandates** because they are mandated (ordered) but not funded (paid for). For example, counties are responsible for running 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

Unfortunately, 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 approval 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:

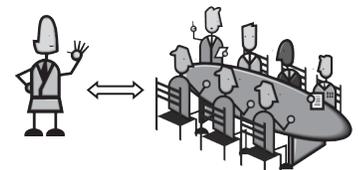
Commission Only County citizens elect several people to sit on a commission (also called a board). This board has some "legislative" power because it passes county laws (which are called ordinances) and figures out the county's budget. It has some "executive" power because it decides what the county's 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 engineer.



Commission/Administrator 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 even 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



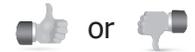
Well before the United States was formed, England was divided into units called "shires." English shires served the local community and represented the national government. The thirteen English colonies in America borrowed the shire system and adapted it to their needs. When the United States government 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.

The Capable County

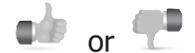
Name: _____

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.

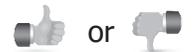
1. Counties in the United States come from an ancient American Indian tradition.



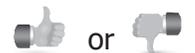
2. Rules for counties and local governments are spelled out in the U.S. Constitution.



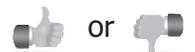
3. Counties have adapted to meet the needs of the communities they serve.



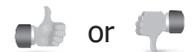
4. Counties all across the United States are managed the same way.



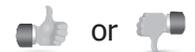
5. Most of counties' money comes from the federal government.



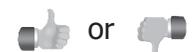
6. The first counties were units of government created as "districts."



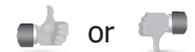
7. The main in-county source of income for most counties is the sales tax.



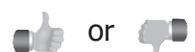
8. A county executive can be fired by the county commission.



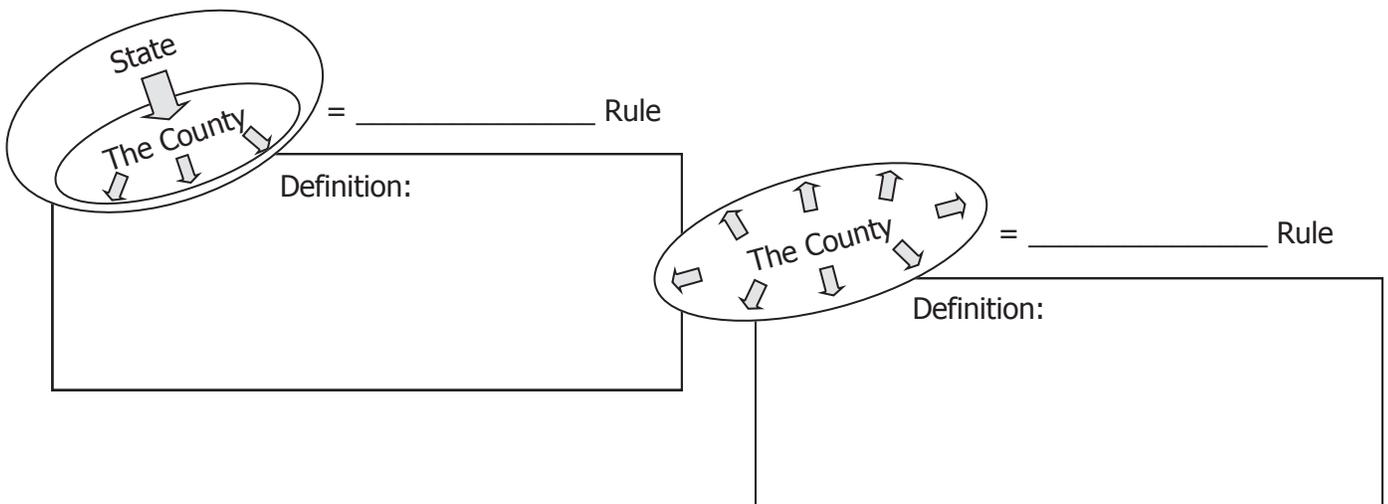
9. Unfunded mandates are services the federal government demands and pays for.



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



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



The Capable County

Name: _____

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 that gas station right next to my house?

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

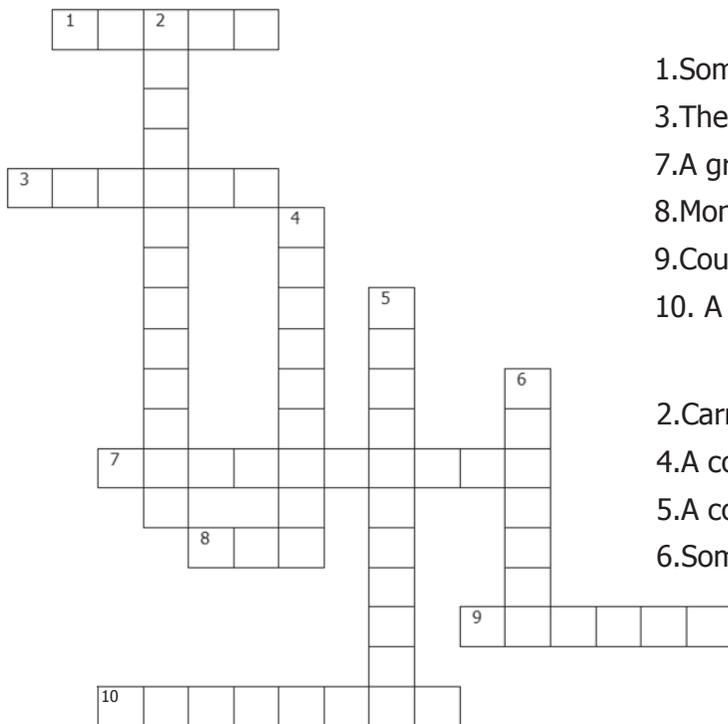
 I just turned 18 and I can't wait to vote!

 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
- E.** WASTE MANAGEMENT
- F.** DISEASE PREVENTION
- G.** ROAD MAINTENANCE
- H.** ELECTIONS
- I.** LAND USE PLANNING
- J.** VITAL RECORDS

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. A commission is partly like this branch of government.
5. A commission is partly like this branch of government.
6. Something a county has been ordered to do.

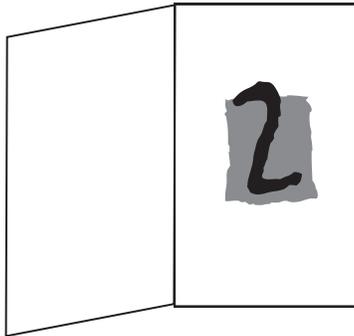
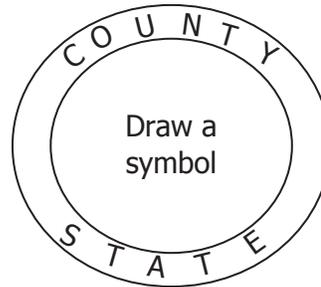
The Capable County

Every county should have proper advertising materials. Create a brochure about a real county, or design your own fictional 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!



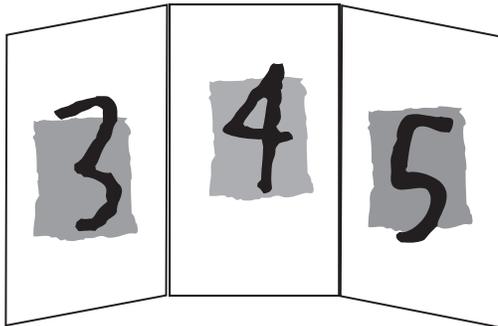
The front page of your county brochure should be the title page. It should include the following things:

- ◆ Name of County
- ◆ State
- ◆ Seal



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

- ◆ County Motto
- ◆ 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 all the way opened, you should see three pages that should include the following things:

Page Three:

- ◆ County government structure: Draw a picture of the county leader(s). Is there a single county executive or a board/council?

Page Four:

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

Page Five:

- ◆ County development plan: What are three ways that you will make your county a better place? Include a picture of this development in action.



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

- ◆ Fun facts about your county!
 - How big is your county?
 - How old is your county?
 - Where does your county name come from?
- ◆ Picture(s) to support your fun facts!!

County Services!

Four horizontal lines for writing.

Our county government is made up of...

Seven horizontal lines for writing.

3

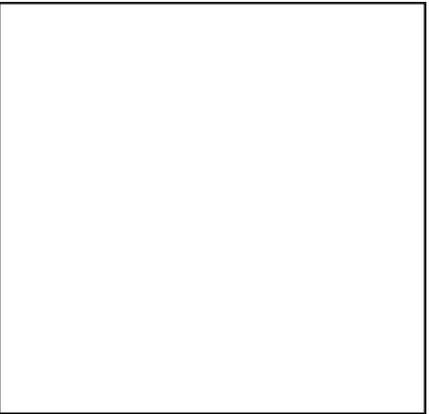
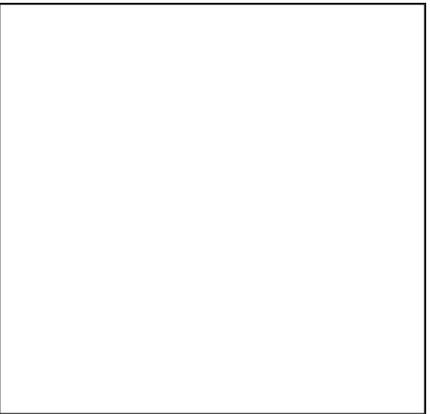
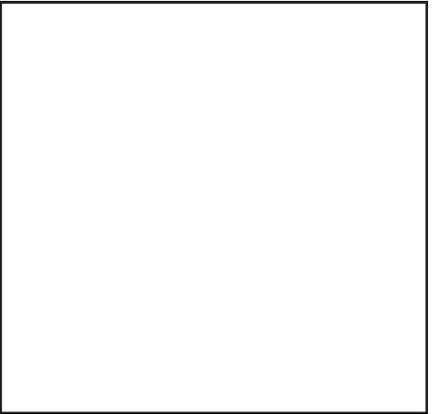
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5

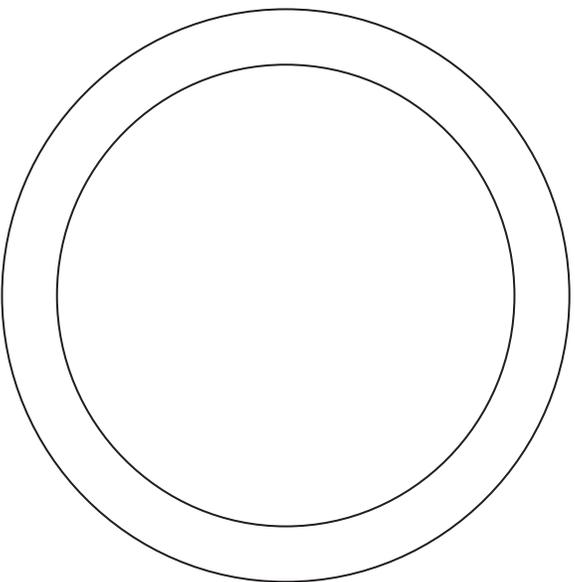
Our county motto is...

Population: _____

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 2009, the county with the fewest people had...

12 people

45 people

This county is located in

Texas

Alaska

In 2009, 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

1631

1776

The youngest county was organized in the year

1988

2008

The smallest county measures

< 26 sq mi

< 2 sq mi

The largest county measures

> 14,000 sq

> 87,000 sq mi

The largest county is located in

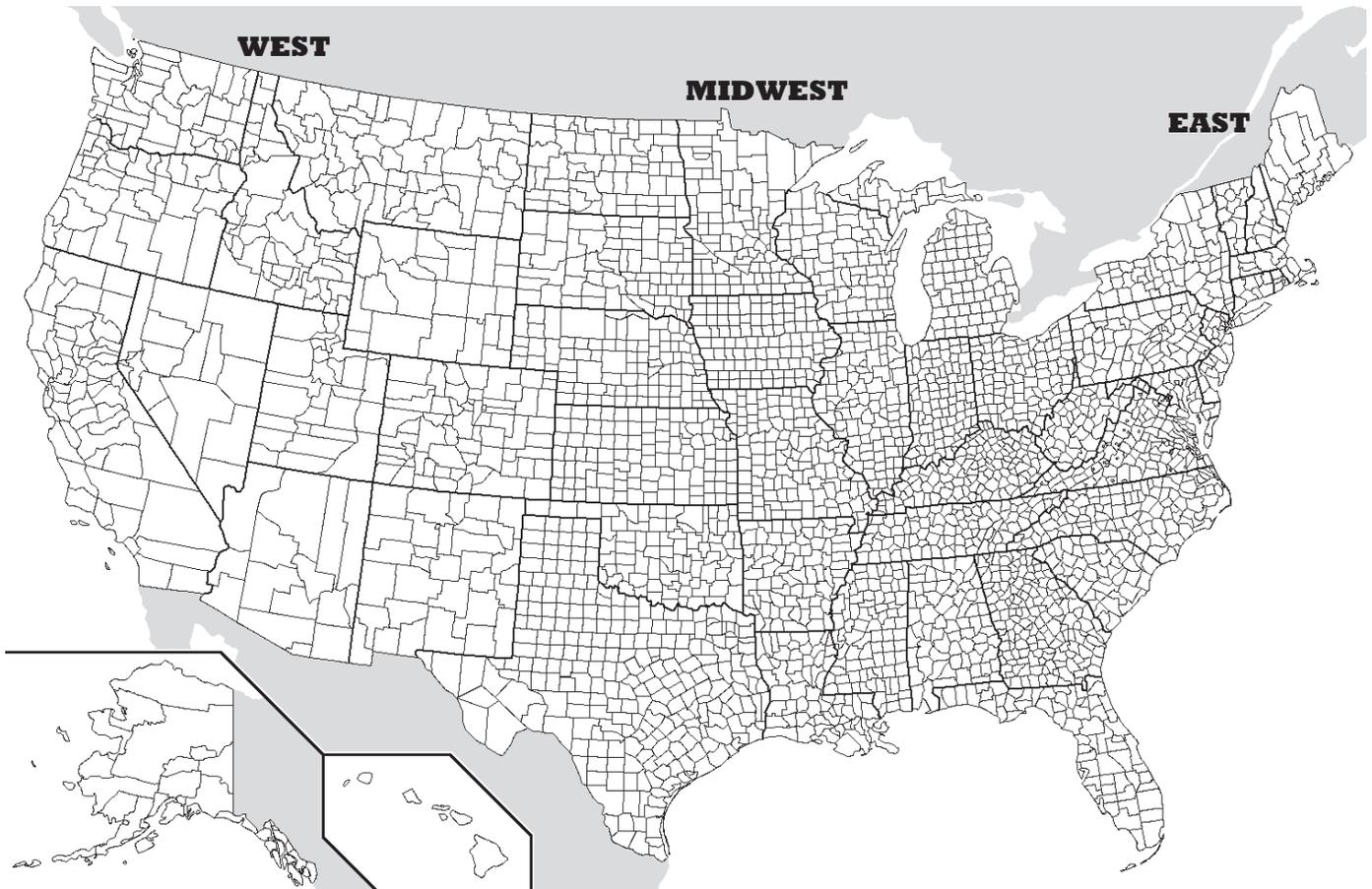
Texas

Alaska

The Capable County

Name: _____

Can you find your county? Circle it!



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

1) 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?

EAST MIDWEST WEST

2) 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?

EAST MIDWEST WEST

3) As Americans moved toward the West, counties were divided up into even plots of land in the shape of squares or rectangles because it was easy for surveyors and no one owned land there already. In which part of the United States did this rule apply?

EAST MIDWEST WEST

4) 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?

EAST MIDWEST WEST