

## Stream Divides and River Systems

## SKILLS AND OBJECTIVES

- **Identify** the major river systems of the United States.
- **Deduce** the divides that separate these river systems.

## MATERIALS

- tracing paper
- colored pencils
- paper clips
- Appendix B *Physical United States Map*, pages 708–709

Every second, over one-half of a million cubic feet of water pours from the Mississippi River into the Gulf of Mexico. This water originally fell as precipitation in places as far away as Montana and Pennsylvania. Over time, the water flowed through the various tributaries of the Mississippi River system, working its way to the Gulf.

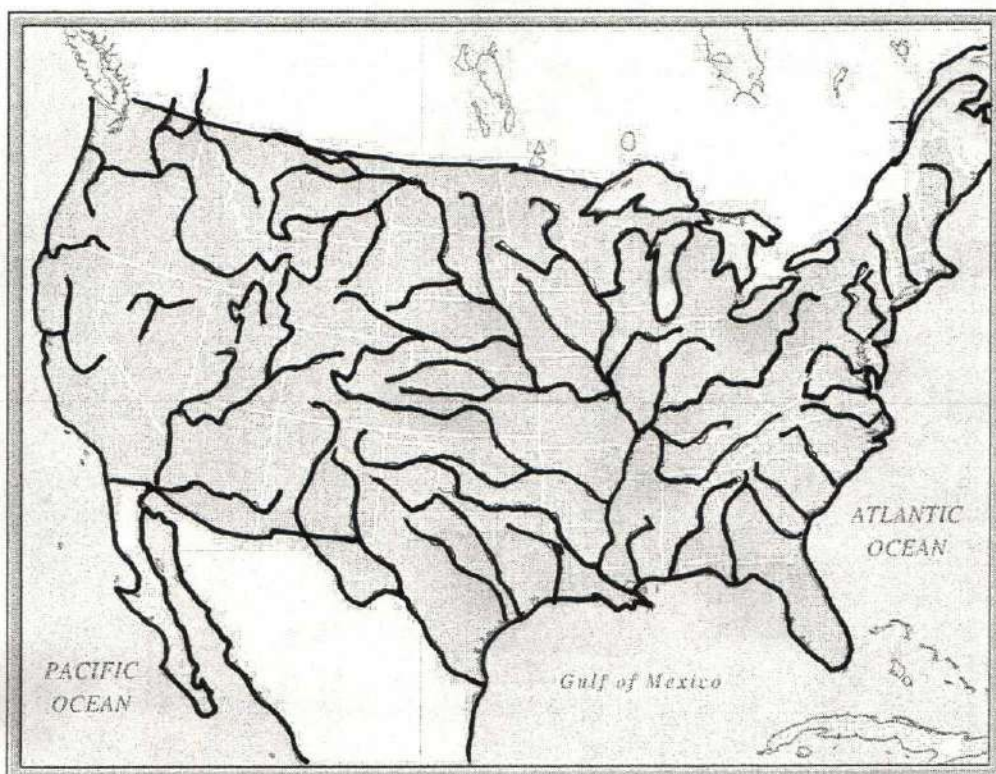
In this exercise, you will examine the drainage basins for the Mississippi and other major river systems of the United States.

## Procedure

- 1 Use paper clips to fasten tracing paper over the map of major rivers of the United States on the opposite page. Trace the outline of the United States coastline with a black colored pencil.
- 2 Locate the Mississippi River on the opposite page using the Physical United States Map as a reference. Trace the Mississippi River and all of its tributaries with a dark blue colored pencil.
- 3 With a lighter colored pencil, encircle the rivers outlined in Step 2. The circled region should include the entire Mississippi River and its tributaries, but should not include any of the other rivers. Label the enclosed area the *Mississippi River System* and lightly shade the area.
- 4 Repeat Steps 2 and 3 for the *Colorado River System*, the *Columbia River System*, the *Rio Grande System*, and the *St. Lawrence River System*. Use a different color to outline and shade each river system.

## Analysis and Conclusions

1. Label the river on the tracing paper that is closest to your school. Name all of the sources of the water for this river.
2. Draw and label the Continental Divide on your map. What does the Continental Divide represent?
3. What is the source of the water in the St. Lawrence River? In what general direction does the river flow?
4. Locate the rivers in central Nevada. Why are these rivers not part of a major river system?
5. The headwaters of three rivers systems are located in Colorado along the Continental Divide. Identify the three river systems.



6. The headwaters of three different river systems are also found in Wyoming. Identify these three river systems.
7. Why is the Continental Divide located in the western United States and not halfway between the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans? With what topographic feature is the Continental Divide associated?
8. In 1825 engineers completed construction on the Erie Canal, which connects the Hudson River and Lake Erie. Draw and label the Erie Canal on your map. How does the Erie Canal affect the outline of the St. Lawrence River System?



## Appendix B: Atlas

### Physical United States Map





