

Summary: The Geography of Our World

Welcome to Geography

Geography is the study of the people and places of Earth. It explains forces that shape the land. Geographers study how our environment affects us and how we affect our environment. Geographers ask three questions about a place. They ask, “Where is it?” If you want to tell someone where you live, you can say your address or you can say where your home is in relation to other places. Geographers ask, “Why is it there?” They look for clues about forces that shaped mountains, rivers, landforms, and bodies of water.

Geographers study why some communities grow and some disappear. They ask “What is it like there?” They study the physical features of the land. They also study human features, such as how people use land, the work they do, their foods, languages, and beliefs.

Where in the World Are You?

A globe shows the earth’s oceans and continents. Continents are masses of land. There are four large oceans: the Atlantic, Arctic, Pacific, and Indian. There are seven continents: Africa, Antarctica, Asia, Australia, Europe, North America, and South America. The earth can be divided into hemispheres. The United States is in the Northern and Western Hemispheres. The United States has many regions. A region is an area that can be described by features, such as the language people speak there or the kinds of landforms found there.

Maps with latitude and longitude lines show the exact location of a place. Latitude lines run parallel to the equator. Lines of longitude, also called meridians, run from the North Pole to the South Pole. The lines have numbers, called degrees. The equator is 0 degrees latitude. It divides Earth into two hemispheres, Northern and Southern. Other latitude lines are measured in degrees north or south. The prime meridian is 0 degrees longitude. Other longitude lines are measured in degrees east or west. To give the exact location of a place, find where the latitude and longitude lines cross. For example, New Orleans is at 30 degrees north, 90 degrees west. This is written as 30° N, 90° W.

Before You Read

Find and underline each vocabulary word.

geography *noun*, the study of the people and places of Earth

environment *noun*, all the surroundings and conditions that affect living things

hemisphere *noun*, one half of the earth’s surface

region *noun*, an area that is defined by certain features

After You Read

REVIEW What are two ways to describe the location of a place?

Highlight the sentence that tells how you can describe where you live.

REVIEW What physical features does a globe show? Draw a box around the sentence that tells what features are shown on a globe.

REVIEW Why are maps useful? What does a map with latitude and longitude lines show? Underline the sentence that tells the answer.