



Using maps

North America: Geography and Environment



Mexico City, Mexico



Gateway Arch, U.S.A.



Dog sleds, Canada



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North America: Geography and Environment



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North America: Geography and Environment

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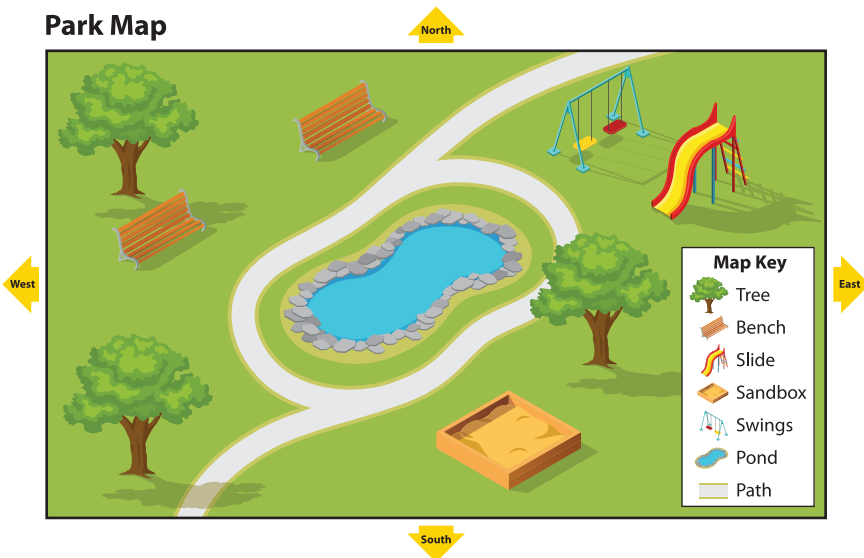
Using Maps

Maps are important sources of information. They come in all sizes and colors, and they are found in many different places. One place you can find maps is in an atlas. An atlas is a big book filled with different maps.



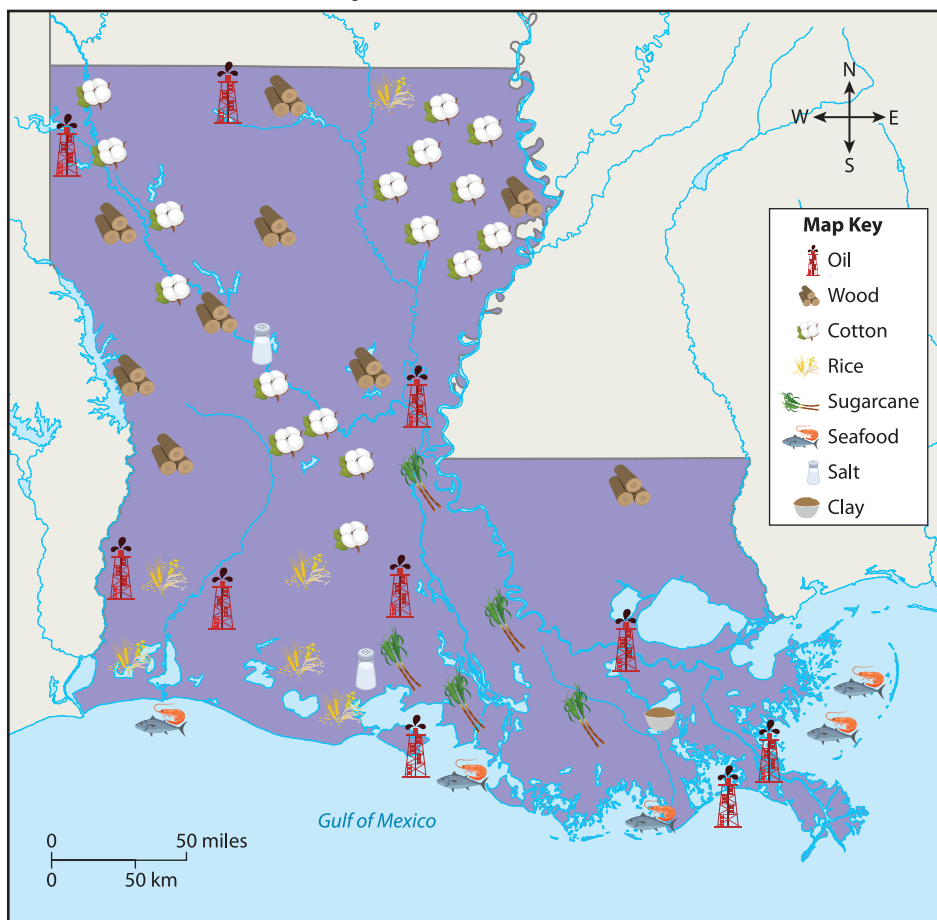
Some maps are on pieces of paper that can be folded to fit in your pocket. Today, people can also get maps on their phones. Some cities even have maps on big screens to help you find your way around.

Maps show many different things. Some maps might show someone how to find their way around a park. Do you see the path on this map? Look at the map to see where the path leads.



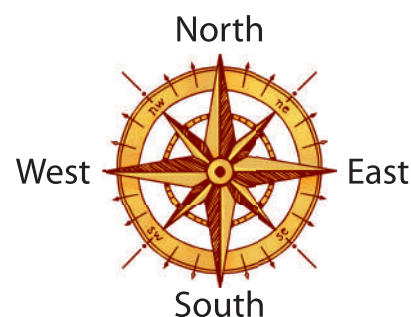
Some maps show land features, such as mountains and valleys. Some maps show information about natural resources and crops that people grow, like rice or sugarcane. And others might show a town, a state, a country, or even the whole world!

Natural Resources and Crops of Louisiana










No matter what kind of map you are looking at, you need to know where north, south, east, and west are. These are the four main directions. Maps have something called a compass rose on them.

A compass rose points you to where north, south, east, and west are on the map. Can you see a compass rose on the map of natural resources and crops above?



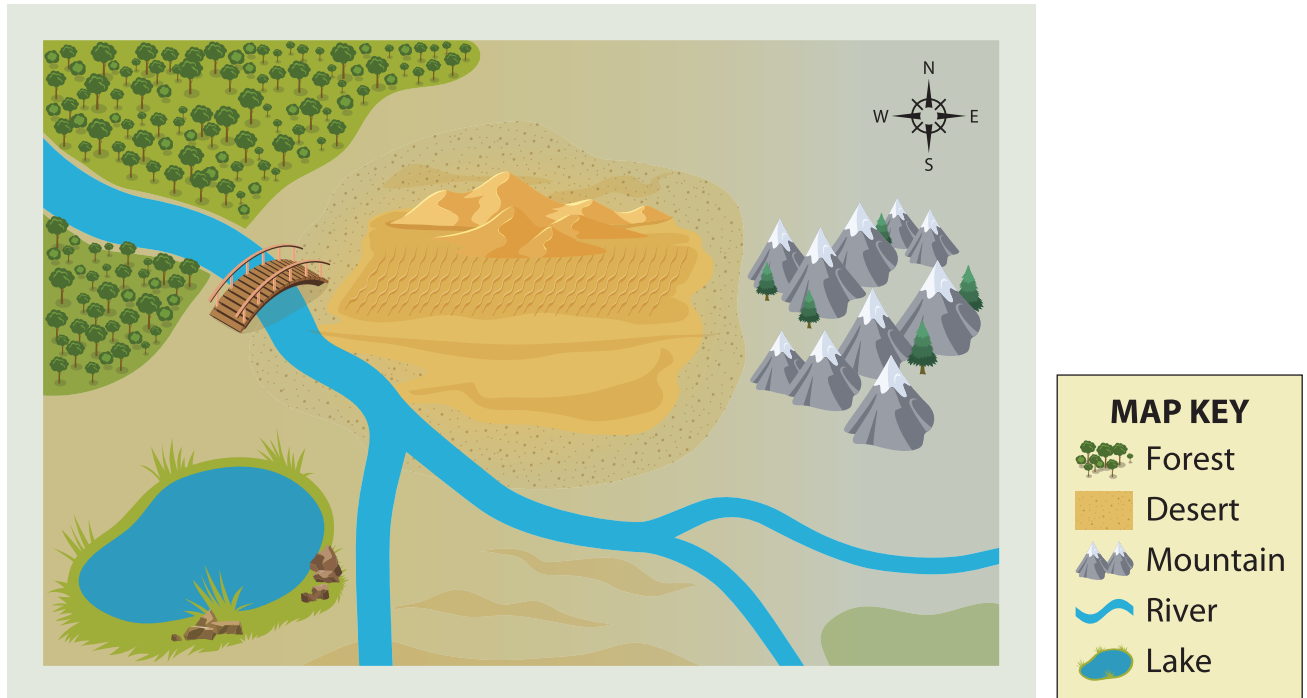
Maps also have symbols that stand for special places and things. The map key tells us what these symbols mean. For example, dots often show where cities are on a map. A star

usually stands for a capital city. Tiny pictures may show things such as highways, railroads, museums, and bus stops. The symbols can also tell us about the natural resources of a place. Map keys can be very helpful when you are trying to find a certain location in a big place!

MAP KEY			
	Museum		Bus stop
	Bridge		Highway
	City		Railroad
	Capital city		



A map key can tell us about the physical geography of a place. Triangles often mean mountains, and wavy lines mean rivers. Groups of little dots often stand for deserts, and pictures of trees stand for forests.



The colors on maps also tell us about physical geography. Bodies of water like rivers, lakes, and oceans are blue. Dry areas like deserts are tan or brown. Areas with forests are green.



River



Desert



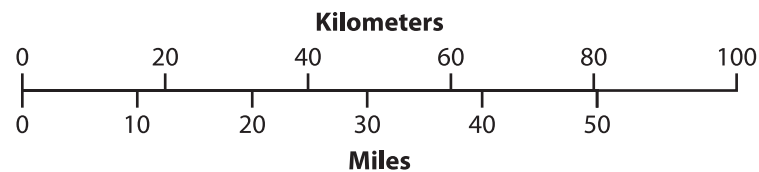
Forest

How do we know the distance between places on a map? Another feature of maps can help us answer this! The map scale tells us how distance in the real world is represented on the map.

Map of the Southeastern United States



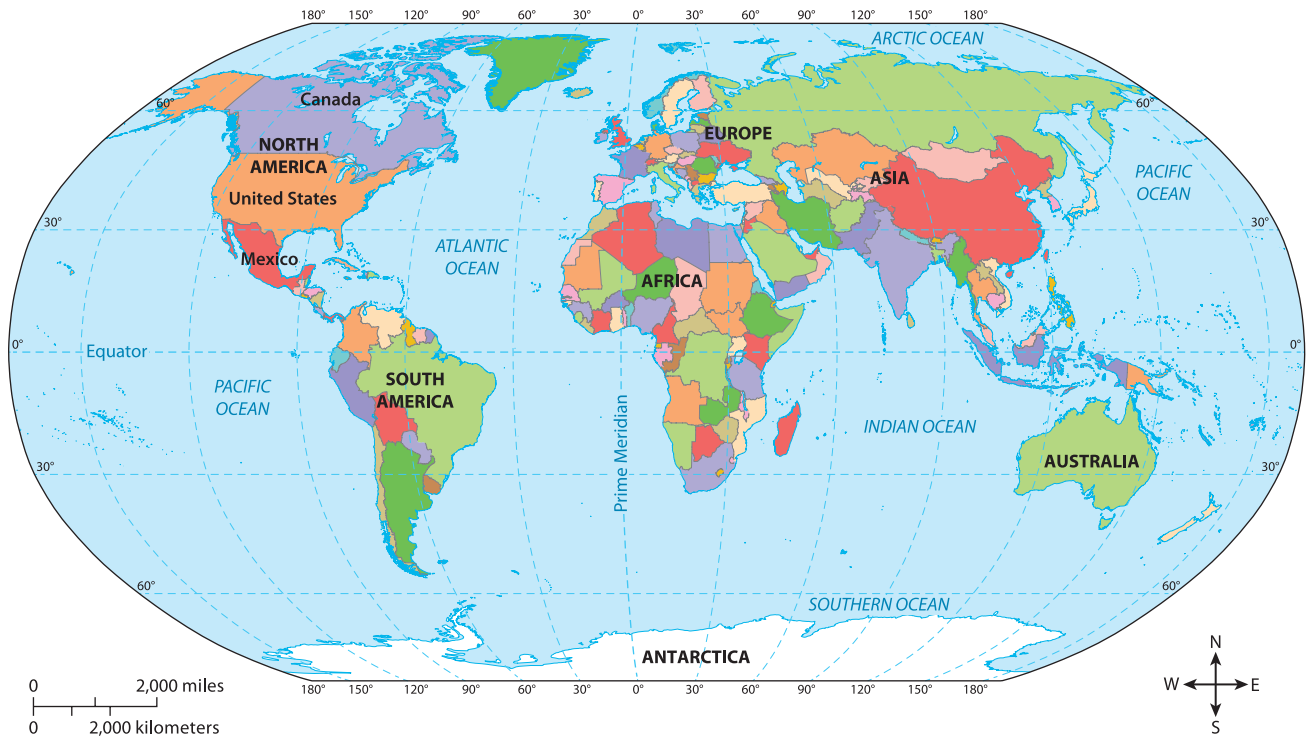
On a map of just your town, one inch (2.5 cm) could be equal to one mile (1.6 km). On a map of the United States, one inch (2.5 cm) could be equal to five hundred miles (805 km). What is the scale equal to on the map of the southeastern United States above?





Like maps, globes show the geography of Earth. They are round to show Earth's shape.

The equator is an imaginary line that runs from east to west around the middle of Earth. It is halfway between the North Pole and the South Pole. The area north of the equator is called the Northern Hemisphere. The area south of the equator is called the Southern Hemisphere.



The prime meridian is an imaginary line that runs from north to south. The area to the west of the prime meridian is called the Western Hemisphere. The area to the east of the prime meridian is called the Eastern Hemisphere.

North America: The United States

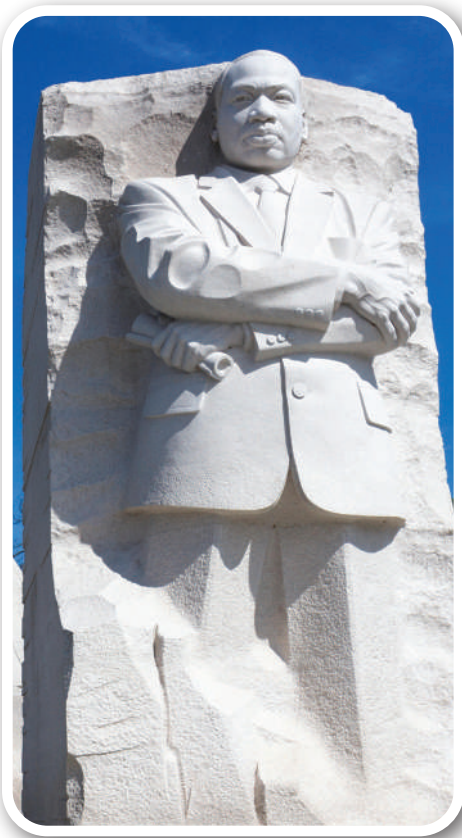
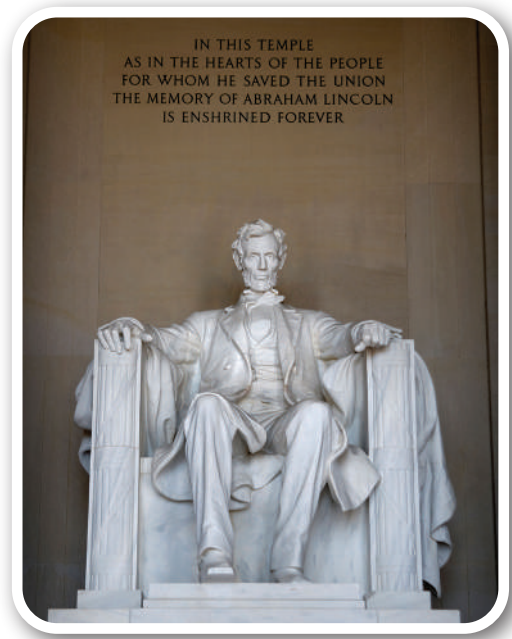
The United States of America, Canada, and Mexico are all part of North America. Are you ready to explore the continent of North America? The first stop is the United States!



The United States is a country with its own government and laws. The government for the United States is in the capital city, Washington, D.C. Members of the government meet in the U.S. Capitol. The president lives in the White House, which is also in Washington, D.C. Every president has lived here except for George Washington.



Washington, D.C., is also home to many monuments. A monument is a special building or statue that is made to honor an important person or event. The Lincoln Memorial honors President Abraham Lincoln. Sitting, Lincoln's statue is nineteen feet (5.8 m) tall. Standing, he would be twenty-eight feet (8.5 m) tall!



The Martin Luther King Jr. Memorial honors the work of Dr. King. It is near where he gave one of his most famous speeches.



The Tomb of the Unknown Soldier honors people who have died fighting in wars. It is located just outside of Washington, D.C., at Arlington National Cemetery in Virginia.

There are fifty U.S. states. If you traveled to all of them, you would see many different kinds of landscapes! For example, most New England states have beautiful coastlines on the Atlantic Ocean. Some New England states have mountains and lakes. In the past, fishing was an important industry there. People in New England still fish today, including for lobster.



The United States of America has big urban areas. One of them is New York City. Millions of people live and work there. People in this part of the United States have jobs in many different fields, like technology, health care, and banking. The Statue of Liberty is a symbol of New York City and the United States. New York City is also home to many other places that people visit, like the September 11th Memorial and Museum.



On the northern border of New York State is Niagara Falls. They are part of the oldest state park in the country. Thousands of gallons of water rush over the falls each second. On the other side of Niagara Falls is the country of Canada. People from around the United States and the world visit these beautiful falls each year.



The Appalachian Mountains are in the eastern part of the United States. They stretch from New England into states in the South. The Smoky Mountains in Tennessee and North Carolina are a part of the Appalachian Mountains. One way people can experience these beautiful mountains is by hiking on the Appalachian Trail. The trail is over two thousand miles (3,200 km) long!





The southern part of the United States is hotter than the northern part. The South has beautiful beaches. People like to vacation in Florida, a state that is a long peninsula.

Hurricanes during the summer and fall are common in the South, including Louisiana. High winds and heavy rain from hurricanes can cause flooding and damage buildings.

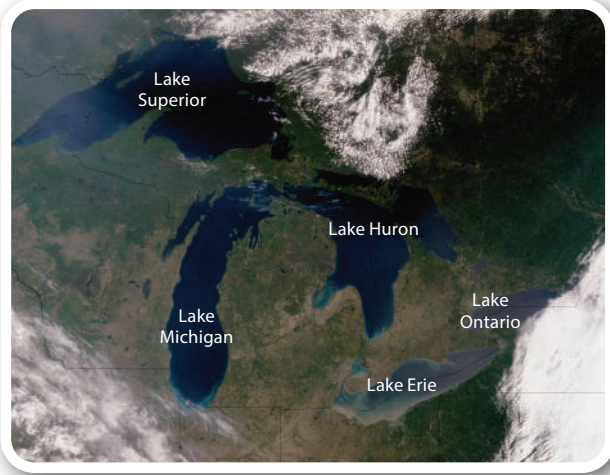


The mighty Mississippi River is the second-longest river in the United States. Tugboats on the Mississippi push large barges that carry goods from around the United States.

The barges stop at places like the Ports of New Orleans and Greater Baton Rouge in Louisiana. The goods on these ships are then transported from the ports to other parts of the United States. They also go to places all around the world!



Many states in the Midwest, such as Iowa, have rural areas. Farmers there use the land to grow crops and run dairy farms.

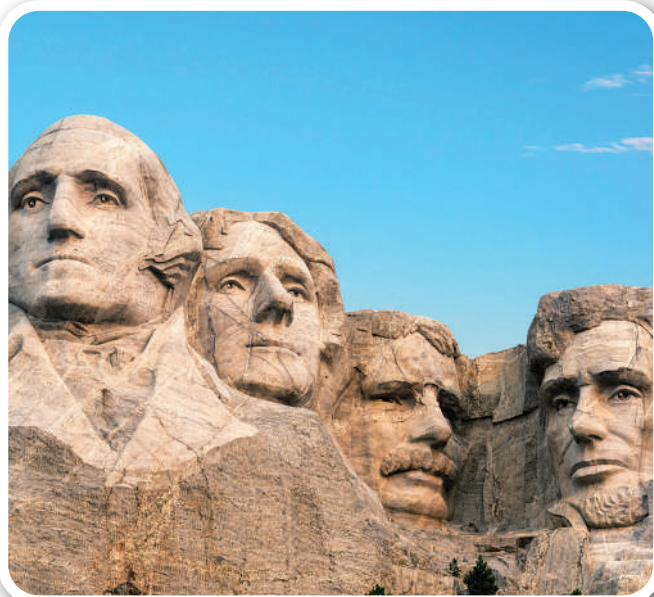


The Midwest is also home to the five Great Lakes: Lakes Superior, Huron, Ontario, Erie, and Michigan. Lake Superior is one of the biggest lakes in the entire world!

St. Louis, Missouri, is a city in the Midwest. It is home to the tallest monument in the United States, the Gateway Arch.



The Great Plains are miles and miles of flat land where wheat is grown. Weather on the Great Plains is not always nice. Tornadoes are common during the spring. Dangerous snowstorms called blizzards can happen during the winter months.



South Dakota is a state in the Great Plains. It is home to Mount Rushmore. This monument shows the faces of four presidents: George Washington, Thomas Jefferson, Theodore Roosevelt, and Abraham Lincoln. Their faces are carved into the side of the hill. Each face is almost sixty feet (18 m) tall!

The Rocky Mountain region has tall mountains that stretch across the western part of North America. Some of these mountains have snow on them all year round! In the past, people came here to mine metals like silver and copper. Today, people come to the Rockies to hike and ski. Many people who live here work in industries like tourism.



Yellowstone National Park is in the state of Wyoming. It is the world's first national park. People visit Yellowstone National Park to see the animals that live there, like bison, bears, and elk. They also come to see the beautiful land and Yellowstone's many geysers.



The Southwest region of the United States has canyons and deserts. Monument Valley is a red-sand desert area on the Arizona–Utah border. It has giant towers of stone that stand tall on the dusty, desert landscape.



The Grand Canyon is a natural wonder in the state of Arizona. The deep canyon was cut out of the plateaus in the region by the Colorado River. It took millions of years for the Grand Canyon to form. If you look over the edge, you will see many different colors. These colors are made by different layers of rock.



California, Oregon, and Washington have coastlines on the Pacific Ocean. There are many large cities in this part of the country, like Los Angeles and San Francisco. Los Angeles has many suburban areas where people live.



The Golden Gate Bridge is in San Francisco. It stretches across a beautiful bay. There is often a lot of fog in San Francisco. One reason the Golden Gate Bridge is a bright color is to help people see it through the fog.

Oregon and Washington are called the Pacific Northwest. This area is home to beaches, mountains, and rainforests. It is also one of the rainiest parts of the United States.



To get to the state of Alaska, you would have to drive or fly across Canada or perhaps travel by boat. Alaska has more land than any other state. But not many people live there. Alaska has tall mountains and many rivers, lakes, and forests. Denali, the tallest mountain in North America, is found in Alaska. The state is also home to many types of animals, like bears, moose, eagles, and wolves. The weather in Alaska is really cold in the winter!



The state of Hawaii is made up of islands in the Pacific Ocean. Some of the islands are very small. Other islands, like Oahu, are larger. Hawaii is two thousand miles (3,200 km) away from California—far away from the rest of the United States! How might you get to Hawaii?

Hawaii is home to volcanoes, tropical forests, and beaches. The first people to live in Hawaii invented surfing. Today, people come from all over the world to surf there. It is also home to the Pearl Harbor National Memorial.



North America: Canada

Canada is located north of the United States. It is the second-largest country in the world. Only Russia is bigger. Ottawa is the capital of Canada. Let's explore this big, northern country!

Canada is divided into areas called provinces and territories. There are ten provinces, each with its own capital, and three territories.



Canada has the longest coastline in the world. It also has more lakes than any other country.

Fewer people live in Canada than in the United States. That's because the northern parts of Canada are very cold in the winter. These parts of Canada are not too cold for polar bears though!



Heavy snow and blizzards are common in many parts of the country.



Most Canadians live in the south of the country, near the border with the United States. But some Native Canadians, called the Inuit, do live in the far north in the territory of Nunavut, in the Canadian Arctic. Native Canadians know how to hunt and fish in this cold region. They travel across the snow on snowmobiles or sleds that are pulled by dogs.



Like the United States, Canada stretches all the way from the Atlantic Ocean to the Pacific Ocean. On the western coast of Canada is the province of British Columbia.



The Rocky Mountains run through the eastern part of the province. These are the same Rockies that run through the western United States.

Canada has open grasslands, or prairies, in parts of the south. There, herds of roaming bison and antelope can be found.



The northwestern part of Canada is divided into three territories. These are the Yukon Territory, the Northwest Territories, and Nunavut. The Yukon Territory is named for the Yukon River, which flows through Canada and Alaska. The Yukon River is the third-longest river in North America.



The Great Lakes that you read about earlier make up part of the border between Canada and the United States. Lake Ontario, one of the five lakes, is the start of the St. Lawrence River. This river is over seven hundred miles (1,100 km) long. It flows through the provinces of Ontario and Quebec to the Atlantic Ocean. The St. Lawrence River is very important for shipping goods to and from North America!



Ontario is a province on the eastern side of Canada. Ontario has a famous waterfall called Horseshoe Falls. This waterfall is on the Canadian side of Niagara Falls. The American falls are nearby in the U.S. state of New York. If you stand close to the waterfalls, you will hear the very loud sound of rushing water. You may even get splashed!



The northern part of Ontario has lots of rural areas. Many people who live there earn a living by farming.



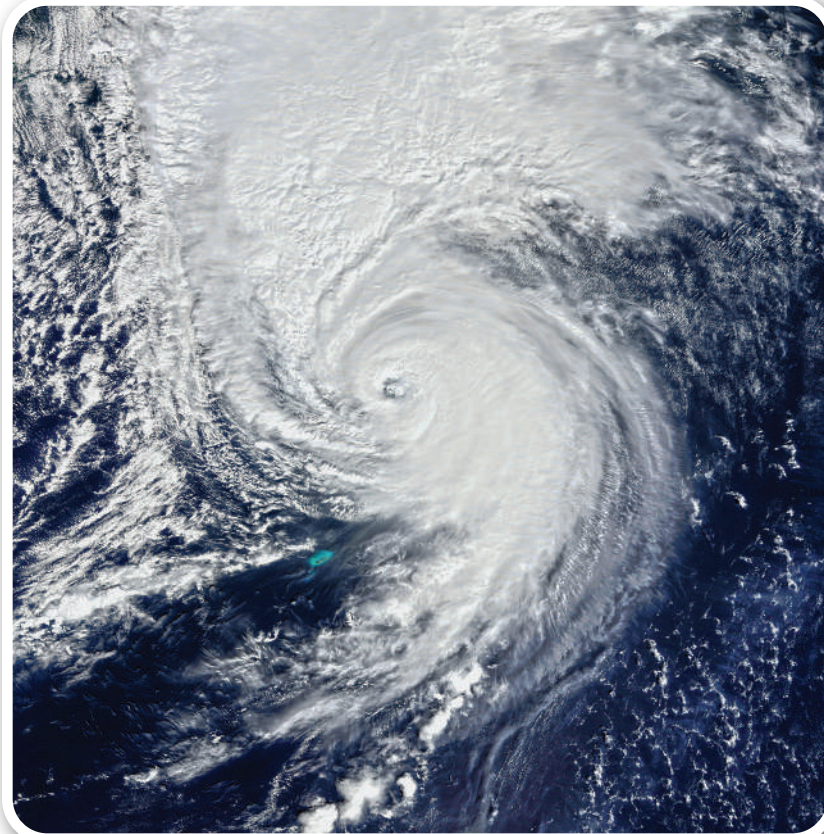


Canada's capital city of Ottawa is in southern Ontario. The city gets its name from the Native Americans who lived there in the past. This part of Ontario has urban and suburban areas.

People who live in Toronto, Ontario's capital, have different kinds of jobs. Some people work in tourism and banking. Others have jobs working in factories or making new kinds of technology.



The province of Newfoundland and Labrador has the longest coastline in Canada! Labrador is part of the mainland, but Newfoundland is an island. It is surrounded by the Atlantic Ocean. The Burin Peninsula is an important place for fishing. Newfoundland has cool summers and cold winters.



This area can also get hurricanes in the summer and fall. Hurricanes bring lots of rain and cause the level of the ocean to rise. As a result, flooding during hurricanes in Newfoundland and Labrador is common.

North America: Mexico

Mexico is located south of the United States. It has the world's largest population of Spanish speakers. There are thirty-one states in Mexico. Like the United States and Canada, Mexico has two coasts. Mexico's western border is the Pacific Ocean. The Gulf of Mexico and the Caribbean Sea make up Mexico's eastern border.



Let's visit Mexico! The first stop is the coastal areas of Mexico, where tourism and fishing are important. Each year, hundreds of thousands of tourists travel to the beautiful Mexican beaches and coastline.



However, most people in Mexico do not live on the coast. They live in the central part of the country, where the land is good for farming. This soil is mixed with the ash that comes from Mexico's ancient volcanoes. Mexican farmers grow crops such as corn, sugarcane, wheat, avocados, tropical fruits, and coffee.





Central Mexico is surrounded by three great mountain ranges. They make up the Sierra Madre. In Spanish, this means the mother mountain range. Some of the mountains are more than ten thousand feet (3,000 m) tall! The weather in the Sierra Madre changes based on how high up you are in the mountains. The very top of the mountains is called the *tierra fría*, Spanish for cold land. The bottom of the mountains is called the *tierra caliente*, Spanish for hot land.

The northern part of Mexico is home to the Chihuahuan Desert.

It is drier here than in the south. Farmers use irrigation to bring water from rivers or from deep in the ground to their crops

and animals. Irrigation helps farmers here grow different fruits, nuts, vegetables, and other plants.

Lots of cacti and yuccas grow in the northern parts of Mexico.



Deep in the Yucatán Peninsula, you will find leafy rainforests and the ruins of great cities built by a group of people called the Maya. The Maya civilization existed over a thousand years ago and was very big. They built high, stepped temples in their cities. No one lives in these cities now, but the Maya do still live in Mexico. Many people in this part of Mexico speak Mayan languages and Spanish.

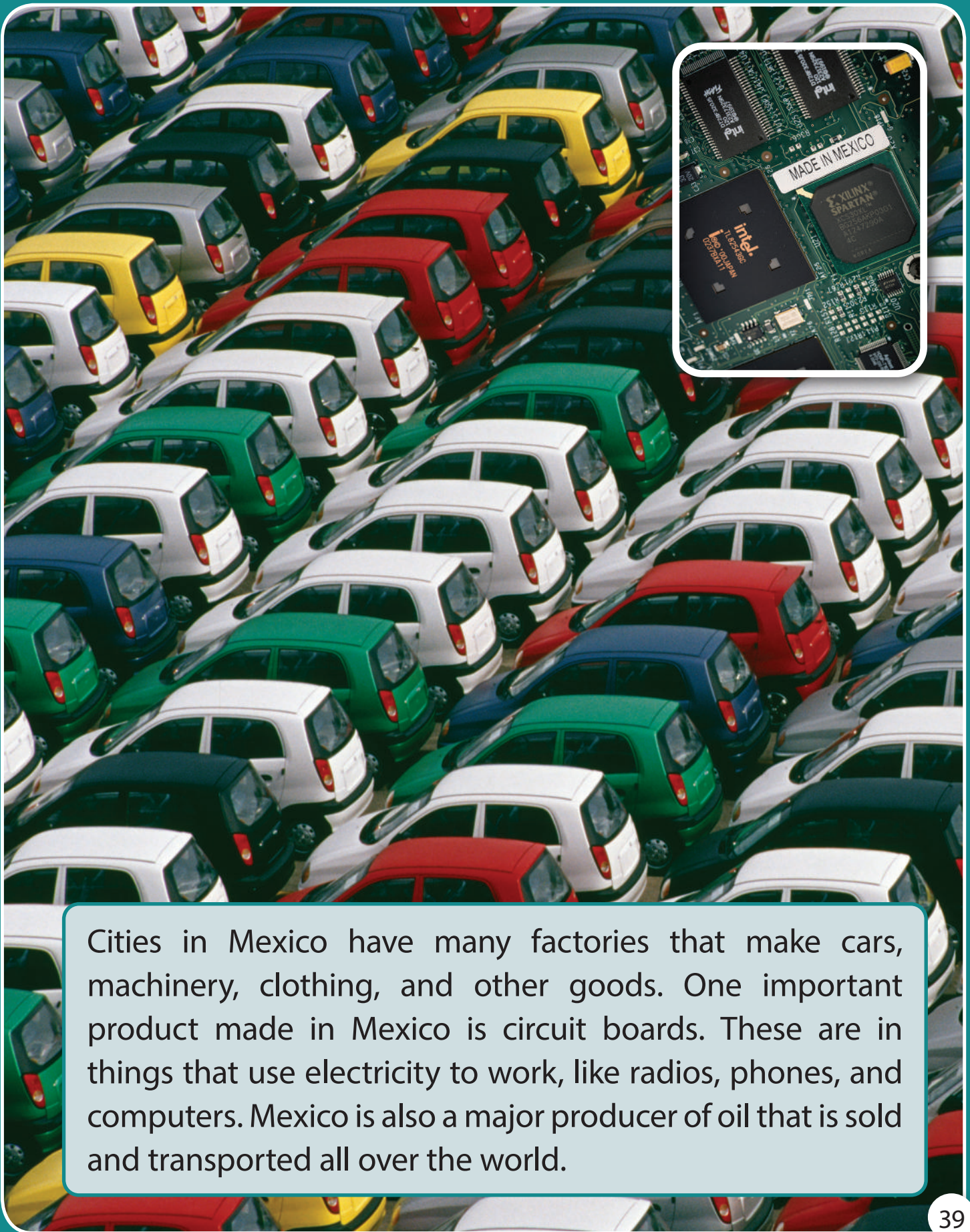




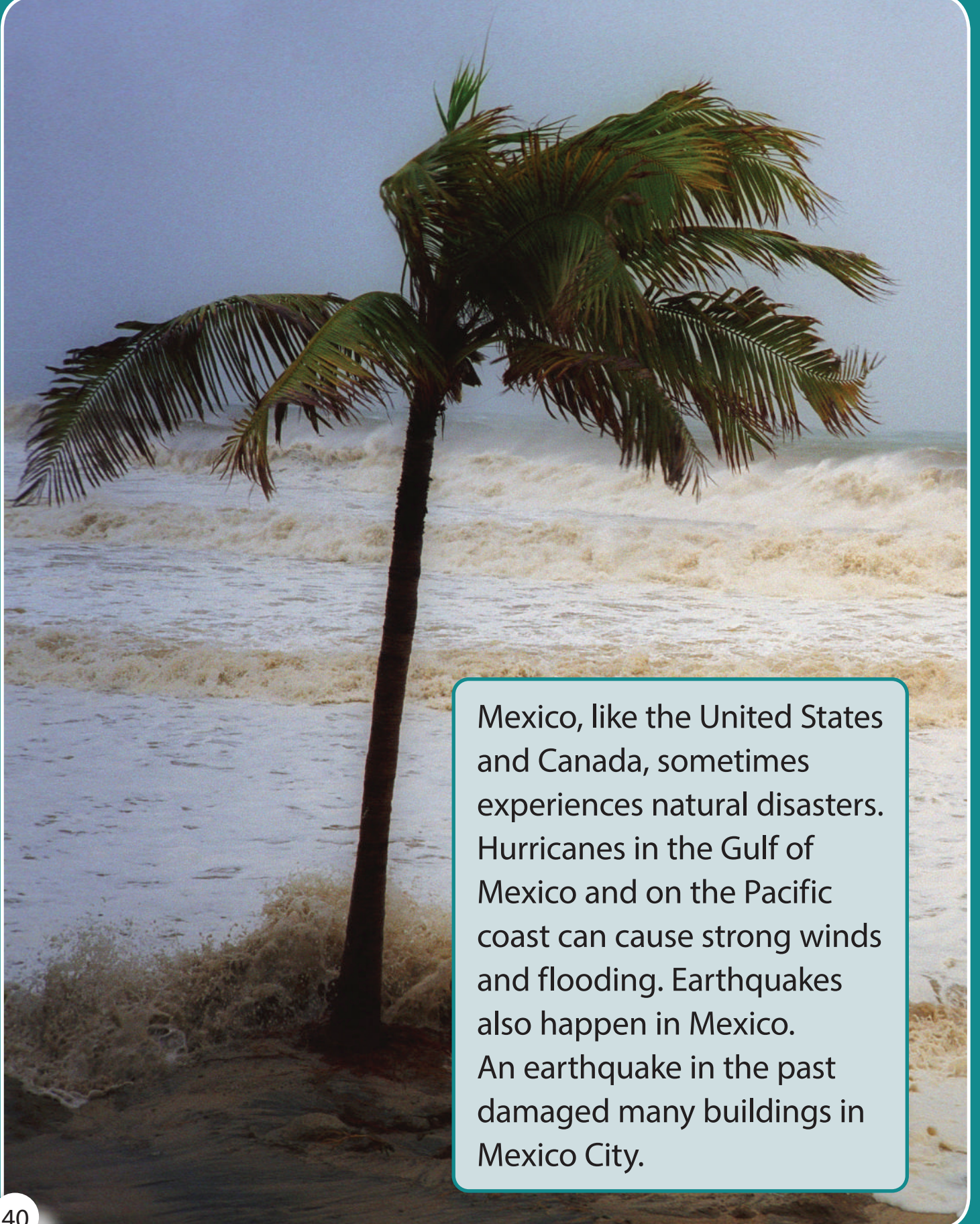
Five hundred years ago, much of Mexico was ruled by the Aztec people. The Aztec capital, Tenochtitlán, was built on islands in Lake Texcoco. It was the biggest city in the Americas. Thousands of people lived there.

Today, Mexico City is where Tenochtitlán used to be. Millions of people live here. It is one of the largest cities in the world! Mexico City has many buildings from the past and from the present. These show how different cultures have made Mexico what it is today.





Cities in Mexico have many factories that make cars, machinery, clothing, and other goods. One important product made in Mexico is circuit boards. These are in things that use electricity to work, like radios, phones, and computers. Mexico is also a major producer of oil that is sold and transported all over the world.



Mexico, like the United States and Canada, sometimes experiences natural disasters. Hurricanes in the Gulf of Mexico and on the Pacific coast can cause strong winds and flooding. Earthquakes also happen in Mexico. An earthquake in the past damaged many buildings in Mexico City.

Then

North America in 1800



Now

North America Today





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