

# Themes of Geography

One useful way to think about geography is in terms of major themes or ideas. These pages examine the five major themes of geography and show how they apply to Boston, Massachusetts. Recognizing and understanding these themes will help you to understand all the different aspects of geography.

## Location

“Where am I?” Your answer to this question is your *location*. One way to answer it is to use *absolute* location. That means you’ll use the coordinates of longitude and latitude to give your answer (see page 8). For example, if you’re in Boston, its absolute location is approximately 42° north latitude and 71° west longitude.

Like most people, however, you’ll probably use *relative* location to answer the question. Relative location describes where a certain area is in relation to another area. For example, Boston lies in the northeast corner of the United States, next to the Atlantic Ocean.

**THINKING ABOUT GEOGRAPHY** What is the relative location of your school?

## Place

“What is Boston like?” *Place* can help you answer this question. Place refers to the physical and human factors that make one area different from another. Physical characteristics are natural features, such as physical setting, plants, animals, and weather. For example, Boston sits on a hilly peninsula.

Human characteristics include cultural diversity and the things people have made—including language, the arts, and architecture. For instance, Boston includes African Americans, as well as people of Irish, Italian, Chinese, and Hispanic ancestry.

**THINKING ABOUT GEOGRAPHY** What physical and human characteristics make where you live unique?

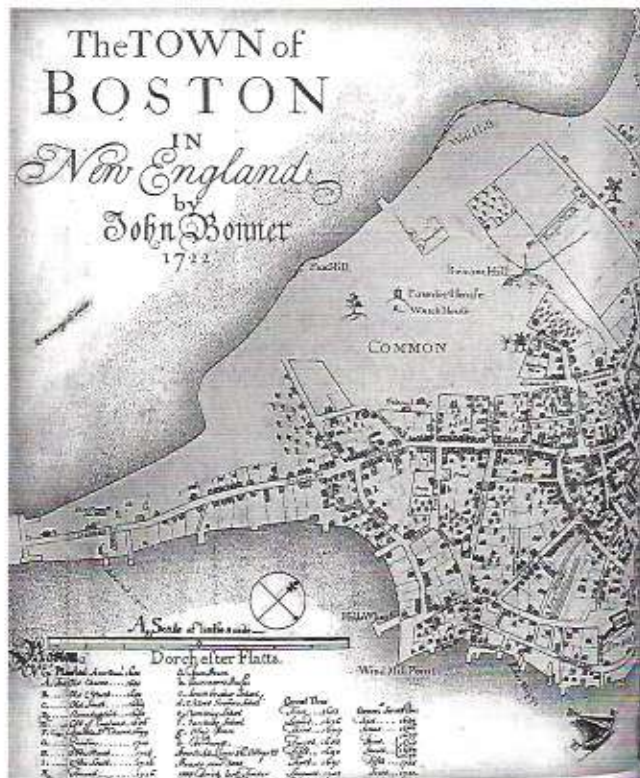
## Region

Geographers can’t easily study the whole world at one time. So they break the world into regions. A *region* can be as large as a continent or as small as a neighborhood. A region has certain shared characteristics that set it apart. These characteristics might include political division, climate, language, or religion. Boston is part of the northeast region. It shares a climate—continental temperate—with the cities of New York and Philadelphia.

**THINKING ABOUT GEOGRAPHY** What characteristics does your city or town share with nearby cities or towns?



Boston is located on the shores of the Atlantic Ocean.



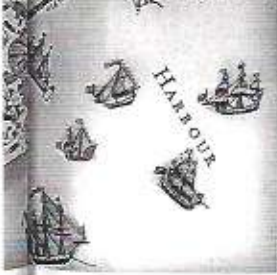
Boston has grown and changed since this 1722 map.



Airplanes from Boston's Logan International Airport move people and ideas around the globe.



People shop, eat, and interact at Boston's famous Quincy Market.



## Movement

*Movement* refers to the shifting of people, goods, and ideas from one place to another. People constantly move in search of better places to live, and they trade goods with one another over great distances. Movement also causes ideas to travel from place to place. In recent years, technology has quickened the movement of ideas and goods.

Boston became known as the *Cradle of Liberty* because of the movement of ideas. The concepts of freedom and self-government that developed in Boston spread to the other colonies and helped to start the American Revolution.

**THINKING ABOUT GEOGRAPHY** What are some of the different ways you spread information and ideas?

## Human-Environment Interaction

*Human-environment interaction* refers to ways people interact with their environment, such as building a dam, cutting down a tree, or even sitting in the sun.

In Boston, human-environment interaction occurred when officials filled in swampy areas to make the city larger. In other ways, the environment has forced people to act. For example, people have had to invent ways to protect themselves from extreme weather and natural disasters.

**THINKING ABOUT GEOGRAPHY** What are ways that people in your city or town have changed their environment?

### Themes of Geography Assessment

#### 1. Main Ideas

- a. What is the relative location of your home?
- b. What are three characteristics of the region in which you live?
- c. What are at least three ways in which you have recently interacted with the environment?

#### 2. Critical Thinking

**Forming and Supporting Opinions** Which aspect of geography described in these themes do you think has most affected your life? Explain.

#### THINK ABOUT

- ways that you interact with your environment
- how you travel from place to place