



From Coast to Coast

BEFORE YOU READ

In the last chapter, you read about the field of geography.

In this section, you will read about the geographic features of the United States and Canada.

AS YOU READ

Copy this chart for taking notes on how each geographic feature contributes to the economies of the United States and Canada.

Economic Benefits of North America's Geography				
Climate & Soil	Oceans & Rivers	Plains and Lowlands	Canadian Shield	Mountain Ranges

TERMS & NAMES

Sacagawea Native American woman who guided explorers from 1804 to 1806

landforms features of Earth's surface, such as mountains, valleys, and plateaus

glacier thick sheet of ice that moves slowly across land

erosion process by which wind, rivers, and rain wear away soil and stone

river system network of major rivers and their tributaries

North America (pages 69–70)**What countries are located in North America?**

Canada and the United States are in the northern part of the continent. Canada is the second largest country in area in the world. North America also includes Greenland, which is the world's largest island.

Mexico, the Central American countries, and the Caribbean island nations are part of the continent. These countries, along with South America, make up Latin America. Geographers study Latin America separately from the United States and Canada because the cultural heritage of the two areas is different.

Most of the United States and Canada is in the *middle latitudes* of the Northern Hemisphere, where a temperate climate and farming enable countries to feed large populations.

1. Why do geographers study Latin America separately from the United States and Canada?

An Isolated Continent (pages 70–71)**Why was North America once an isolated continent?**

North America is almost completely surrounded by water, from the Arctic Ocean to the Gulf of Mexico and from the Pacific Ocean to the Atlantic Ocean.

At one time, oceans and seas isolated North America. The earliest settlers arrived 12,000 to 35,000 years ago. No other people reached this continent for thousands of years.

2. What are the names of the oceans that surround North America?

Crossing the Barriers (page 71)**Why did people begin to move to North America?**

As people learned more about shipbuilding and navigation, the oceans became a travel route.

Settlers arrived with plants and animals that at times replaced native plants and animals.

A Shoshone woman, **Sacagawea**, had a vital role in exploring the United States. From 1804 to 1806, she guided explorers Lewis and Clark into the Pacific Northwest.

In the 20th century, the distance from other countries helped protect Canada and the United States from wartime attack.

3. How did Sacagawea help explorers?

Regions of the United States and Canada (pages 72–73)

How are the regions of the United States and Canada alike?

The United States and Canada share many geographic regions.

The *Atlantic Coastal Plain* runs along the Gulf of Mexico and the east coast of North America. It has rich farmland and some wetlands.

The *Appalachian Mountains* are a 400-million-year-old mountain range west of the Atlantic Coastal Plain.

The *Central Lowlands* extend west of the Appalachians to the Great Plains. They are generally flat farmlands with rich soil.

The *Great Plains* have grasslands and few trees. Some areas have farms and cattle ranches.

The *Rocky Mountains and Coastal Ranges* in the west are North America's highest mountain ranges. These heavily forested ranges run from Mexico to Alaska.

The *Intermountain Region* lies between the Rocky Mountains and the western coastal mountains. This dry region contains plateaus, basins, and deserts. Ranchers raise cattle and sheep there.

The *Canadian Shield* is a rocky region that covers most of Greenland, curves around the Hudson Bay, and reaches into the United States. It is rich in iron and copper. Most of the land is not farmable and is sparsely populated.

4. What mountains run along the west coast of North America from Alaska to Mexico?

Physical Processes Shape the Land (pages 73–74)

How have natural processes shaped North America?

Some of the continent's most dramatic landforms were created by wind, water, ice, and moving slabs of Earth's crust. **Landforms** are features of Earth's surface, such as mountains, valleys, and plateaus.

A **glacier** is a thick sheet of ice that moves slowly across land. Thousands of years ago, glaciers covered much of North America. As they moved and melted, they smoothed out rough surfaces and piled up rock and dirt, creating new valleys, lakes, and hills.

Wind, rivers, and rain wear away soil and stone in a process called **erosion**. Erosion has created magnificent landforms, such as the Grand Canyon. Volcanoes and earthquakes have also created landforms across North America.

5. How does a glacier change landforms?

Waterways (page 74)

What is a river system?

North America has an extensive **river system**, or network of rivers and their *tributaries*. When snow melts and rain falls, water flows into creeks that become rivers. Rivers empty into oceans, lakes, and other rivers.

6. How does a river system work?
