



The Five Themes of Geography

BEFORE YOU READ

In the last chapter, you read about culture regions and the five fields of learning that make up social studies.

In this section, you will learn about the five themes of geography.

AS YOU READ

Use this chart to take notes about the five themes of geography.

The Five Themes of Geography				
Location				

TERMS & NAMES

absolute location the exact spot on Earth where a place can be found

latitude imaginary lines that run parallel to the Equator

longitude imaginary lines that run between the North and South Poles

relative location the location of one place in relation to another place

migrate to move from one area in order to settle in another

The Five Themes (page 35)

Which geography theme did Wegener explore?

In 1912, scientist Alfred Wegener proposed that the continents had once been joined together as one huge landmass. He called this supercontinent *Pangaea*. Wegener thought that over time, pieces of this landmass had broken away and drifted apart. People rejected his claim, saying that it was impossible for continents to move.

Eventually, the scientific community accepted Wegener's *theory*. Scientists discovered that giant slabs of Earth's surface, called tectonic plates, move, causing continents to drift. The movement of the plates also creates earthquakes, volcanoes, and mountains. *Geographers* study processes that cause changes like these. To understand how geographers think about the world, consider geography's five themes—location, place, region, movement, and human-environment interaction.

1. What do geographers study?

Location (pages 36–37)

How can location help you learn about a place?

Geography helps you understand where places are located and why they are located there.

Absolute location is the exact spot on Earth where a place can be found. Using imaginary lines drawn on Earth's surface, geographers can locate any place in the world. Lines that run parallel to the *Equator* are called **latitude** lines. They measure distance north and south of the Equator. Lines that run between the North and South Poles are called **longitude** lines. They measure distance east and west of the *Prime Meridian*.

Another way to define the location of a place is to describe its **relative location**, where it is in relation to other places. You might say your school's relative location is two blocks west of the pet store or close to the post office.

2. What is the difference between absolute location and relative location?

Place (page 37)

What physical features and human characteristics would you use to describe a place?

Another theme of geography is place. Every place on Earth has physical features, which include climate, landforms, bodies of water, and plant and animal life. Places can also have human characteristics, or features created by people, such as cities, governments, and cultural traditions.

Earth's physical features change. Some changes are dramatic, caused by volcanoes, earthquakes, or hurricanes. Others happen slowly, such as the movement of glaciers or the formation of a delta.

3. Why do places change?

Region (pages 37–38)

What is a region?

Geographers group places into regions. A region is a group of places that have physical features or human characteristics in common. A geographer interested in languages might divide the world into language regions. Geographers compare regions to understand the differences and similarities among them.

The world can be divided into ten natural regions. A *natural region*, such as a tropical rain forest, has unique plant and animal life and a unique climate.

4. Why are tropical rain forests examples of natural regions?

Movement (pages 38–39)

Why is movement one of geography's themes?

People, goods, and ideas move from one place to another. So do animals, plants, and other physical features of Earth. Sometimes, people move within a country. For example, vast numbers of people have migrated from farms

to cities. **Migrate** means to move from one area in order to settle in another.

Migration is a result of push and pull factors. Problems in one place, such as poverty, *prejudice*, and political oppression, push people out. Advantages in another place, such as employment and educational opportunities, freedom, and peace, pull people in.

Natural barriers, such as mountain ranges and rivers, make migration difficult. Oceans and flat land make it easier. Modern transportation also makes it easier.

5. What are push and pull factors?

Human-Environment Interaction

(pages 39–40)

Why does human-environment interaction occur?

Human-environment interaction occurs because humans depend on, adapt to, and change the world around them. Human society and the environment are shaped by each other.

An area may have open meadows because early settlers cleared the land for farming. Changes caused by humans, such as pollution, can hurt the environment. The environment can also harm people. Hurricanes wash away houses. Earthquakes cause destruction.

People adapt to the resources their environment provides. In the past, people who lived near oceans learned to fish. Those who lived near fertile soil learned to farm. People built homes using local materials and ate food grown nearby. Cultural differences in clothing styles and sports often reflected the environment.

People and the environment continually interact. When people use public transportation or ride bicycles rather than drive, less gasoline is burned and there is less air pollution.

6. In the past, how did people adapt their ways of life to the environment?
