

The United States East of the Mississippi River

Lesson 1: Physical Features

ESSENTIAL QUESTION

How does geography influence the way people live?

Terms to Know

subregion smaller part of a region

lock gated passageway used to raise or lower boats in a waterway

tributary small river that flows into a larger river

levee raised riverbank used to control flooding

coastal plain flat lowland along a coast

fall line area where waterfalls flow from higher to lower ground

hurricane storm with strong winds and heavy rains

Where in the World: The United States East of the Mississippi River



The United States East of the Mississippi River

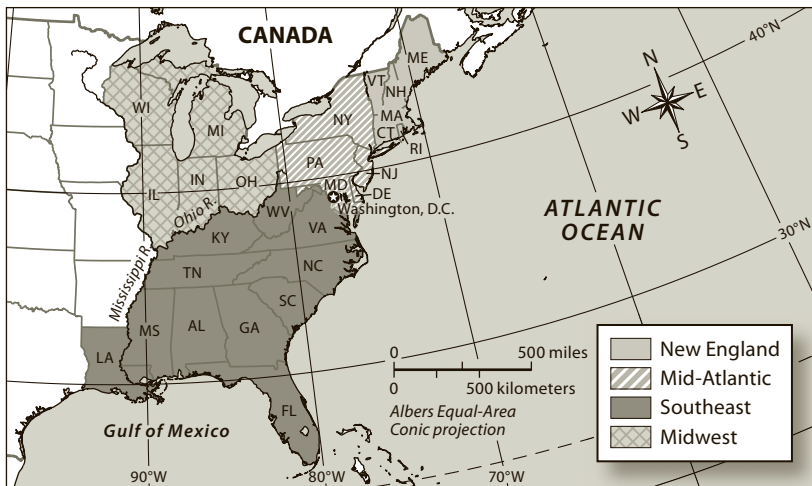
Lesson 1: Physical Features, *Continued*

The Regions

Guiding Question *How do the physical features of the United States east of the Mississippi River make the region unique?*

The United States is very large. There are many differences between its various parts. It is made up of geographic areas geographers call regions. Each region has features that make it different from other regions. The regions can be divided into smaller parts, called **subregions**.

We can divide the United States into two regions. One region is east of the Mississippi River, and the other is west of the Mississippi. In this lesson, you will learn about the United States east of the Mississippi. It is made up of four subregions. They are the New England, the Mid-Atlantic, the Midwest, and the Southeast subregions.



Many of the first English colonists settled in New England. They arrived during the 1600s. The settlers named the area to honor their homeland.

The Mid-Atlantic states were part of the original thirteen colonies. Our nation's capital, Washington, D.C., is located in the Mid-Atlantic subregion.

The Midwest states share borders with one or more of the Great Lakes. A large part of America's food crops are grown in the Midwest's rich soil.

The Southeast is the largest subregion in the United States east of the Mississippi. Some of these states have long coastal borders on the Atlantic Ocean or Gulf of Mexico.

Defining

1. What is the definition of a *subregion*?

Marking the Text

2. Read the text on the left. Highlight the names of the subregions of the United States east of the Mississippi each time you see them.

Explaining

3. How is each of the four subregions divided into smaller areas?

Reading Progress Check

4. Why do you think geographers divide the United States at the Mississippi River instead of dividing it through the middle into equal halves?

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Lesson 1: Physical Features, *Continued*



Marking the Text

5. Read the text on the right. Highlight the names of all the bodies of water that border the United States east of the Mississippi.



Describing

6. Why is the St. Lawrence Seaway important?



Reading Progress Check

7. How could a logging company in Kentucky send logs to a buyer on the Gulf of Mexico using an all-water route?

Bodies of Water

Guiding Question *Which of North America's major bodies of water are located east of the Mississippi?*

The United States east of the Mississippi River is nearly surrounded by water. The largest body of water is the Atlantic Ocean. It borders the states along the East Coast. The East Coast stretches more than 2,000 miles (3,219 km), from Maine to Florida.

The Gulf of Mexico extends from Florida to Texas and Mexico. The land around the Gulf is called the Gulf Coast. Currents flow through the Gulf of Mexico like underwater rivers. One of these is the Gulf Stream. It also flows through the Atlantic Ocean.

The Great Lakes are a cluster of five lakes located in the Midwest and central Canada. They were formed by glaciers thousands of years ago. They hold more freshwater than any other location on Earth. From west to east, the Great Lakes are named Lake Superior, Lake Michigan, Lake Huron, Lake Erie, and Lake Ontario.

The St. Lawrence River carries water from the Great Lakes to the Atlantic Ocean. During the 1950s, the United States and Canada built canals, artificial waterways, to connect the Great Lakes and the St. Lawrence River. **Locks** in the canals allow water levels to rise and fall so that boats can move from one level to another. The St. Lawrence Seaway connects the Midwest to the Atlantic Ocean and seaports all over the world.

The Mississippi is one of the longest rivers in North America. It runs south from Minnesota to the Gulf of Mexico. The Mississippi has many **tributaries**, smaller rivers that flow into it. These rivers are busy waterways. In the past, the Mississippi often flooded. The government built walls called **levees** to control flooding.

The Ohio River is the Mississippi's largest tributary. It begins in western Pennsylvania. Ohio, Indiana, and Illinois are north of the river. West Virginia and Kentucky are on its south side. Like the Mississippi, it is an important shipping and transportation route. It connects much of the Midwest to the Mississippi.

Physical Landscape

Guiding Question *What characteristics make the physical landscape east of the Mississippi unique?*

Along the Atlantic Ocean and Gulf of Mexico, a **coastal plain** stretches from the northeast U.S. to Mexico. This is a flat lowland area. Parts of it are below sea level and they often become flooded by storms and heavy rains.

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Lesson 1: Physical Features, *Continued*

The Appalachian Mountain system stretches from Alabama northeast to Canada. Dense forests cover much of the Appalachian Mountains. The mountains here stand side by side in parallel ranges. These ranges include the Blue Ridge Mountains in Virginia and the Great Smoky Mountains in Tennessee.

A **fall line** runs from New Jersey to South Carolina. It is a long, low cliff running parallel to the Atlantic coast. There are many waterfalls along this line. The fall line is a boundary between upland areas and the coastal plain.

The climate of the eastern United States is varied. New England and the Midwest see dramatic seasonal changes. They have cold winters and hot, humid summers. Coastal areas have milder climates. Much of the Southeast has a humid subtropical climate. Summers are rainy and hot. Winters are cooler and drier.

Hurricanes, strong ocean storms, can strike along the coast.

The region has many minerals and energy resources. Minerals include iron ore, which can be made into metals. Metals are used in manufacturing and construction. Energy resources include coal, oil, and natural gas. Burning coal can produce electricity. There is a huge demand for mineral and energy resources. Mining them is a major industry.

The rich soil of the region is a valuable resource. It is excellent for growing crops such as grains, fruits, and vegetables. Industries such as logging and fishing are also important. Factories in the region produce automobiles, electronics, and clothing.



Defining

8. What is a fall line?



Marking the Text

9. Read the text on the left. Highlight the names of resources found in the United States east of the Mississippi.



Reading Progress Check

10. Why is farmland considered a natural resource?

Writing

Check for Understanding

1. **Informative/Explanatory** Choose one of the subregions of the United States east of the Mississippi River. Using information from this lesson, describe the region as completely as possible.

2. **Informative/Explanatory** Give an example of the effect waterways have on life in the United States east of the Mississippi.
