



Exploring the Counties of Arkansas

Counties are administrative and political sub-units of a state. The county government is based within a community designated the county seat and typically consists of a county judge (who serves as the chief executive officer), county clerk, circuit clerk, assessor, sheriff, coroner, and the legislative body known as the quorum court; some counties have or had other positions such as county superintendent, surveyor, or collector. Some counties possess dual county seats.

GRADES:

6-12

DURATION:

45-90 minutes

CONTENT AREAS:U.S. History, Arkansas History

Objective

Students will conduct research using the CALS Encyclopedia of Arkansas (EOA) in order to demonstrate understanding of Arkansas counties, county structures, and history.

Key Vocabulary

1. Primary Sources: first-hand information from those who experienced a time or event. Includes memoirs, interviews, letters, and public documents.
 2. Secondary Sources: second-hand information; works that have been collected, interpreted, or published by someone other than the original source
 3. County: administrative and political sub-unit of a state
 4. County Seat: the locality designated as the home of a county's administrative body
 5. County Judge: the person who presides over a county court; also serves as the chief executive of their given county.
 6. Association of Arkansas Counties: an organization that was created to allow county and district officials to better meet, collaborate, and engage in continuing education through general research, through public education programs, and by conducting seminars for county governments in Arkansas
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Necessary Materials

- Pen or pencil
- Lined paper

- Internet Access
 - Relevant Printouts
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Historical Background

Counties are the administrative and political sub-units of a state. Each county government is based within a community designated as the county seat and typically consists of a county judge (who serves as the chief executive officer), a county clerk, a circuit clerk, an assessor, a sheriff, a coroner, and the legislative body known as the quorum court. Some counties have other positions such as county superintendent, surveyor, or collector. Some counties possess dual county seats, if geography historically made it harder for county residents to travel to a single county seat in one day.



Map of Arkansas's counties in 1819, when the area was still called Arkansas Territory. Note that the four western counties extended into what is today Oklahoma.

When Arkansas became a U.S. territory in 1819, there were only five counties: Arkansas, Lawrence, Pulaski, Clark, and Hempstead. As the state's population grew, these big counties were divided into smaller and smaller units, creating the seventy-five counties that make up Arkansas today. The Arkansas Constitution specifies that no county then established "shall be reduced to an area of less than six hundred square miles, nor to less than five thousand inhabitants," and neither "shall any new county be established with less than six hundred square miles and five thousand inhabitants."

In 1968, the **Association of Arkansas Counties (AAC)** was created to allow county and district officials to better meet, collaborate, and engage in continuing education through general research, through public education programs, and by conducting seminars for county governments in Arkansas. The AAC is made up of 1,400 members and is itself a member of the National Association of Counties. There are nine affiliation associations within the AAC, including ones for: county judges, sheriffs, assessors, quorum court officers, circuit clerks, collectors, treasurers, county clerks, and coroners. Each group contributes two of its own members to the AAC board of directors. The AAC provides a calendar of events and FAQs for each of the nine groups, and it holds an association-wide conference annually.

Activities

BELLRINGER

As a bellringer, ask students to describe the county that they live in.

Do they know their county's name? What are the major towns and cities located within their county? Do they know what their county is best known for, or where the county seat is, or who their county judge is? Go around the room when students have completed the exercise to see how many of these details students could answer.

DIRECT INSTRUCTION

Briefly describe to students the general structure of a county government and how those elements work together within the state. Be sure by the end of instruction students are familiar with each of the following:

- The number of counties in Arkansas (seventy-five) as well as which one their school is located in
- What a county seat is, what a county judge is, and what the chain of command looks like in a county
- What the Association of Arkansas Counties is, what it does, and what its annual conferences entail



Map of Arkansas's counties in 2005.

ENGAGING SECONDARY SOURCES

Students will peruse the [County Explorer](#) tab on the EOA. Ask students to investigate three separate counties (ones where they do not live and do not attend school), and find the following information about each county:

- What is that county's name?
- Do you know who or what the county is named after?
- Where is the county seat?
- When was the county established?
- What was the parent county for that county?
- Who is the current county judge for that county?
- What is that county best known for (e.g., natural environment, a particular good or service, famous people who lived there, etc.)?
- Does the county have its own official website? If so, provide the link.



Map of Arkansas's county seats. Arkansas has seventy-five counties, ten of which have two county seats. Each of these ten counties is separated into two districts, and each district has its own courthouse. In addition to its eighty-five county courthouses, Arkansas has eleven federal courthouses.

Evaluation

This mini research activity serves both to familiarize students with counties in their own state, familiarize themselves with the structure and purpose of counties, practice basic research skills for further development later on, and engage with helpful tools available through the EOA. Their short research writeups can serve as a graded assessment checking for understanding and skill development.

Extensions

As an extension for this activity, tell students that they will create new county names based on independent research and support these new identities through an oral report. Have students write a persuasive essay detailing why their county name should be changed and supporting the new name they have chosen for the county.

Suggested Writing Prompt: You are interested in changing the name of a county. Persuade your reader that your county name should be changed and support your new name of choice. Before you begin to write, think about why you believe the county name should be changed. What positive effects could a name change have on this location? Now, write about why this county's name should be changed. Be sure to give reasons why you believe it should be changed and give enough detail so that readers will understand your new name choice and point of view. Students could make a brief, timed presentation to the class in support of their county name change.

As another extension for this activity, the [EOA County Explorer](#) feature allows teachers access to a blank Arkansas counties map, as well as a fully completed Arkansas counties map. Either for a grade or an incentive, have students study these maps before taking a blind quiz where they have to label as many of the counties as they can accurately on the blank map. This could be done over any length of time desired, and possibly done multiple times to reinforce student knowledge.

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