

The American Nation

Chapter 1 / Section 1

Thinking Geographically

I. Five Themes of Geography

Geography is the study of **people, their environment, and their resources**. Geographers ask how the natural environment affects the way we live and how we, in turn, affect the environment.

Geography is closely linked to history. Both historians and geographers want to understand how the natural environment affects people and events. To help show these connections, geographers have developed five themes: **location, place, interaction between people and their environment, movement, and regions**.

A. Location

Often the most basic question we ask about an event is “Where did it happen?” the answer to this question involves the geographic theme of location. There are two types of location: **exact and relative**.

To describe the exact location of a place, geographers use a grid of numbered lines on a map or globe. Lines of latitude measure distance **north and south** from the equator. The equator is an imaginary line that lies at 0° (degrees) latitude. It divides the Earth into two halves, called hemispheres. Lines of **longitude** measure distance **east and west** from the Prime Meridian, which runs through Greenwich, England.

B. Place

Geographers use the theme of place to describe an areas' **physical and human features**, physical features include climate, soil, vegetation, animal life, and bodies of water. One of the most important aspects of a place is its **natural resources**, materials that humans can take from the environment to survive and satisfy their needs. The human features of a place include the kinds of houses people build, their means of transportation, their ways of earning a living, their languages, and their religions.

C. Interaction

Interaction between people and their environment is a third theme of geography. Throughout history, people have adapted to and changed their **natural surroundings**. Native Americans in the southwest developed a method of irrigation, or bringing water to dry lands. By digging ditches that channeled water from the Salt and Gila rivers, they turned arid unproductive desert into farmland.

D. Movement

A fourth geographic theme involves the movement of people, goods, and ideas. Movement occurs because people and resources are **scattered unevenly around the globe**. To get what they need or want, people travel from place to place. As they meet other people, **they exchange ideas and technology as well as goods**.

E. Regions

A region has certain unifying characteristics. It may be defined by its physical characteristics, such as its **climates or landforms**. Regions characteristics may also be **human and cultural**.

II. Case Study: Population Trends and the Five Themes

When the United States won its independence in 1783, it was made up of 13 states located on the **Atlantic coast** (*region, exact location*). The majority of the population lived along the coast or near rivers (*relative location*), where water transportation was easy (*movement*). The Appalachian Mountains and other geographic features limited westward movement (*region, movement*). In 1790, the nation's center of population was located in **Maryland**.

A. *The Nation Expands*

The United States added **vast new territories** in the early 1800's, eventually stretching to the Pacific Ocean (*movement, exact location*).

B. *A New Trend*

The **westward trend** continued in the late 1800's. As white settlers displaced Native Americans, the human and cultural characteristics of the west changed (*place*). By 1900, the center of population had shifted to **Indiana**.

III. Maps and Globes

The most common tools used to understand geography are **maps and globes**. Maps and globes have different uses. Because a globe is about the same shape as the earth, it can accurately show **sizes and shapes** of landforms. However, a flat map has the disadvantage that it **distorts** some parts of the earth.

A. *Map Projections*

Mapmakers, or cartographers, have developed dozens of ways of drawing the earth on a flat surface. These methods are known as **map projections**. For hundreds of years, the most widely used map

projection was the **Mercator projection**. It was developed in 1569 by the Flemish cartographer Gerardus Mercator. The Mercator projection was valuable because it gave sailors an accurate picture of **ocean distances and the shapes on landmasses**.

B. Types of Maps

Each one has a special purpose. **Physical maps** show mountain ranges, bodies of water, and other physical features. **Political maps** show features that are determined by people. These include the boundaries of countries and states, as well as the location of capitals and other cities. **Thematic maps** deal with specific topics that can help you understand the connection between **geography and history**.

C. Making Accurate Maps

The oldest surviving map in the world today was created by an ancient cartographer somewhere around **2300 B.C.** today cartographers create maps with the help of computers and satellites. As a result, today's mapmakers create maps that are more accurate than anyone had previously thought possible.

Section 1 – Assessment

1 thru 5