

Teacher's Notes: **Getting Oil Out of Kazakhstan**

Overview: The transition between places can be as important as the conditions at each place. We can learn much from even a quick study of conditions that promote or hinder connections.

Students use a simple map to assess the physical and political conditions along four different routes for a pipeline from the new oil discoveries in Kazakhstan, north of the Caspian Sea.

Grade: 6-10

Related Discipline: Economics

GLCEs: 6G421, 6G511,2

Time: 20-40 minutes

Preparation: Copy the worksheet, and review the content in the presentation.

Setup: Do you know where Kazakhstan is? You should. Here's why. If you do a web search for pictures from the capital of Kazakhstan, you might see signs in English, Dutch, Russian, and Chinese. If you read those signs, you will notice the names of big oil companies – BP (that's British Petroleum), Royal Dutch Shell, Lukoil, Exxon-Mobil, Chevron. What are these companies doing in a place like Kazakhstan? Announce that several of the world's largest oil discoveries have been in a remote area north of the Caspian Sea. The problem is that this area is dry, very cold in winter, and almost unpopulated. Someone will have to figure out how to get this oil out to the world markets.

Can we learn something about international geopolitics from a simple map? Just let your eyes roam along lines running in four directions from the land north of the Caspian Sea. Even on a simple map, you can see which routes run through one or two large countries and which ones go through many small countries. On a physical map, you could see which ones go through deserts or mountains, where construction might be more difficult than in open, flat land.

Subordinate Objectives: One "spinoff" of this activity is simply becoming familiar with the locations and environments of Kazakhstan and the Caspian Sea. You can show the location and describe the conditions in any way that seems appropriate, from direct instruction to individual inquiry and report.

Procedure: The worksheet is self-explanatory. One way to start the activity is to discuss all or part of the presentation, *Spatial Thinking About Oil*, in the Russia folder in Mi6thGradeClass.com. You could also use the worksheet called *World Oil Discovery and Use* to provide context.

This activity can be done as an individual worksheet, small-group activity, whole-class discussion (with or without a projector), or take-home project. Middle-school students with access to a physical-political map can do the worksheet in about ten minutes. The result is raw material for a policy discussion that could take minutes or weeks (see Extension below).

Answers: Westward – E3 P1 Northward – E1 P2 Eastward - E4 P4 Southward – E2 P3.

Debrief: The presentation includes a summary of diplomatic/military activity: Russia trying to assure Kazakhstan that, despite decades of Soviet rule, it was a "good guy" now; Europe trying to plan a route through multiple countries; the United States trying to pacify Afghanistan. Meanwhile, China quietly built the pipeline. It follows the old Silk Road and ends in Lanzhou, where the Silk Road crossed the Huang He.

It bears repeating: *fracking does not discover new oil*. It just makes it possible to pump oil that we already knew was there but couldn't get with previous technology. But the fracking "revolution" has made costly long-distance transport from Kazakhstan less competitive in the world market.

Vocabulary: barrier connection export geopolitics petroleum spatial thinking

Extension: Do a role-play with groups representing different countries. The online CIA Factbook is a good source of factual information. Students could research their countries and decide what role they might play in discussions about the pipeline route. This activity has the great advantage of being virtually immune from challenges that it is simply busywork, with no real-world application! It can therefore be used as the "spine" for a longer unit that includes other topic and skills, such as Russian and Chinese history, petroleum geology, or a look at international energy agencies.