

Story Mapping in the Dutch Republic (c. 1600–1700)

In early modern Europe, maps were doing more than locating places: they told stories about current and past events. ‘Story mapping,’ which combined narrative and spatial information to tell a story about current or historical events, flourished in the Dutch Republic in the seventeenth century as cartography became accessible to a broader public and the printing press enabled a rich news and media culture.¹ Story maps circulated as loose broadsheets,² pamphlets, book illustrations, drawings, paintings, medals, and other formats. The Netherlands, being the largest production centre of these story maps, and numerous competing mapmakers in the Republic produced works that were widely copied abroad. Warfare and conflict, in particular, generated a strong demand for cartographic representations of events, especially those of the Eighty Years’ War (1568–1648), by which the Dutch overthrew their catholic Habsburg rulers, as well as of imperial and colonial ventures overseas.

Despite their widespread dissemination and use, story maps remain highly underexplored. Existing research is mostly limited to isolated case studies or specific source corpora and rarely adopts an interdisciplinary approach.³ By contrast, I propose a new methodology grounded in narrative theory, which draws on the classical Aristotelian three-act structure – set-up, conflict, and resolution – to identify five key narrative aspects that structure story maps: place, time, characters, actions/events, and resolution. Together, these aspects provide a framework for analysing how maps function not merely as spatial representations, but as narrative media. They form the core of the dissertation as each chapter focuses on one.

Place constitutes the foundational element of any map, yet in story maps, it is not a neutral background. Instead, spatial representation is shaped by the narrative being told, with emphasis placed on locations that advance the story and establish spatial dominance of certain actors. *Time* (Van Schaik 2023) is conveyed through visual sequencing, textual annotations, legends, and titles, allowing viewers to reconstruct a chronological progression across the mapped space. Story maps often juxtapose multiple moments in time. *Characters* – both individual and collective – are central to the storytelling function of these maps. Protagonists, antagonists, and supporting actors are identified through portrayal, textual labels, or heraldic symbols, establishing hierarchies of agency and power relations. Closely related are *actions* or *events*, visualised through (the suggestion of)

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² A copy of the described map can be found here: <https://id.rijksmuseum.nl/200493061> (date of access: 07/23/2026).

³ Vannieuwenhuyze 2020; Helmers 2016; Van Luijk 2008; Van Schaik 2022; Klinkert 2005; Van Groesen 2019; Koeman 1973; Caquard and Dimitrovass 2020; Caquard and Cartwright 2014; Roth 2021; Van Schaik 2025.

movement, skirmishes or captures of strongholds, that attract the viewer's eye across the map, sometimes implying a sequence that resembles a narrative path through space and time. Finally, 'resolution' addresses how story maps end or conclude the narrative. Some maps present clear outcomes, such as victory or conquest, while others remain open-ended, inviting anticipation, expectation, or further information through the accompanying texts. Resolution thus plays a crucial role in the interpretation of the general message or discourse of the map. These five key aspects are the ingredients for the story map, creating and manipulating perceptions of contested places and the histories attached to them. This project sheds new light on the dynamic interplay between cartography, storytelling, and memory in the early modern period, revealing how mapping shaped – and shapes – our view of history.

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