How Geographers View the World: Human Geography

ESSENTIAL QUESTION: How does geography influence the way people live?
Geographers Think Spatially

Guiding Question: What does it mean to think like a geographer?

- An understanding of the world is based on a combination of information from many sources.
- Biology = the study of how living things survive and relate to one another.
- History = the study of events that occur over time and how those events are connected.
- Geography = the study of Earth and its peoples, places, and environments.
- Geographers look at people and the world in which they live mainly in terms of space and place.
- They study such topics as where people live on the surface of Earth, why they live there, and how they interact with each other and the physical environment.
Thinking Spatially

- **Geography** emphasizes the spatial aspects of the world.
- **Spatial** refers to Earth’s features in terms of their locations, their shapes, and their relationships to one another.
- **Physical** features such as mountains and lakes can be located on a map.
- Can be measured in terms of height, width, and depth.
- Distances and directions to other features can be determined.
- Geographers also think about the relationships between human features and physical features.
The Perspective of Place

What do geographers look at/ask?

- The characteristics of Earth’s features.
- What mountains in different locations are made of, e.g., volcanic rock, basalt, etc.
- What kinds of fish live in different lakes.
- The layout of cities and think about how easy or difficult it is for people to move around in them.

What is the difference between physical characteristics and human ones?
The Perspective of Experience

What is a landscape?

- Landscapes can tell us much about the people who live there.
- Geographers look at landscapes and try to explain their unique combinations of physical and human features.

We all live in the world. We feel the change of the seasons. We hear the sounds of birds chirping and of car horns honking. We walk on sidewalks and in forests. We ride in cars along streets and highways. We shop in malls and grocery stores. We fly in airplanes to distant places. We surf the Internet or watch TV and learn about peoples and events in our neighborhood, our country, and the world.
A Changing World

- Earth is dynamic, or always changing. [Grand canyon]
- Rivers shift course.
- Volcanoes suddenly erupt, forming mountains or collapsing the peaks of mountains.
- The pounding surf removes sand from beaches.
- The things that people make change, too.
- Farmers shift from growing one crop to another.
- Cities grow larger.
- Nations expand into new areas.
- Geographers, then, study how places change over time.
- They try to understand what impact those changes have.
- What factors make a city grow?
- What effect does a growing city have on the people who live there?
- What effect did the city’s growth have on nearby communities and on the land and water near it?
- Answering questions like these is part of the field of geography.
- Describing How is geography related to history?
The Five Themes of Geography

Guiding Question: How can you make sense of a subject as large as Earth and its people?

Geographers use five themes to organize information about the world. These themes help them view and understand Earth:

**Location** - where something is found on Earth.

Two types of location.

**Relative location** describes where a place is compared to another place. This approach often uses the cardinal directions— north, south, east, and west. A school might be on the east side of town. Relative location can also tell us about the characteristics of a place. For example, knowing that New Orleans is near the mouth of the Mississippi River helps us understand why the city became an important trading port.

**Absolute location** is the exact location of something. An address like 123 Main Street is an absolute location. Geographers identify the absolute location of places using a system of imaginary lines called latitude and longitude. Those lines form a grid for locating a place precisely.
Latitude

- Lines of latitude run east to west, but they measure distance on Earth in a north-to-south direction.
- One of these lines, the **Equator**, circles the middle of Earth.
- This line is equally distant from the North Pole and the South Pole.
- Other lines of latitude between the Equator and the North and South Poles are assigned a number from 1° to 90°.
- The higher the number, the farther the line is from the Equator.
- The Equator is 0° latitude. The North Pole is at 90° north latitude (90° N), and the South Pole is at 90° south latitude (90° S).
Lines of longitude run from north to south, but they measure distance on Earth in an east-to-west direction.

They go from the North Pole to the South Pole.

These lines are also called meridians.

The Prime Meridian is the starting point for measuring longitude.

It runs through Greenwich, England, and has the value of 0° longitude.

There are 180 lines of longitude to the east of the Prime Meridian and 180 lines to the west.

They meet at the meridian 180°, which is the International Date Line.
Place

- Another theme of geography is place.
- The features that help define a place can be physical or human.
- Why is Denver called the “Mile High City”? Its location one mile above sea level gives it a special character.
- Why does New Orleans have the nickname “the Crescent City”?
- It is built on a crescent shaped bend along the Mississippi River.
Region (An Art Project Would be Fruitful Here)

- Although places are unique, two or more places can share characteristics, these are called regions.
- Places that are close to one another and share some characteristics belong to the same region.
- For example, Los Angeles and San Diego are located in southern California.
  - They have some features in common, such as nearness to the ocean.
  - Both cities also have mostly warm temperatures throughout the year.
  - In the case of those two cities, the region is defined using physical characteristics.
- Regions can also be defined by human characteristics.
  - For instance, the countries of North Africa are part of the same region.
  - One reason is that most of the people living in these countries follow the same religion, Islam.
Human-Environment Interaction

- People and the environment affect each other.
- The physical characteristics of a place affect how people live.
- Flat, rich, well-watered soil is good for farming.
- Mountains full of coal can be mined.
- The environment can present all kinds of hazards, such as floods, droughts, earthquakes, and volcanic eruptions.
- People affect the environment, too; they blast tunnels through mountains to build roadways and drain swamps to make farmland.
- Although these actions can improve life for some people, they can also harm the environment.
- Exhaust from cars on the roadways can pollute the air, and turning swamps into farms destroys natural ecosystems and reduces biological diversity.
Environment

- **The environment** = the natural surroundings of a place.
- **Landforms**: or the shape and nature of the land - Hills, mountains, and valleys are types of landforms.
- The environment also includes the presence or absence of a body of water.
- Cities located on coastlines, like New York City, have different characteristics than inland cities, like Dallas.
- Weather and climate also play a role in how people interact with their environment.
- The average weather in a place over a long period of time is called its **climate**.
- Alaska’s climate is marked by long, cold, wet winters and short, mild summers.
- Hawaii’s climate is warm year-round.
- Alaskans interact with their environment differently in December than Hawaiians do.
- Another component, or part, of the environment is **resources**. These are materials that can be used to produce crops or other products.
- Forests are a resource because the trees can be used to build homes and furniture.
- Oil is a resource because it can be used as a source of energy.
Movement

- Geographers also look at how people, products, ideas, and information move from one place to another.
- Many reasons for moving, e.g., a better job.
- Can be forced to move because of war, famine, or religious or racial prejudice.
- Movement by large numbers of people can have important effects:
  - Shortages of housing and other services.
  - If new arrivals to an area cannot find jobs, poverty levels can rise.
- In our interconnected world, a vast number of products move from place to place.

Apples from Washington State move to supermarkets in Texas.

- Clothes produced in Thailand end up in American shopping malls.
- Oil from Saudi Arabia powers cars and trucks across the United States.
- Movement relies on transportation systems - ships, railroads, airplanes, and trucks.
- Ideas can move at an even faster pace than people and products.
- Communications systems, such as telephone, television, radio, and the Internet, carry ideas and information all around the Earth.
  - Remote villagers on the island of Borneo watch American television shows and learn about life in the United States.
  - Political protesters in Egypt use text messaging and social networking sites to coordinate their activities.
Where Does Your Food Come From?
Skill Building

1. How will studying geography help you develop skills for everyday life?
2. Have you ever used a Web browser to find a route from your home to another place? If so, your search took you to a Website that provides maps. If you followed that map to your destination, you were using a geography skill.

Interpreting Visuals

Maps are one tool geographers use to picture the world. They use other visual images, as well. These other visuals include graphs, charts, diagrams, and photographs.

Graphs are visual displays of numerical information. They can help you compare information. Charts display information in columns and rows.

Diagrams are drawings that use pictures to represent something in the world or an abstract idea. A diagram might show the steps in a process or the parts that make up something.
1. Geographers ask analytical questions. For example, geographers might want to know why earthquakes are more likely in some places than in others. That question looks at causes. They might ask, How does climate affect the ways people live? Such questions examine effects.

2. Geographers might ask how the characteristics of a place have changed over time. That is a question of analysis. Or they could ask why people in different nations use their resources differently. That question calls on them to compare and contrast.

Learning how to ask—and answer—questions like these will help sharpen your mind. In addition to understanding geography better, you will also be able to use these skills in other subjects.

Analyzing: How do geographers use visuals?