

Summary: The Land of the United States

Physical Processes

Many forces, such as tectonic plates, earthquakes, volcanoes, glaciers, and flooding shape the land. A tectonic plate is a big piece of moving rock. Long ago, tectonic plates under Earth moved slowly. This caused the ground to break and push up making the Appalachian Mountains. Today, moving tectonic plates can change the land by causing earthquakes and volcanoes.

An earthquake happens when tectonic plates break apart and cause the ground to shake. When the ground shakes, it can change the land. An earthquake can flatten mountains and make rivers change course. A volcano happens when tectonic plates move. This causes hot, melted rock to come up from under Earth to the surface. When the rock cools, it can shape the land. A volcano can make a new landform, such as an island.

A big sheet of ice that moves slowly over the land is a glacier. Heavy glaciers can make valleys deeper, cut out pieces of mountains, and make lakes as the ice melts. A flooding river can take soil away from riverbanks. This erosion changes the land.

Regions

People who study the land grouped the United States into four main regions. They grouped together states that are close to each other. These four main regions are the East, the South, the Midwest, and the West. Each region is different from another.

Forests cover much of the East. It has a jagged coast along the ocean. In the South, you can find mountains and swamps. The Midwest has rolling hills and grassy plains. The region of the West has mountains and deserts.

Since landforms can affect the climate, there are many different kinds of climate in the four regions. The air is cooler in the forests where there are trees and plants than in places without trees, such as deserts.



Before You Read

Find and underline each vocabulary word.

tectonic plate *noun*, a huge piece of slowly moving rock on Earth's surface

landform *noun*, a feature on the surface of the land

erosion *noun*, the process by which water or wind wears away the land

region *noun*, an area that has one or more features in common

plains *noun*, large areas of flat or nearly flat land



After You Read

REVIEW What are some of the forces that shape the land? Draw a box around the sentence that tells what can happen to cause changes in the land.

REVIEW What are the major regions of the United States? Circle the four words that name the regions.