

# Traveling Capitals

At a Glance

**Time:** 45 m

**Grade Level:** 2–12

**Description:** This lesson explores why Georgia's capital city changed so many times throughout the state's history. It reviews Georgia history, and prompts students to consider what qualifications a city needs to make it a capital.

**Standards:** SS2H1, SS2E2, SS2E4, SS3H1, SS3H3, SS3E1, SS4H3, SS4E1, SS8H1, SS8H2, SS8H4, SS8H5, SS8E1

**Objectives:**

Reflect on why capital cities may change and what qualities a capital may have.

Compare and contrast one's own concept of a city's ideal qualities and today's capital cities in Atlanta, Georgia, and Washington D.C.

Establish why Georgia has had five capital cities and what those capitals are.

**Supplies:** Worksheets, Traveling Capitals Video

**Bibliography:** See Appendix

**Essential Questions:**

1. How we choose capital cities
2. The five capitals of Georgia: Savannah, Augusta, Louisville, Milledgeville, and Atlanta.

# Sample Script

**\*\*While you discuss the capitals, make sure to bring the discussion back to the elements from the activity section.**

## Intro discussion:

Today, we are going to discuss how Atlanta became Georgia's capital city. First, a little vocabulary review. It is important to remember throughout this discussion that capital with an "a" means we are discussing the city, whereas capitol with an "o" means only the building.

Throughout the lesson I want us to consider why Atlanta remains the capital. We will look at various features of a capital city, as we unfold our state's journey from Savannah to Atlanta. First, we are going to start with our activity. In this activity, we will learn what characteristics make capital cities so special. We have broken down the basic characteristics into eight categories: history, location, economy, transportation, health, safety, population, and religion. Let's each create an imaginary capital city based on these features. You can even name it if you like. Next, pick the three top features you want your city to have: history, transportation, health, safety, location, religion, population, economy. Explain your choices. Which elements does our nation's capital have? Which features does Atlanta have?

### *Activity 1: What Makes a Good Capital?*

**Groups will use the worksheet create imaginary cities. Ask them to explain why they think those elements are the best building blocks for a capital city. Ask the group if they believe Atlanta and Washington D.C. are the best capitals for Georgia and the U.S.**

Optional: Have students watch *Traveling Capitals* on the Georgia State Capitol Museum's YouTube channel.

### *Activity 2: Capital Trail*

**As you discuss the movement of the capitals, have students follow along on a map of Georgia where the city is, and have groups debate which criteria each former capital meets.**

Let's talk about Georgia's capitals and why they moved from place to place. For each capital, we are going to look at some of their pros and cons.

#### *1776 – Savannah*

*Pro: Location, Transportation, Economy Cons: Location, Safety  
Summary: Savannah was the first capital of Georgia when the U.S. declared its Independence from Great Britain. The capital was officially decided in 1777, but the state constitution allowed the legislature to meet elsewhere if necessary. The Revolutionary War kept the capitol moving. The government may have even met in South Carolina at one point. In 1782, the British capture of Savannah led to Augusta and Savannah alternating as the capital city.*

#### *1782/1786 – Augusta*

*Pro: Location, Transportation, Economy Cons: Location, Health  
Summary: Northern and southern Georgians disagreed as to where the state's business should be conducted. They met temporarily in each city, but a quorum was hard to maintain at either site.*

*In 1785, the legislature finally declared that Augusta would serve as the capital until further notice. Though proximity to the river allowed for better transportation, it increased the risk of epidemics like malaria in the local population. In 1786, the legislature held its first official meeting at the Capitol building in Augusta, but plans were already underway to move again to a more central location.*

### **1796– Louisville**

*Pro: Location Cons: History, Health*

*Summary: A site with roads leading to all major cities (at the time) prompted Georgia leaders to select Louisville, Georgia. Despite its selection, the capitol building would not be finished until 1796. By 1796, westward expansion had taken hold, and Louisville was no longer the most convenient and central location. Change was hastened by malaria epidemics because of proximity to water. Despite the construction of the brand-new capital city and capitol building, the push for a move began again.*

### **1807– Milledgeville**

*Pro: Location, Economy, Population Con: History, Transportation, Safety*

*Summary: In 1807, the treasury and state documents left Louisville to find a new home in Milledgeville. Milledgeville served as our capital for 66 years. By 1838, thanks to railroad construction, a new contender would arise—a place formerly known as Terminus. The first vote for this new champion was in 1847 but was defeated in a vote of 68–55. During Reconstruction, Milledgeville’s innkeepers refused to allow African American delegates to the state constitutional convention. Without proper lodging for all delegates, General John Pope ordered that the convention be held in Atlanta. This was the beginning of the end for Milledgeville as Georgia’s capital city.*

*Fun Fact: Milledgeville served as capital for a day in 2001. In 2000, the restoration on the old Capitol was completed, and Georgia*

*Georgia celebrated at a symbolic meeting there.*

### **1845/1868– Atlanta**

*Pro: Location, Transportation, History, Economy, Population*

*Summary: Atlanta underwent rapid and intense growth with the introduction of the rail lines. The city was conveniently located for travel throughout not only the state but also the country. Following the Civil War, the opportunity arose again for Atlanta to become Georgia's capital city. Many of Atlanta's prominent, white businessmen played a major role in the shift, fighting tooth and nail to enact the move from Milledgeville. The first meeting location was the Fulton County Court House and Atlanta City Hall until the current building was built. At the time, the structure that housed Fulton County Court House, Atlanta City Hall, and Georgia State Capitol, was on the plot of land where today's state capitol building stands. The government shared these quarters for three years before meeting in the Kimball Opera house, which they rented until the completion of the modern capitol building.*

*Fun Fact: The Georgia State Capitol building opened with a parade on the 4th of July in 1889.*

### **Closing Discussion Questions**

*How would you change your original city based on this discussion?*

*Do you think Atlanta is still is the best site for Georgia's Capitol building? Why?*

*Do you think D.C. is the best site for the U.S. capital city? Why?*

*Where would you relocate the nation's capital city?*

*Why might Atlanta change from being the state's capital city?*

**Take Home Activities:** *Included in word document*

### **Elementary School Activity**

Have students list the characteristics from the lesson (history, transportation, health, safety, location, religion, population, economy) that they recognize in their own home towns.

### **Middle School Activity**

Have students write a one-page essay on the three characteristics they think are most important when choosing a capital city. Have them explain why those characteristics are important in an essay.

### **High School Activity**

*Option A:* Conduct historical research on the period of American Boosterism. How did the culture of boosterism play into the selection of Atlanta as a capital?

*Option B:* Critique Henry Grady's speech to the New England Club. What should he have included? Did he omit any information (positive or negative) that might have made a difference?

*Option C:* Argue for or against Atlanta remaining the state's capital city.

# BIBLIOG- RAPHY

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