

Unit Overview: Geographic Features of California

California History-Social Science Grade 4, Standard 1: Students demonstrate an understanding of the physical and human geographic features that define places and regions in California.

1. Explain and use the coordinate grid system of latitude and longitude to determine the absolute locations of places in California and on Earth.
2. Distinguish between the North and South Poles; the equator and the prime meridian; the tropics; and the hemispheres, using coordinates to plot locations.
3. Identify the state capital and describe the various regions of California, including how their characteristics and physical environments (e.g., water, landforms, vegetation, climate) affect human activity.
4. Identify the locations of the Pacific Ocean, rivers, valleys, and mountain passes and explain their effects on the growth of towns.
5. Use maps, charts, and pictures to describe how communities in California vary in land use, vegetation, wildlife, climate, population density, architecture, services, and transportation.

Historical and Social Sciences Analysis Skills

Chronological and Spatial Thinking

- Students use map and globe skills to determine the absolute locations of places and interpret information available through a map's or globe's legend, scale, and symbolic representations.
- Students judge the significance of the relative location of a place (e.g., proximity to a harbor, on trade routes) and analyze how relative advantages or disadvantages can change over time.

Research, Evidence, and Point of View

- Students pose relevant questions about events they encounter in ... maps, artworks, and architecture.

Historical Interpretation

- Students identify the human and physical characteristics of the places they were studying and explain how those features form the unique character of those places.

Significance of the Topic

In this unit, students will learn about the physical and human geographic features of California, a state that is unique in terms of its vast and varied geography. The unit serves as a backdrop for the study of California history, economics, and political science.

Focus Questions:

1. Where in the world is California?
2. What are the physical characteristics (e.g., water, landforms, vegetation, climate) that define the regions of California?

Recommended Materials to assemble for this unit:

- Local map, California map, world map, globes, atlas, textbook
- Art prints, brochures or calendars with pictures that depict regions of California
- Check out trade books from the school library and public library. (Refer to the Resources section of the unit.)
- Markers, crayons, scissors, glue, rulers, paper plates, stapler
- Copies of the lesson handouts

Literacy Links

A variety of activities are included in the lesson that support and develop reading and writing standards. Examples of these literacy activities are:

Reading

- Identify the main idea and supporting details
- Use appropriate strategies when reading for different purposes (e.g., full comprehension, location of information...)
- Make and confirm predictions about text by using prior knowledge and ideas presented in the text itself, including illustrations, titles, topic sentences, important words, and foreshadowing clues.
- Compare and contrast information about the regions of California after reading several passages or articles.
- Engage in research using a variety of print and internet resources
- Develop and use new content-specific vocabulary

Writing

- Label maps accurately and neatly
- Take notes and record information based on research on to a retrieval chart
- Use various reference materials (e.g., reference books, encyclopedia, online information) as an aid to writing.
- Quote or paraphrase information sources, citing them appropriately.
- Locate information in reference texts by using organizational features (e.g., prefaces, appendixes).

Assessment

The assessment for this unit includes a map of the political and physical features of California. For directions, refer to page 4. Handouts for students with the prompt and rubric are on pages 10 and 11.

Other assessments for the unit include: *The World on a Plate* and the *Mini Flip Book* in Lesson 1 and a *Map of the Regions of California* and the *Retrieval Chart for the Regions of California* in Lesson 2.