

# SEMANTIC MAPPING

(High School SOSE)

## What is it?

A Semantic Map is a way of representing relations among topic words and concepts in a visual display. In addition to the mapping of words using space as an indicator of word groupings and conceptual closeness or distance, connection lines are drawn to express relations among the target words and related concepts. In the course of constructing a semantic map, students are encouraged to express what they already know about words and concepts in a topic and to expand that knowledge by thinking through related concepts and words. By connecting new information to things they already know, students come to deepen their understanding of new terminology and store topic words more easily in long-term memory.

## Why is it Important?

Semantic Mapping works because it creates connections among ideas and contextualises new learning, hooking new pieces of information into students' already-existing frameworks of knowledge (Nash & Snowling, 2006). Teaching vocabulary in context has a strong research base, and has been shown to be more effective for building complex vocabulary knowledge than giving definitions or looking words up (Antonacci & O'Callaghan, 2011). Like Concept Maps, a Semantic Map acts like a picture, tapping into the brain's ability to store visual information. Learning researchers claim that the brain remembers more when there has been a personal creation of a 'picture' of the information being studied (Ritchhart, Turner & Hadar, 2009).

Researchers interested in the quality of class discussion have shown that Semantic Maps work best when surrounded by rich talk or discussion (Stahl & Vancil, 1986). Using group work can help students negotiate their understandings with others, clarify meanings and clear up misconceptions.

## Things to consider before starting

- Remember that Semantic Mapping at middle and high school levels ought to be as detailed and complex as the concepts students are expected to know. When planning for a Semantic Mapping session, focus on getting at the details and the relations among the topic words/concepts.
- Semantic Maps can be especially effective when used alongside or after a text investigation (e.g. reading a textbook chapter). They are also useful as a way of consolidating vocabulary/concept knowledge in a topic review at the end of a unit.
- Consider your student groupings. Small groups in which meaningful discussions can happen work better than individual work. Mixed ability groups also work well in this activity.
- Remember that talk is central to learning new vocabulary so provide opportunities for students to engage in thoughtful talk as they work. Be an active teacher during a Semantic Maps session. Move round the groups so you can question, prompt and guide students to elaborate on representations of their thinking.

## Steps in a Semantic Mapping Session

1. If your students are new to semantic mapping, start by showing students examples of highly detailed Semantic Maps so they understand how sophisticated they can be. Model HOW to construct a map by working with them through a few examples.
2. Set the Thinking Task e.g. “Today you are going to use semantic mapping to explore your understandings of medieval castles and their critical role in providing protection for communities.”
3. Put students into pairs or small groups and set them going on the task.
4. Circulate, discussing the words and concepts with students as they work. If you want to share something, you can stop the class to involve them in interesting discussions, a further reading or to refer them back to their text examples.
5. Make sure students are using academic vocabulary and especially the key words.

## References

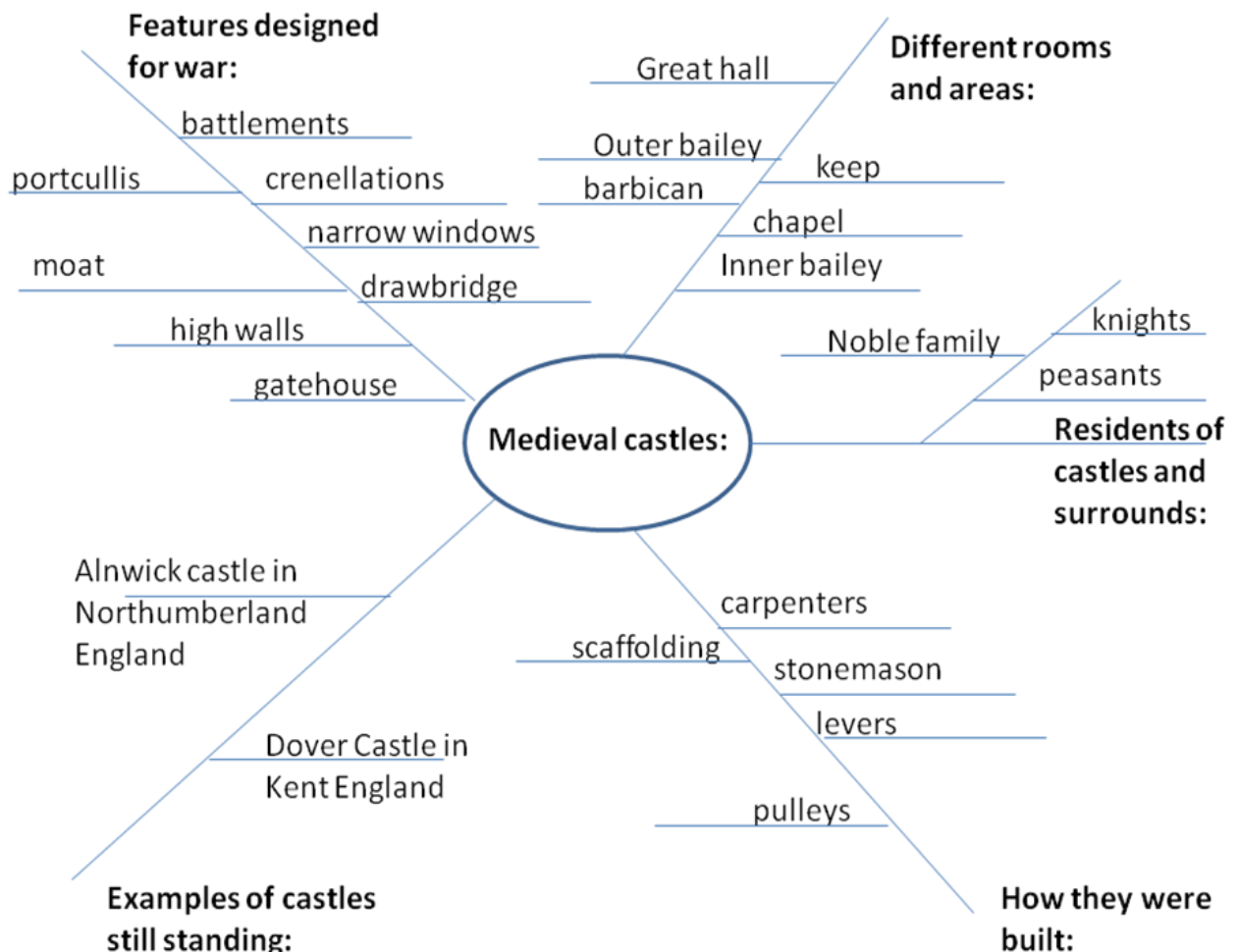
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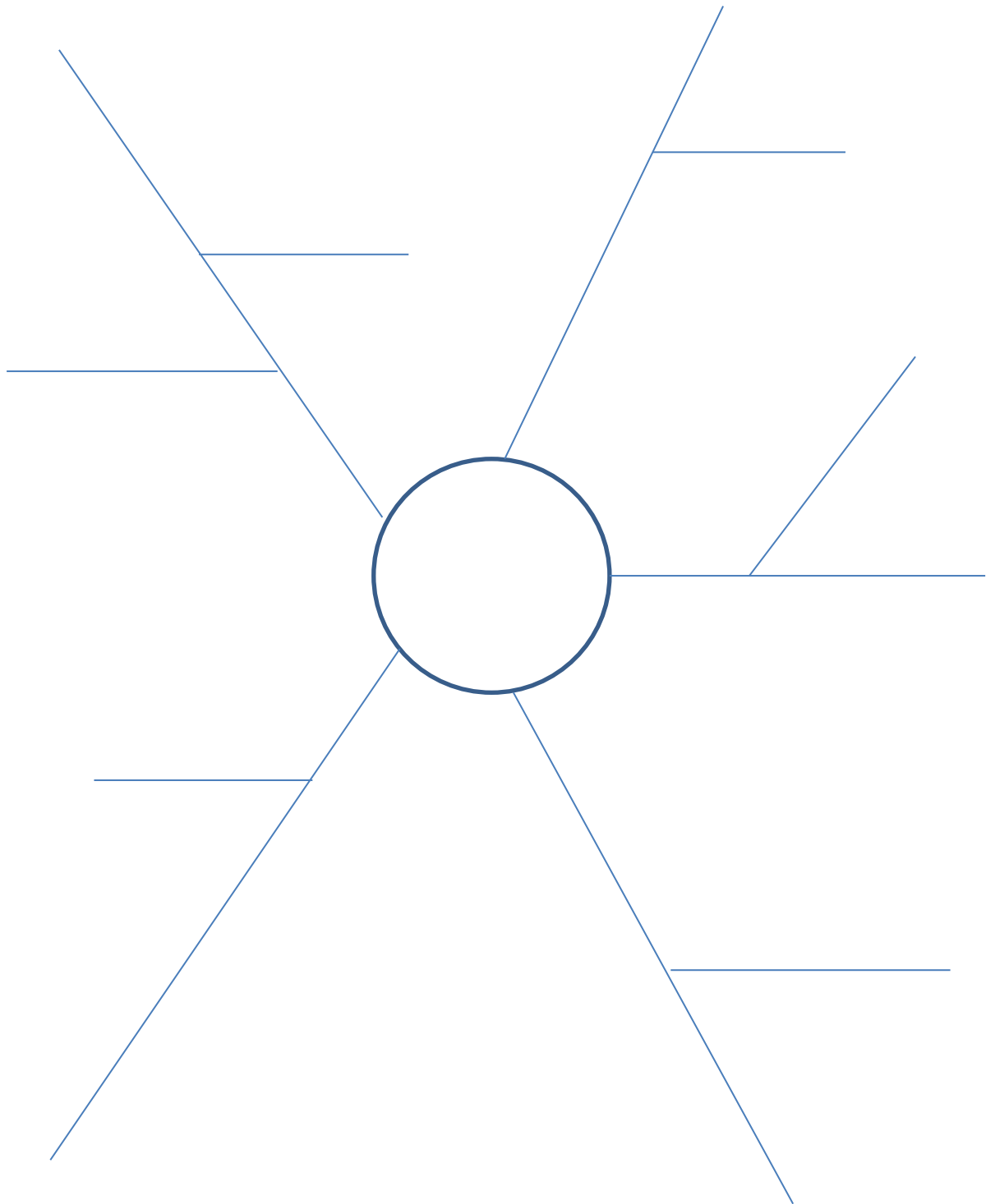
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## Semantic Mapping Ideas for SOSE





Name

Date

