

Summary: Where Is California?

California's Location

We are going to study the geography of our state, California. Geography is the study of people, places, and environments. Environment means parts of nature, such as land, water, and air.

California is one of the fifty states that make up the United States. West of California is the Pacific Ocean. To the north is Oregon. To the south is Mexico. The United States of America is on the continent of North America.

Look at a map or a globe. The point farthest north is the North Pole. The point farthest south is the South Pole. The equator is the imaginary line around the middle of Earth. It is an equal distance from both poles. Earth is divided into two hemispheres. From the equator to the North Pole is the Northern Hemisphere. From the equator to the South Pole is the Southern Hemisphere. California, like the rest of North America, is in the Northern Hemisphere.

Geographers Ask Four Questions

Geographers are the people who study geography. They ask four major questions about places: (1) Where is it? (2) What is it like there? (3) Why is it there? (4) How do places change? When geographers ask where a place is, they want to know about its location. For example, California is on the Pacific Ocean.

When geographers ask what a place is like, they want to know what physical features it has, such as seashore or mountains. They might also ask questions about the number of people and what kinds of work they do.

When geographers ask why a place is there, they want to understand how different parts of the environment affect each other. Why are plants in northern California different from those in southern parts of the state? They would also want to understand how the land affects people.

When geographers ask how places change, they want to know how places change over time. Human activities and physical forces change landscapes. Natural forces such as storms and earthquakes also change the land.

Before You Read

Find and underline each vocabulary word.

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

continent *noun*, one of the seven great land areas on Earth

equator *noun*, imaginary line around Earth, dividing it into the Northern and Southern hemispheres

hemisphere *noun*, one of the two halves of Earth, from the equator to one of the poles

After You Read

REVIEW The state of California is located in which country, continent, and hemisphere? Highlight the three sentences that give you this information about California.

REVIEW Name the four questions that geographers ask and explain what they mean. Draw a box around the paragraph that lists the questions. Then underline the main sentences that describe what geographers want to determine by asking each question.