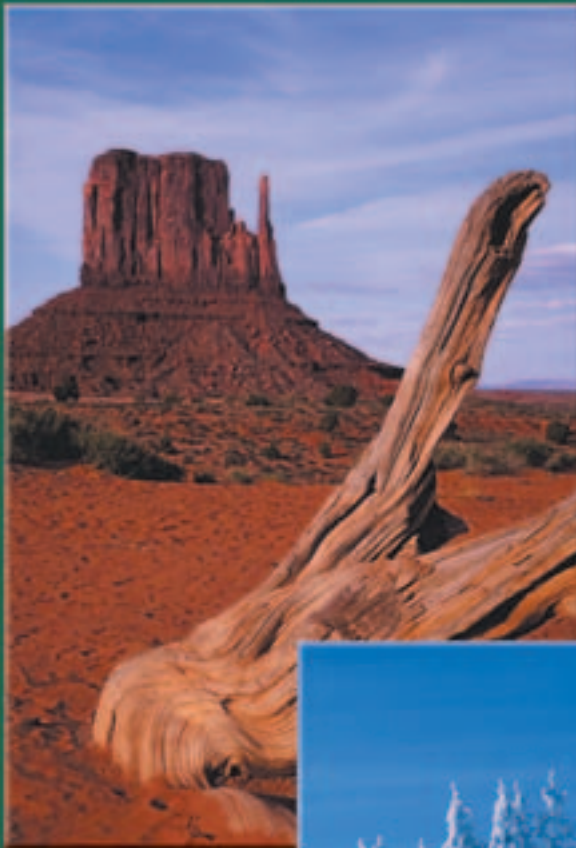


# Geography Handbook

Acadia National Park, Maine ▶



▲ Monument Valley, Utah

The Tongass National Forest in Southeastern Alaska, covering nearly 17 million acres, is the single largest national forest in America. ▶



# What Is Geography?

The story of the United States begins with geography—the study of the earth in all of its variety. Geography describes the earth’s land, water, and plant and animal life. It is the study of places and the complex relationships between people and their environments.

## Geography of the United States

The United States is a land of startling physical differences. It is also a nation of diverse groups of people. A study of geography can help explain how the United States acquired its diversity.

The United States—with a total land area of 3,537,441 square miles (9,161,930 sq. km)—is the world’s fourth-largest country in size.

## The 50 States

Most of the United States—48 of the 50 states—spans the entire middle part of North America. This group of states touches three major bodies of water—the Atlantic Ocean, the Gulf of Mexico, and the Pacific Ocean. Two states—Alaska and Hawaii—lie apart from the 48 states.

## Our Nation’s Growth

Within the borders of the United States stretch a variety of landscapes—dense forests, hot deserts, rolling grasslands, and snow-capped mountains. Because of its large size and diverse regions, the United States throughout its history offered many opportunities. Over the centuries people from Europe, Africa, Asia, and other parts of the Americas have journeyed here. Today more than 281 million people make their homes in the United States.



# How Do I Study Geography?

To understand how our world is connected, some geographers have broken down the study of geography into five themes. The **Five Themes of Geography** are (1) location, (2) place, (3) human/environment interaction, (4) movement, and (5) regions. You will see these themes highlighted in the Geography Skills accompanying the maps of *The American Republic to 1877*.

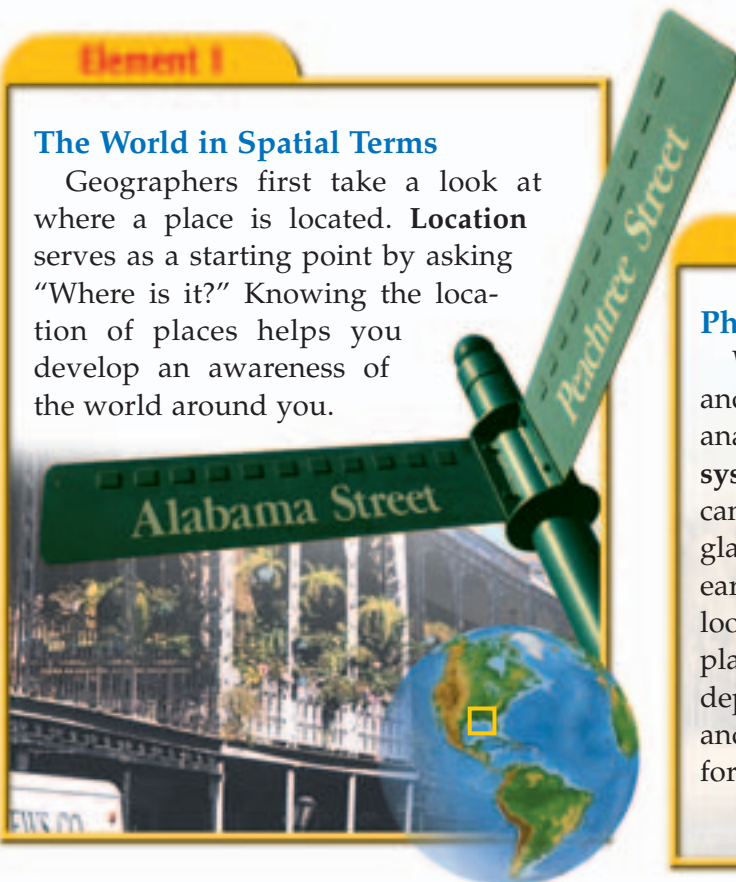
## Six Essential Elements

Recently, geographers have begun to look at geography in a different way. They break down the study of geography into **Six Essential Elements**, which are explained below. Being aware of these elements will help you sort out what you are learning about geography.

### Element 1

#### The World in Spatial Terms

Geographers first take a look at where a place is located. **Location** serves as a starting point by asking "Where is it?" Knowing the location of places helps you develop an awareness of the world around you.

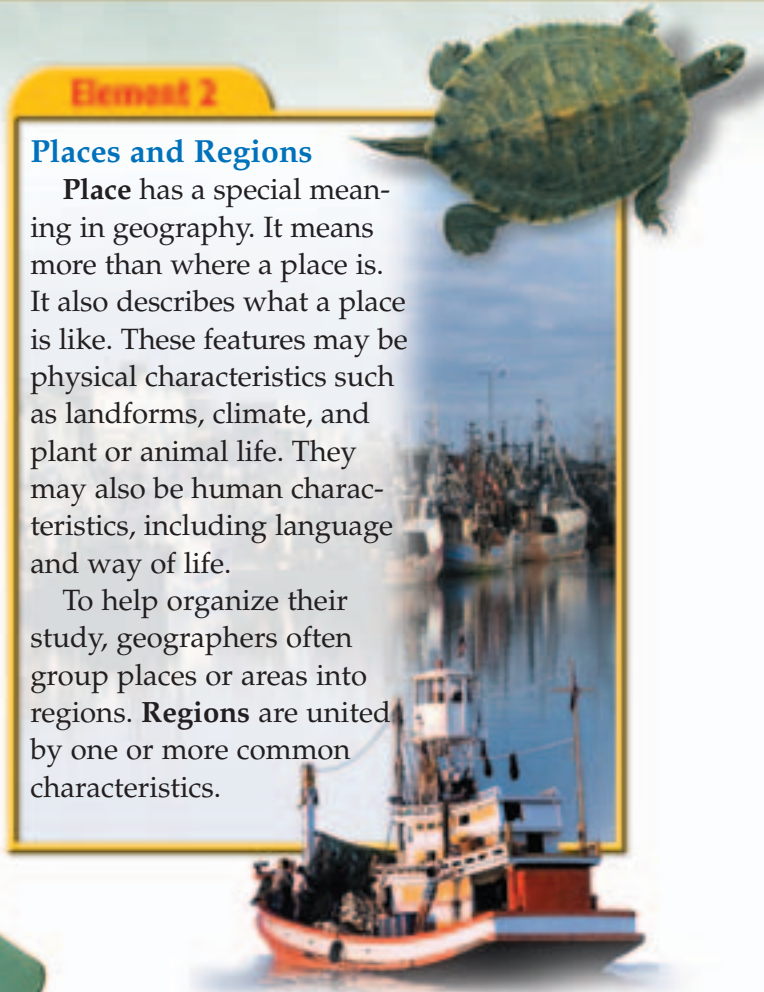


### Element 2

#### Places and Regions

**Place** has a special meaning in geography. It means more than where a place is. It also describes what a place is like. These features may be physical characteristics such as landforms, climate, and plant or animal life. They may also be human characteristics, including language and way of life.

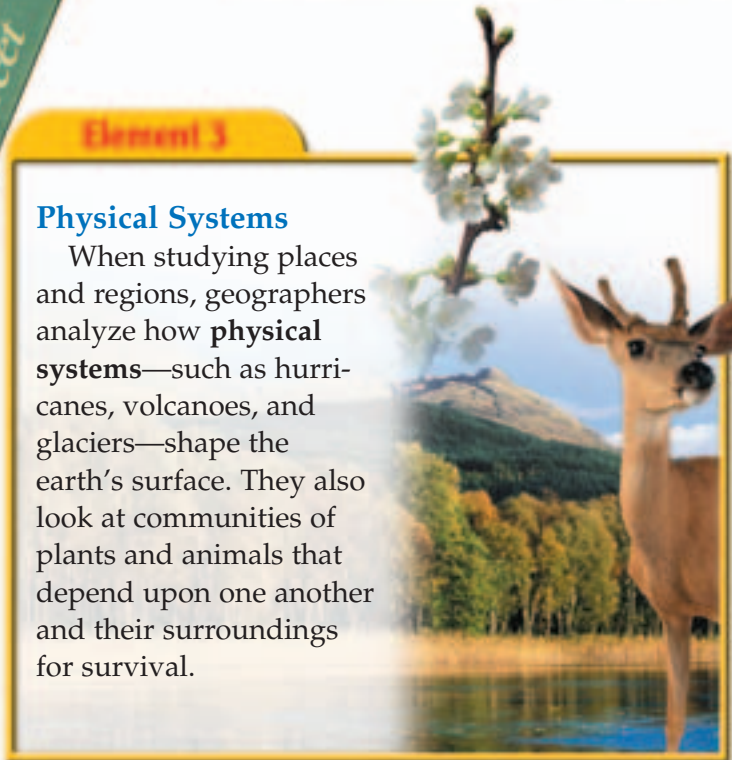
To help organize their study, geographers often group places or areas into regions. **Regions** are united by one or more common characteristics.



### Element 3

#### Physical Systems

When studying places and regions, geographers analyze how **physical systems**—such as hurricanes, volcanoes, and glaciers—shape the earth's surface. They also look at communities of plants and animals that depend upon one another and their surroundings for survival.



Element 4

**Human Systems**

Geographers also examine human systems, or how people have shaped our world. They look at how boundary lines are determined and analyze why people settle in certain places and not in others. A key theme in geography is the continual **movement** of people, ideas, and goods.



Element 5

**Environment and Society**

“How does the relationship between people and their natural surroundings influence the way people live?” This is one of the questions that the theme of **human/ environment interaction** answers. This theme also shows how people use the environment and how their actions affect the environment.



Element 6

**The Uses of Geography**

Knowledge of geography helps people understand the relationships among people, places, and environments over time. Understanding geography, and knowing how to use the tools and technology available to study it, prepares you for life in our modern society.



# How Do I Use Maps?

Maps of many different kinds are used in *The American Republic to 1877* to help you see the connection between geography and the history of our nation.

## Political Maps

Political maps generally show political, or human-made, divisions of countries or regions. The political map on pages RA2–RA3, for example, shows boundaries between the states that comprise the United States.

## Different Kinds of Maps

### Physical Maps

A physical map shows the physical features of an area, such as its mountains and rivers. Physical maps use color and shadings to show **relief**—how flat or rugged the land surface is. Colors also may be used to show **elevation**—the height of an area above sea level.

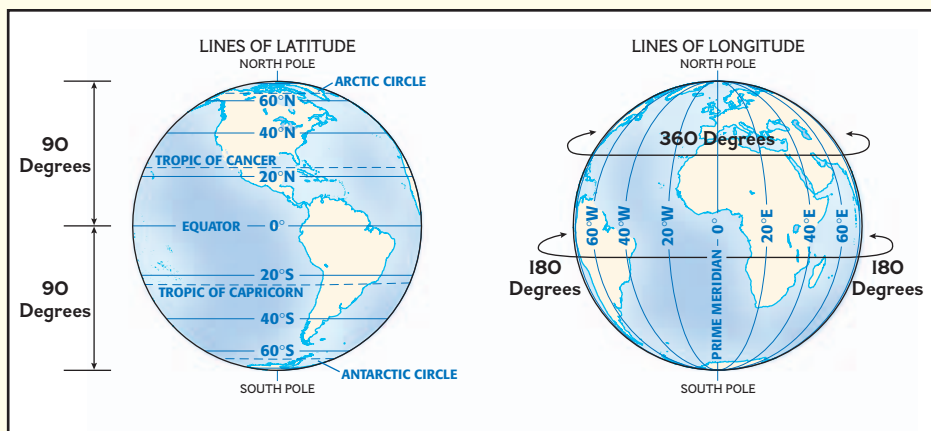
### Special-Purpose Maps

Besides showing political or physical features, some maps have a special purpose. Human activities such as exploration routes, territorial expansion, or battle sites appear on special-purpose maps, also called **thematic maps**. The maps on pages RA6–RA7, for example, show territorial growth of the United States.

## Latitude and Longitude

Maps have lines of latitude and longitude that form a grid. Lines of latitude circle the earth, either north or south of the Equator ( $0^\circ$  latitude). Lines of longitude stretch from the North Pole to the South Pole, either east or west of the Prime Meridian ( $0^\circ$  longitude). The distance between the lines is measured in degrees ( $^\circ$ ). Every place on the earth has a unique position or “address” on this grid.

Knowing this address makes it easier for you to locate cities and other places on a map. For example, the map on page RA5 shows you that the address of New Orleans is  $30^\circ\text{N}$  latitude,  $90^\circ\text{W}$  longitude.



## Parts of Maps

**Map Key** The map key explains the lines, symbols, and colors used on a map. For example, the map on this page shows the various climate regions of the United States. The key shows what climates the different colors represent. Map keys also may show structures created by people. Cities are usually symbolized by a solid circle (•). A star within a circle represents capitals (⊛). On this map, you can see the capital of Texas and the cities of New Orleans, Los Angeles, and Chicago.



**Scale** A measuring line, often called a **scale bar**, helps you determine distance on the map. The map scale tells you what distance on the earth is represented by the measurement on the scale bar.

**Compass Rose** An important first step in reading any map is to find the direction marker. A map has a symbol that tells you where the **cardinal directions**—north, south, east, and west—are positioned.

# How Does Geography Influence History?

Geographic factors—landforms, waterways, natural resources—have shaped America’s history. Here are some examples of geography’s influences in history that are highlighted in *The American Republic to 1877*.

**Unit 1 Different Worlds Meet** As settlement spread, Native Americans created distinctive civilizations appropriate to their climates and resources. For example, Native Americans in the Great Plains depended on herds of buffalo for food, clothing, shelter, and tools.



**Unit 2 Colonial Settlement** Beginning in the 1500s, Europeans came to North America seeking land, riches, and freedom. Groups from Spain, France, Great Britain, and other countries established colonies. The British colonies along the Atlantic coast were hemmed in by the Appalachian Mountains—the first physical barrier to the West.



**Unit 3 Creating a Nation** The hardships of the land shaped the colonial settlers’ cultural identities. The colonists were isolated from much of the world and became more independent. Eventually they broke away from Great Britain and won their independence.



**Unit 4 The New Republic** When the United States was established, many doubted that the young government could control people over such great distances. New rivers, roads, and canals helped to open up the country. At the same time an Industrial Revolution had begun in New England.



**Unit 6 Civil War and Reconstruction**

Demand for cotton by the textile industry increased the demand for labor provided by enslaved African Americans. In 1861 regional differences and a dispute over slavery sparked the Civil War between the North and South.



**Unit 5 The Growing Nation** Through wars, treaties, and purchases, the United States gained control of the lands west of the Mississippi River. Settlers were drawn to Western territories by opportunities. Native Americans were forced onto reservations. Railroads enabled people to overcome geographic barriers.

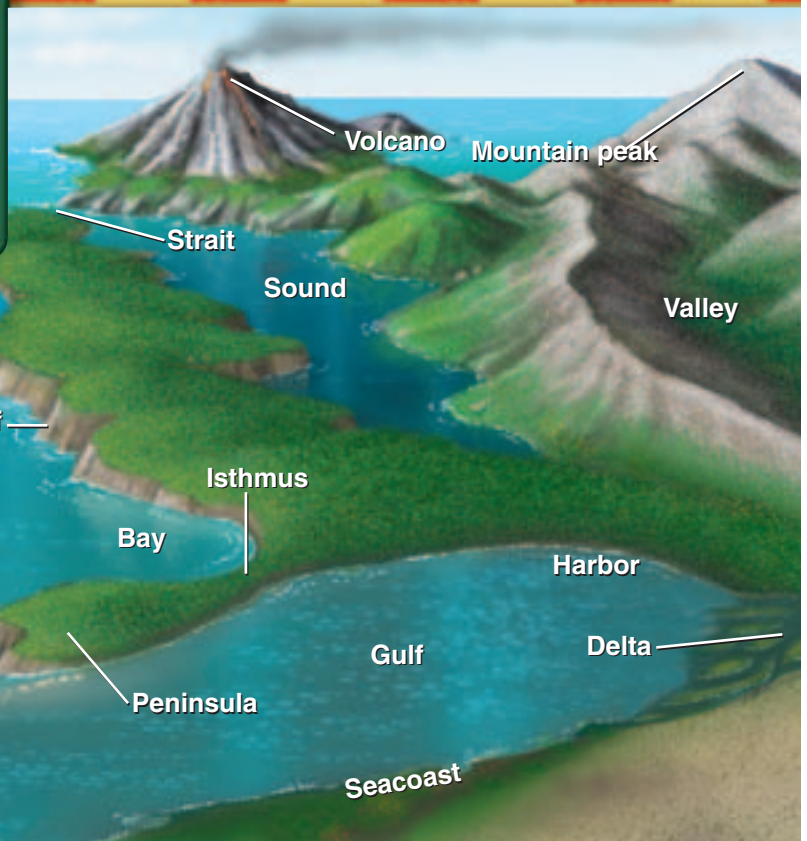


**Unit 7 Modern America Emerges** In the late 1800s and early 1900s, the United States became an urban industrial nation and took the leading role in international affairs. Americans entered the twenty-first century as a free nation committed to the truths expressed in the Declaration of Independence.





# Geographic Dictionary



As you read about America's geography, you will encounter the terms listed below. Many of the terms are pictured in the diagram.

**absolute location** exact location of a place on the earth described by global coordinates

**basin** area of land drained by a given river and its branches; area of land surrounded by lands of higher elevations

**bay** part of a large body of water that extends into a shoreline, generally smaller than a gulf

**canyon** deep and narrow valley with steep walls

**cape** point of land that extends into a river, lake, or ocean

**channel** wide strait or waterway between two land-masses that lie close to each other; deep part of a river or other waterway

**cliff** steep, high wall of rock, earth, or ice

**continent** one of the seven large landmasses on the earth

**cultural feature** characteristic that humans have created in a place, such as language, religion, housing, and settlement pattern

**delta** flat, low-lying land built up from soil carried downstream by a river and deposited at its mouth

**divide** stretch of high land that separates river systems

**downstream** direction in which a river or stream flows from its source to its mouth

**elevation** height of land above sea level

**Equator** imaginary line that runs around the earth halfway between the North and South Poles; used as the starting point to measure degrees of north and south latitude

**glacier** large, thick body of slowly moving ice

**gulf** part of a large body of water that extends into a shoreline, generally larger and more deeply indented than a bay

**harbor** a sheltered place along a shoreline where ships can anchor safely

**highland** elevated land area such as a hill, mountain, or plateau

**hill** elevated land with sloping sides and rounded summit; generally smaller than a mountain

**island** land area, smaller than a continent, completely surrounded by water

**isthmus** narrow stretch of land connecting two larger land areas

**lake** a sizable inland body of water

**latitude** distance north or south of the Equator, measured in degrees

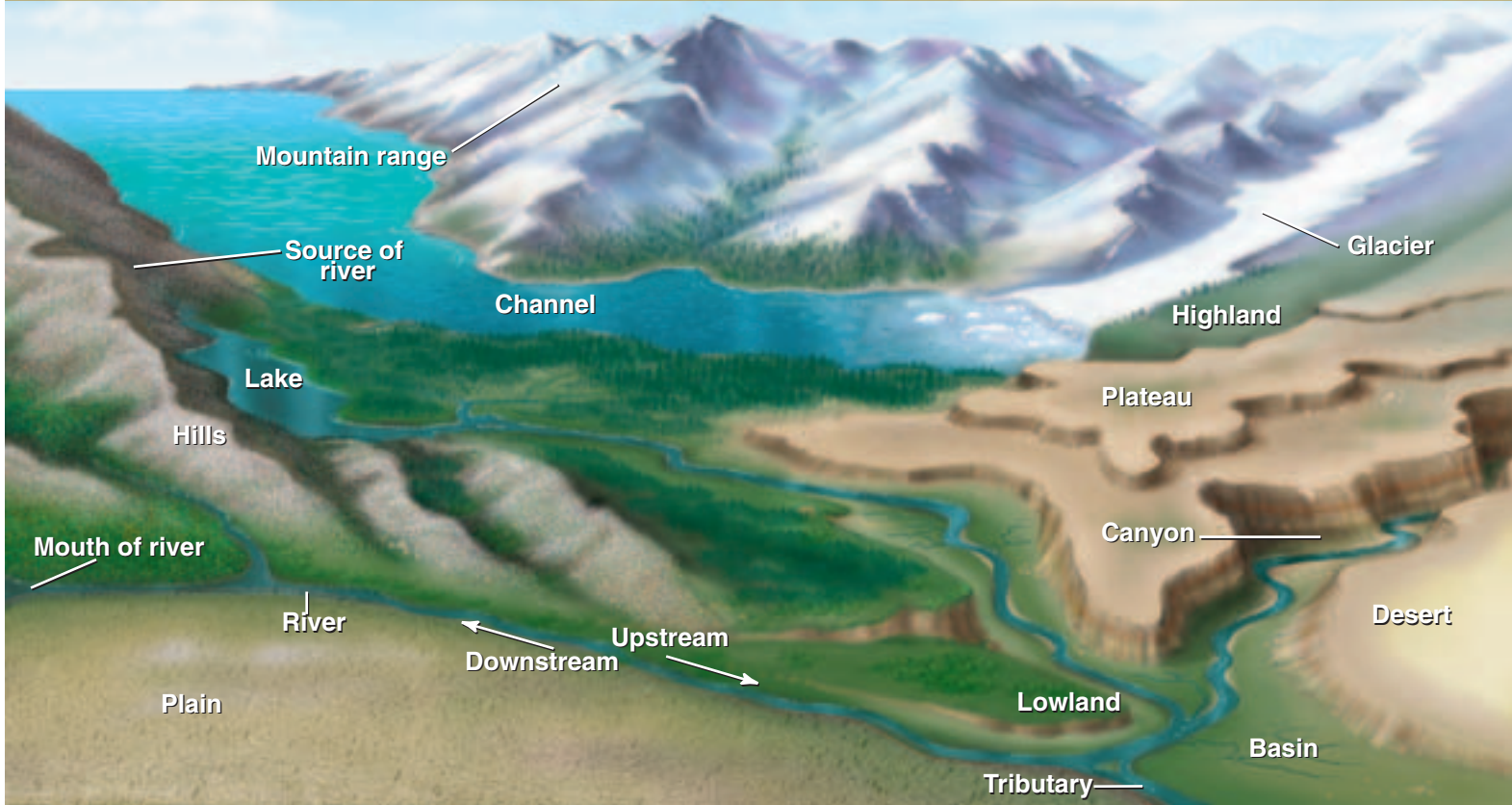
**longitude** distance east or west of the Prime Meridian, measured in degrees

**lowland** land, usually level, at a low elevation

**map** drawing of the earth shown on a flat surface

**meridian** one of many lines on the global grid running from the North Pole to the South Pole; used to measure degrees of longitude

**mesa** broad, flat-topped landform with steep sides; smaller than a plateau



**mountain** land with steep sides that rises sharply (1,000 feet or more) from surrounding land; generally larger and more rugged than a hill

**mountain peak** pointed top of a mountain

**mountain range** a series of connected mountains

**mouth** (of a river) place where a stream or river flows into a larger body of water

**ocean** one of the four major bodies of salt water that surround the continents

**ocean current** stream of either cold or warm water that moves in a definite direction through an ocean

**parallel** one of many lines on the global grid that circle the earth north or south of the Equator; used to measure degrees of latitude

**peninsula** body of land jutting into a lake or ocean, surrounded on three sides by water

**physical feature** characteristic of a place occurring naturally, such as a landform, body of water, climate pattern, or resource

**plain** area of level land, usually a low elevation and often covered with grasses

**plateau** area of flat or rolling land at a high elevation, about 300–3,000 feet high

**Prime Meridian** line of the global grid running from the North Pole to the South Pole through Greenwich, England; starting point for measuring degrees of east and west longitude

**relief** changes in elevation over a given area of land

**river** large natural stream of water that runs through the land

**sea** large body of water completely or partly surrounded by land

**seacoast** land lying next to a sea or ocean

**sea level** position on land level with surface of nearby ocean or sea

**sound** body of water between a coastline and one or more islands off the coast

**source** (of a river) place where a river or stream begins, often in highlands

**strait** narrow stretch of water joining two larger bodies of water

**tributary** small river or stream that flows into a large river or stream; a branch of the river

**upstream** direction opposite the flow of a river; toward the source of a river or stream

**valley** area of low land between hills or mountains

**volcano** mountain created as liquid rock or ash erupts from inside the earth