



Core Knowledge® HISTORY AND GEOGRAPHY

# The Geography of the United States



Statue of Liberty

Reader

Arizona desert



Grand Canyon



Great Smoky Mountains



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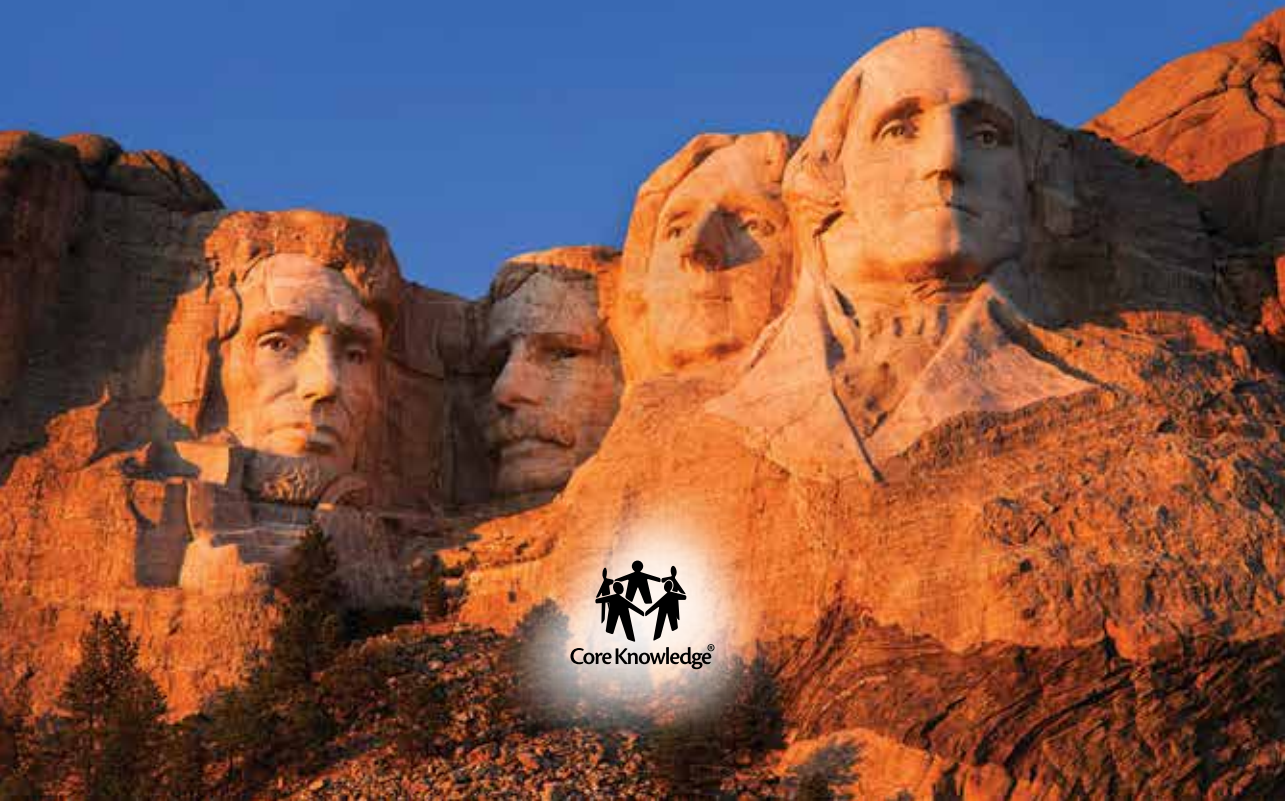
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# The Geography of the United States

Reader



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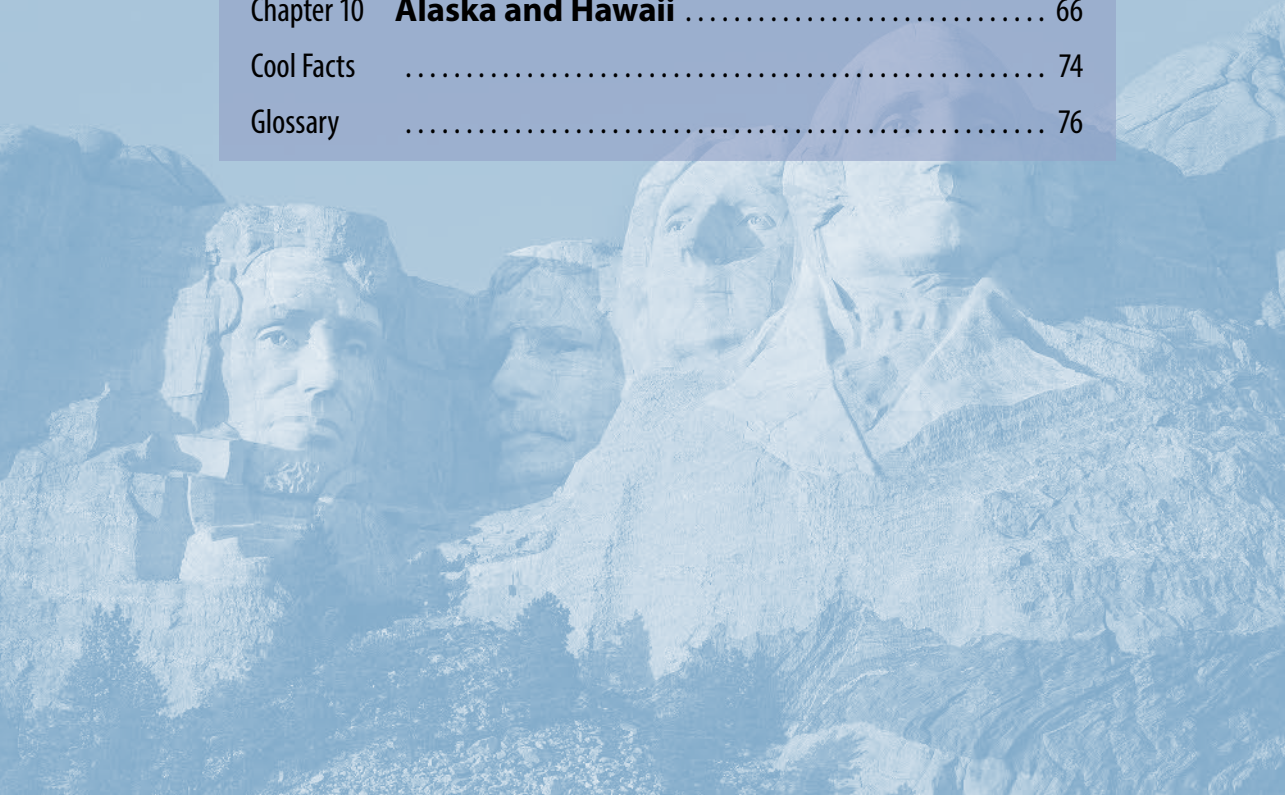
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# **The Geography of the United States Reader**

Core Knowledge History and Geography™ 5

# Chapter 1

## The United States

**Exploring the United States of America** The United States, excluding Alaska and Hawaii, stretches about three thousand miles from coast to coast—or east to west. Because of its great size, it is often divided into smaller

### The Big Question

How does the narrator describe the location of the United States in relation to Earth's hemispheres, continents, and oceans?

### Vocabulary

**region**, n. an area of Earth's surface that has some unique geographic characteristic that sets it apart from other areas

**geography**, n. the physical and human features of a place

**natural resource**, n. something from nature that is useful to humans

geographical areas, or **regions**. The states in each region have many things in common, such as **geography**, including climate, **natural resources**, economic activity, and other important geographical conditions.

### **Mission: Explore Earth**

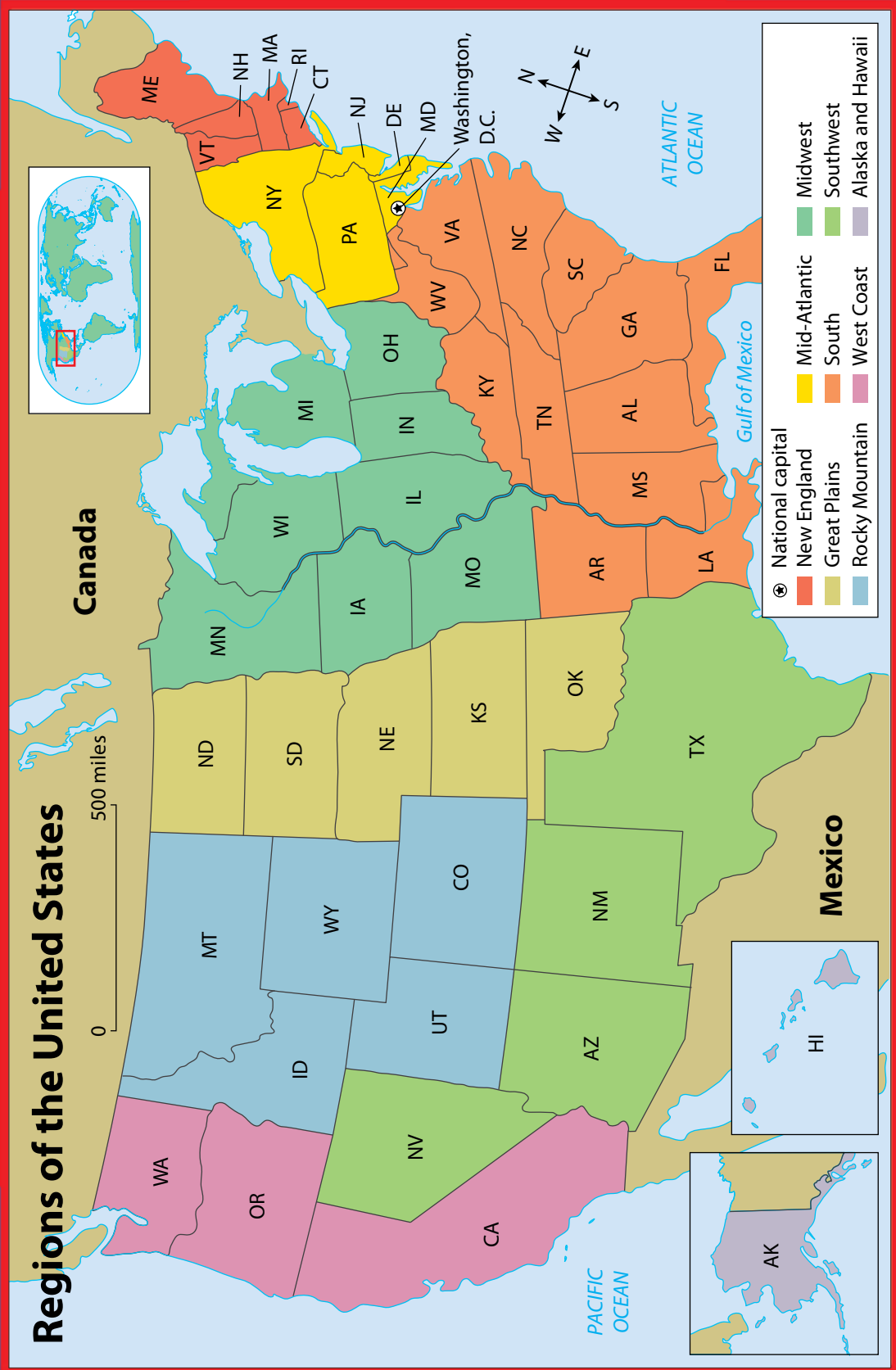
As you know, Admiral Zorg, the spaceship that I command has been exploring the planet known as Earth for almost a year. We have discovered that Earth is very different from our planet Proteus.



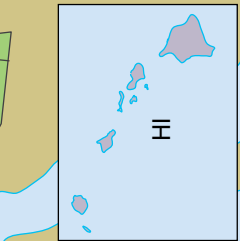
# Regions of the United States

0 500 miles

Canada



- ⊙ National capital
- New England
- Great Plains
- Rocky Mountain
- Mid-Atlantic
- South
- West Coast
- Midwest
- Southwest
- Alaska and Hawaii



This map shows the regions of the United States. Which region is your state located in?

We have studied its interesting physical features and life forms and reported our observations to you. Now, as our year of exploring draws to a close, there is one last place to explore—the United States of America.

We will explore and report on each area of the United States. In each report we will answer questions such as: Which states make up each region? What does the land look like in this region? What plants and animals live there? What is the weather like? What kinds of jobs do people do? What do people eat and drink? What do they do for fun?

These are the regions we will report from: New England, the Mid-Atlantic, the South, the Midwest, the Great Plains, the Rocky Mountains, the Southwest, and the West Coast. There are also two states that do not belong to a region because they are not connected to any other state. They are called Alaska and Hawaii. We will send a separate report about these two states.

We will gather information for our reports through observation. When we have questions, we will talk to some of the people we meet. (Of course, we will always remember to be disguised as humans!)

Right now, as I record this audio message, we are flying over a huge body of water called the Atlantic Ocean. The next land we see will be the United States of America.

## **A Vast and Varied Country**

The United States of America is reported to be a huge country. Earthlings in other places have described it as having a great

variety of **landforms** and life forms. In addition to the **indigenous** peoples who have lived there for thousands of years, and the descendants of the first European settlers, I have heard that people travel from all over the world to live there.

As we fly over the Atlantic Ocean, we will be looking at maps of the United States. These

### Vocabulary

**landform**, n. a natural physical feature on Earth's surface

**indigenous**, adj. native to a particular region or environment



Native Americans lived in the United States for thousands of years before the first European settlers arrived.

maps will help us find the places we want to go. They will also help us to identify the different regions of this vast country.

You remember, Admiral, that Earth is shaped like a globe, or sphere. Earthlings divide their world into half-globes, or hemispheres. They speak of an Eastern Hemisphere and a Western Hemisphere.

The United States is in the Western Hemisphere on the continent called North America. A continent is a large landmass that sometimes has islands off its shores. North America is made up of Canada, the United States, and Middle America, which includes Mexico, Central America, and the Caribbean islands.

Looking at our maps, we see that, excluding Alaska and Hawaii, the United States stretches all the way across the continent of North America—a distance of about three thousand miles. On each side of the country, there is a huge body of water called an ocean. On the east side, the United States is bordered by the Atlantic Ocean. On the west side, it is bordered by the Pacific Ocean.

The United States also controls territories beyond these borders. In the Caribbean Sea, which is south of the United States, Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands are U.S. territories. In the Pacific Ocean, Guam, American Samoa, and the Northern Mariana Islands are all U.S. territories. We will not be sending reports about these territories.

Lieutenant Koola just informed me that she has sighted land below us. She is pretty sure that it is the state of Maine in the northeastern United States. Our map shows that the country is divided into fifty smaller units, or states. I expect that's why the country is called the United States!

Each of the fifty states has its own government and its own capital city. This is because the United States is a democracy. In other words, it has a system of government in which the people rule through elected representatives. The head of the national government, or all fifty states, is called the president. He lives in a place called Washington, D.C., which is the capital of the United States.

Now we are flying low over the coast of Maine. Through our spaceship's porthole, I can see huge, gray waves crashing against rocky cliffs. We will look for a place where people live and land nearby. We are all very excited to meet our first Americans. In my next report, I hope to have plenty to tell you about this interesting country.

I have given the order to turn on the invisibility shield and start our descent.



**Waves break on the coast of Maine.**

# Chapter 2

## New England

**Exploring New England** We began our exploration of the United States in the region called New England. This region is in the northeastern part of the United States. It is made up of six states: Maine, New Hampshire, Vermont, Massachusetts, Connecticut, and Rhode Island. The Atlantic Ocean borders all of these states except one—Vermont.

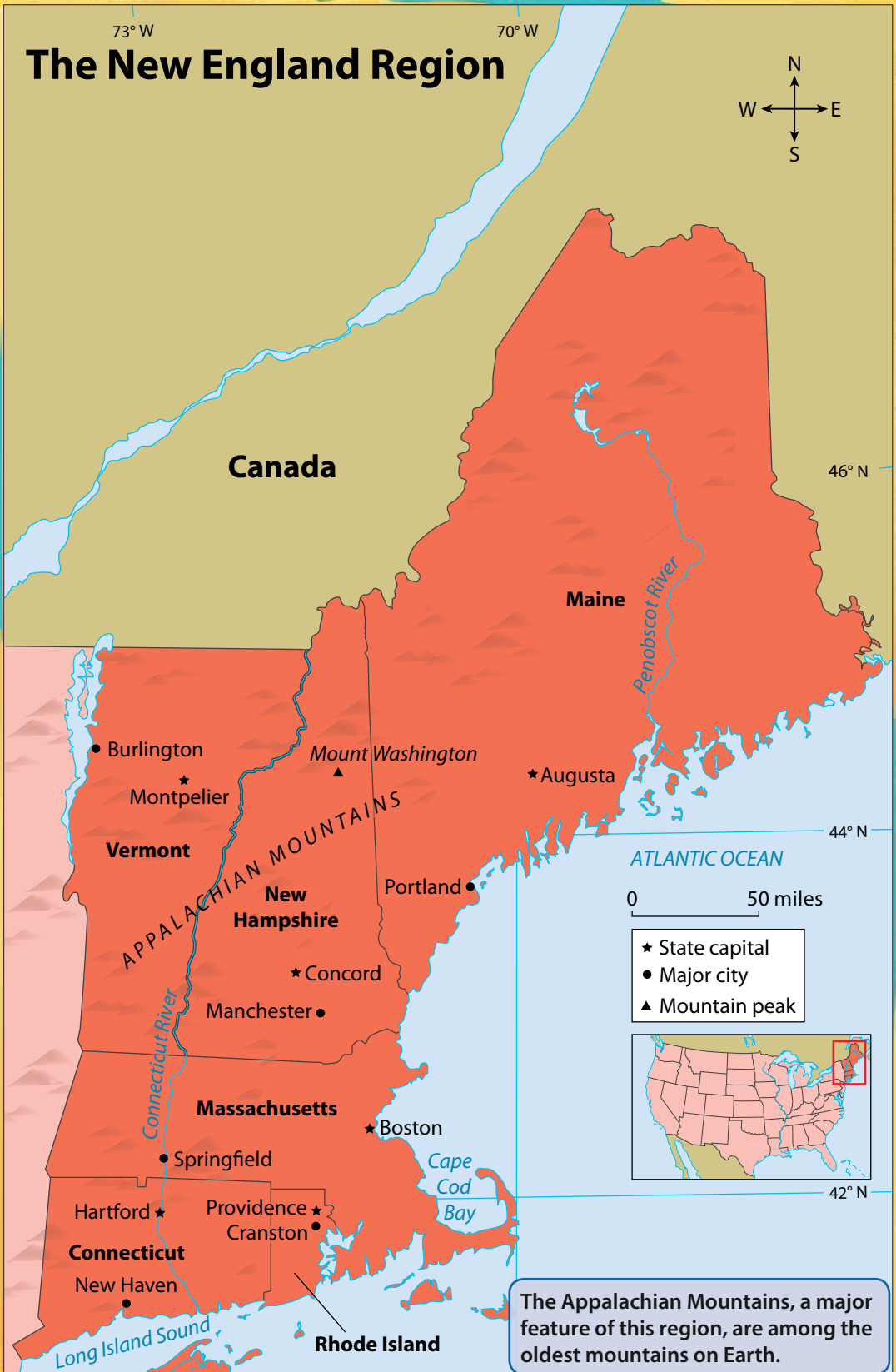
### The Big Question

How might being close to the ocean have helped the development of certain industries in New England?

In addition to the ocean, there are also mountains, hills, forests, and lakes in New England. Lieutenant Koola landed our ship in a forest clearing close to a town. The town had many wooden houses and a small harbor with sailboats. Because we were disguised as humans, the people we met were friendly toward us.

We were hungry after our long journey across the ocean, so we asked someone to recommend a good place to go for a meal. As you know, one of the things we like to find out about a place is what food the people who live there eat.

# The New England Region



The Appalachian Mountains, a major feature of this region, are among the oldest mountains on Earth.

When we were all seated in a nearby restaurant, we decided to try one of the area’s special foods. The server said, “What about some lobster?” Because we had never heard of lobster, we thought we should give it a try.

Imagine our surprise when the server brought each of us a red, bug-like creature with long antennae and mean-looking claws. By talking to the server, we learned that lobsters come from the sea, so they are not really bugs. We were relieved to hear that!

The server mentioned that many people in this part of Maine make their living by catching lobster. We asked him where we could go to find out more about the area. He said, “You could try the public library.” We did not know what a public library was, but we were curious. The waiter gave us directions, and after we left the restaurant, we went to find the library.



A lobsterman shows off his catch.



## Learning at the Library

The library turned out to be a brick building on the main street in town. When we went inside, we realized that we had made a great discovery. A public library, Admiral, is a place full of books and magazines where people can go to read without paying anything. Public libraries also have computers. In a public library, you can find information on any subject.

In America, there are thousands and thousands of these libraries. Almost every town or city has at least one. As soon as we found this out, we realized that we had another wonderful way to find information. We might even visit the public library in every new place we visit.

In terms of climate, New England has four very different seasons. It has a cool spring, a warm summer, a crisp fall, and a long, cold, snowy winter.

You may wonder why the area is called New England. It is because in the 1600s, people from England crossed the Atlantic Ocean and settled in the area. They also settled farther south, all the way down the Atlantic Coast. In fact, thirteen English colonies were established. Over time, building ships and fishing became important **industries** in New England.

### Vocabulary

**industry**, n. a business that manufactures a product or provides a service

Then, in the late 1700s, many people in the thirteen colonies decided they wanted to be independent. They wanted to start a country of their own. In the year 1776, they declared their

independence from Great Britain. The colonists fought a war against Great Britain for their freedom, which the Americans call the Revolutionary War. It is also known as the American Revolution. The colonists defeated the British and called their new country the United States of America. Although their country is not part of Great Britain anymore, the people of the United States did keep the English language, which is spoken by almost all Americans today.

After a few days of studying in the library, we were anxious to begin exploring again. We knew that we would miss the small Maine town and its kind people. Even more, we would miss the delicious lobster.

## **Mountains and Skyscrapers**

After taking off, we turned the ship southwest, toward the mountainous states of New Hampshire and Vermont. Flying low over the mountains, we were greeted by a spectacular sight. Because in the Northern Hemisphere it was Earth's season of autumn, the trees' green leaves had changed color. Some of the trees were gold, some red, some purple. Every hillside was ablaze with different colors.

As we flew down for a closer look, Lieutenant Koola pointed to some of the most brilliantly colored trees. "Do you see those trees?" she asked. "A book I was reading said that those are sugar maples. A sweet liquid called maple syrup is made from the sap of those trees." You really have to hand it to the Americans, Admiral. They seem to be able to make tasty food out of almost anything—even tree sap and big bugs from the ocean!



Visitors come from all over the world to enjoy the brilliantly colored leaves of autumn in New England.

From Vermont, we flew south, across the western part of the state of Massachusetts. There, we enjoyed the sight of more rolling hills and colorful trees. But we were eager to see the city of Boston, which we knew was the capital of Massachusetts and the biggest city in New England. So we turned back east, toward the coast.

Boston looks nothing at all like the small town we visited in Maine. It is a huge, busy city full of tall modern buildings called skyscrapers. But parts of the city are very old. In fact, Boston was one of the first important cities in the country. When we went to Boston's public library to study, we discovered that it was the oldest public library in the United States. We also learned that there is a local university called Harvard, which was the first college founded in America. Today, Boston is famous for

being a center of education, with dozens of colleges scattered around town.

Boston is also a city full of history. The American Revolution broke out in the Boston area. When we walked through the city on the Freedom Trail, we saw many places that are important in the story of the American Revolution.

We visited Faneuil Hall, an old brick building where revolutionaries gave speeches against the British. We also saw the house of Paul Revere. When British troops began to march toward Concord to try to capture certain revolutionaries, Revere rode out in the middle of the night to warn people that the British were coming. A famous old poem talks about “the midnight ride of Paul Revere.”



During the American Revolution, Paul Revere warned colonists that the British troops were on the move.

We could have spent a lot more time in Boston, but we knew we had to fly on and explore the Mid-Atlantic region. So we returned to our ship and headed south and west. Right now we are over the two southern states of New England—Rhode Island and Connecticut. We can see from our map that Rhode Island is by far the smallest of the fifty states. It is less than fifty miles across. Both Connecticut and Rhode Island have **port** towns, as well as some larger cities.

### Vocabulary

**port**, n. a town or city built around a harbor, where ships can dock

**populated**, adj. having people living in the area

But speaking of cities, Admiral, the crew is getting excited because our next stop is the most **populated** city in the United States—New York, New York.

# Chapter 3

## The Mid-Atlantic Region

### Exploring the Mid-Atlantic Region

As you recall from my last message, Admiral, we were excited because we were on our way from New England to New York City. New York City is in the Mid-Atlantic region of the United States. This region is located near the middle of the Atlantic coastline. It includes five states—New York, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Delaware, Maryland—and the city of Washington, D.C., which is the capital of the United States.

#### The Big Question

What are the main features of New York City and Washington, D.C.?

New York City, as you may recall, is the most populated city in America and one of the most populated cities on Earth. It is made up

#### Vocabulary

#### “densely populated,”

(phrase) having many people living in a small area

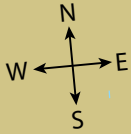
of five areas called boroughs—Manhattan, the Bronx, Brooklyn, Queens, and Staten Island. Manhattan is the most **densely populated** borough.

80° W

75° W

# The Mid-Atlantic Region

45° N



Canada

Lake Ontario

New York

Mohawk River

Albany ★

Buffalo

Lake Erie

Allegheny River

Pennsylvania

Pittsburgh

Harrisburg ★

APPALACHIAN MOUNTAINS

Susquehanna River

Philadelphia

Trenton ★

Newark

New York

Long Island Sound

Hudson River

40° N

ATLANTIC OCEAN

Maryland

Baltimore

Annapolis ★

Washington, D.C. ⊕

Dover ★

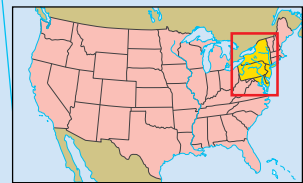
Delaware

There are many port cities in the Mid-Atlantic region. Two of these port cities—Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, and Trenton, New Jersey—are located on the Delaware River.

Chesapeake Bay

- ⊕ National capital
- ★ State capital
- Major city

0 100 miles



Well, the first thing we noticed were the extremely tall buildings, or skyscrapers, in Manhattan. There are so many skyscrapers packed so closely together that when you walk between them, you can hardly see the sky itself.



To really appreciate New York City you have to look up!

New York City is very, very crowded. Many people come to visit and to live in this famous city. Most of the time the sidewalks are packed with people, and the streets are packed with cars. Everyone seems to be in a hurry.

A large wave of people came to live in New York City in the 1800s. These **immigrants** came from countries all around the world. Many moved to New York City because they were looking for a better way of life. You see, Admiral, the United States is a country of immigrants. Since the country's beginning, people have come from faraway places to make their homes in America.

### Vocabulary

**immigrant**, n. a person from one country who moves to another country to live

For many immigrants, the first thing they saw when they sailed into New York Harbor was a gigantic metal statue called the Statue of Liberty. This statue is in the shape of a woman holding up a torch. It is supposed to stand for the freedom that Americans



enjoy. We took a ferryboat out to the statue and discovered that you can walk up inside it. By the time we got to the top of the 354 steps, we were exhausted!

## Things to Do in New York City

When immigrants moved to New York City, they brought along the different kinds of food they ate back home. That means you can get almost any kind of Earth food imaginable when visiting the city. The crew enjoyed sampling many of these different dishes. In the area called Chinatown, we ate several of the crispy snacks called egg rolls. In Little Italy, we picked up some sweet treats called cannoli. At a hot-dog stand, we had Polish sausages called kielbasa.

But there is more to do in New York than eat. Lots more! New York City is full of cultural attractions—concert halls, theaters and museums. In Manhattan, Broadway is famous for its theaters, where you can watch musicals and plays.

I especially liked the Metropolitan Museum of Art, which is also in Manhattan. There, you can see some of the most famous art Earthlings have ever made. Because she is so interested in plants and animals, Lieutenant Koola preferred the Museum of Natural History.



The Statue of Liberty is a symbol of freedom and was a welcoming sight to the immigrants who arrived in New York.

She showed me the big skeletons of some extinct Earth animals called dinosaurs.

Both of these museums are located near a large space called Central Park. The park also has lakes, fields, a theater, a zoo, and other places for people to gather or play.



The New York Public Library is a grand building in the heart of the city.

Of course, we also went to the library. We found the New York Public Library in an impressive building guarded by two stone lions. We spent some time there looking up facts about New York and the other states of the Mid-Atlantic region. We found out, for example, that the area has a climate pretty much like New England's. However, the summers are hotter and the winters are not quite so cold.

We also learned that the states of New York, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Delaware, and Maryland are among the most heavily populated states in the country. Their many large cities are centers of industry and government.

In fact, the headquarters of the national government is in a place called Washington, D.C., located in the southern part of the region. We decided to make Washington, D.C., our next stop.

## Exploring the Capital

Washington, D.C., is the only American city that is not in a state. It is the capital of the entire country. That means it cannot be part of any one state because that state would hold too much power. So the city is its own district, or area: the District of Columbia. That is why Washington is referred to as *Washington, D.C.* Using *D.C.* also stops people from confusing Washington state with the city of Washington.

On the way to Washington, D.C., we flew over some of the other interesting cities in the area. In Pennsylvania, we flew over Philadelphia. In Maryland, we flew over Baltimore.

We also flew over a body of water called Chesapeake Bay, which was covered with hundreds of small fishing boats. We had read that wonderful seafood comes from this **bay**. Chesapeake Bay is especially famous for its crabs, which are supposed to be sort of like lobsters, but smaller and rounder.

When we arrived in Washington, D.C., we noticed the city has wide, straight streets called avenues. There are a lot of grand buildings where the people who run the government work. Maybe the grandest building is the U.S. Capitol with its large white dome. This is where **Congress** makes America's laws. Congress is made up of elected lawmakers from every state.

### Vocabulary

**bay**, n. a part of a sea or ocean that extends into land

**Congress**, n. the law-making branch of the American government that is made up of the House of Representatives and the Senate

To the west of the Capitol is a long grassy area called **The National Mall**. Usually, when Americans talk about a mall, they mean a shopping center full of stores. But The National Mall is definitely not a shopping center! Instead, it is a place where Americans gather for different kinds of celebrations.

## Vocabulary

**The National Mall**, n. a tree-lined park in Washington, D.C., that is surrounded by museums, monuments, and government buildings

Right in the middle of The National Mall is a huge stone obelisk more than five hundred feet tall. An obelisk is a four-sided shaft that narrows to a pyramid-like point. This one is called the Washington Monument. It was built in honor of America's first president, George Washington. As you may recall, Admiral, the president is the head of the national government.

At the far end of The National Mall is the Lincoln Memorial. This structure honors another great American president, Abraham Lincoln. Lincoln was president during the 1860s. Inside the memorial is a very large statue of Lincoln, three or four times the size of a real human being. He is seated in a chair, and looks very serious and commanding.



Abraham Lincoln was a great American leader.



**The National Mall in Washington, D.C., is lined with famous attractions and historical buildings. The Capitol is located at one end of the Mall.**

Near The National Mall is the house where today's president lives. When we saw it, we thought he was lucky to live in the elegant white house with tall pillars in front of the door. Americans call the president's home the White House.

When it was time for some studying, we went to the Library of Congress. This is the biggest library in the United States. There, we looked up facts about the next region: the South.

# Chapter 4

## The South

**Exploring the South** When we left Washington, D.C., Admiral, we did not have to travel far to reach the next region. The South is a large region with interesting cultural diversity as well as striking physical **geographical features**. Across the landscape there

### The Big Question

How might physical geographical features contribute to the development of regional culture?

### Vocabulary

**“geographical features,”** (phrase) the different kinds of landforms, waterways, or physical characteristics in a region

are mountains, rivers, valleys, and sandy beaches. The twelve states that make up the South are Virginia, North Carolina, South Carolina, Georgia, Florida, West Virginia, Kentucky, Tennessee, Alabama, Mississippi, Arkansas, and Louisiana.

The South has a different climate from the northern states we have reported on. It is much hotter, especially in the summer. The difference in climate means that Southern farms grow different crops from those grown on northern farms.

In the 1800s, the two most important crops for Southern farmers were cotton and tobacco. These crops had to be picked by hand. This was

# The Southern Region



Two large bodies of water border the South—the Gulf of Mexico and the Atlantic Ocean.

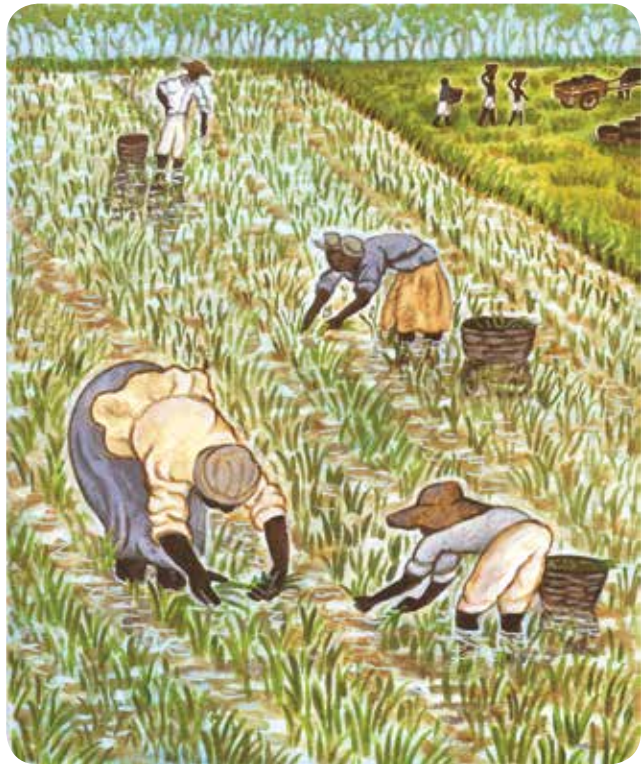
terribly hard work that few people wanted to do. So the Southern planters had people brought over from Africa to work on the farms. But these people did not come willingly. They were victims of the slave trade that flourished at this time.

In the northern states especially, many people disapproved of slavery. For this, and other reasons, there was conflict between the North and the South. Eleven Southern states decided to form their own country and left the United States. This conflict resulted in the Civil War, which lasted from 1861 to 1865.

The Civil War ended with the defeat of the South. The Southern states came back into the Union, and slavery was abolished.

Though many African Americans moved from the South to other parts of the country in the decades after the Civil War, they still had a significant influence on Southern culture, especially on Southern art, literature, music, dance, and food.

Next, we flew south and west to a mountainous area shared by the states of West Virginia, Virginia, and North Carolina. The scenery here is very wild. The



Enslaved workers were used to grow cotton, tobacco, and other crops in the South.



mountains are part of the great Appalachian Mountains, which reach all the way into New England.

In the South, the Appalachians are known by different names. In Virginia they are called the Blue Ridge Mountains, and in North Carolina and Tennessee, the Great Smoky Mountains.

We landed our ship in a place the map called Great Smoky Mountains **National Park**. After landing, we found a man wearing an odd round hat. He explained that he was a park official, or ranger. He told us that a national park was a place the government had set aside so that people could come and enjoy nature. This was only one of dozens of national parks, he explained. We asked why the mountains

### Vocabulary

**national park**, n.  
a piece of land that is protected by the federal government because of its natural beauty or historical importance



Sometimes there is a blue haze above the Great Smoky Mountains.

here were called “smoky.” The ranger explained that because of the hazy, blue fog on their tops, Native Americans named them the “place of the blue smoke.” We spent several peaceful hours walking through the woods that cover the hills.

## Enjoying the Southern Coast

Next, we flew northward along the East Coast. The coasts of Virginia, North Carolina, and South Carolina are covered with sandy beaches. We enjoyed walking in the fresh sea air and observing the behavior of the people on the beach.

Some of the most famous beaches on the East Coast are farther south, in the state of Florida. We went there next. This state is a long **peninsula**. It juts out between two bodies of water—the Atlantic Ocean on the east and the Gulf of Mexico on the west. One reason people go to the beaches in Florida and other Southern states is because the water is warm, making it ideal for swimming. The water is warm partly because of a stream of warm water that flows through the Gulf of Mexico and up the East Coast. It is called the **Gulf Stream**.

### Vocabulary

**peninsula**, n. a piece of land sticking out into a body of water, so that it is almost surrounded by water

**Gulf Stream**, n. a warm ocean current that begins in the Gulf of Mexico and travels north along the coast from Florida all the way to Newfoundland in Canada

Florida is often warmer than the rest of the South. In fact, it stays warm all year round in some parts of the state. Because of the warm weather, people in Florida can grow fruits that cannot be grown in the North, such as oranges.



Because of the weather, Florida has many orange groves.

After visiting an orange grove, we flew on to one of Florida's most famous cities, Miami. Many people come to Miami to visit the nearby beaches. But Miami is much more than just beaches. It is also a big, modern city with a diverse population. We found out that many people from Cuba and other islands in the Caribbean Sea live in Miami. The Caribbean is the sea off Florida's southern coast. On the streets of Miami, a lot of people spoke Spanish, the language of Cuba.

After leaving Florida, we headed north again, this time to visit the states of Kentucky, Tennessee, and Arkansas. In Kentucky, we visited a farm where horses are raised to run in races. The most famous horse race in America is called the Kentucky Derby.

In Tennessee, we stopped off in Nashville and Memphis, two cities famous for music. In Nashville, we saw musicians play what is called country music. In Memphis, we heard a form of music called the blues.

## The Deep South

Heading south again, we reached the state of Georgia. Georgia, Alabama, and Mississippi, are part of what some people call the Deep South.

While in Georgia, we visited a peach orchard near Atlanta, Georgia's capital city. Atlanta was burned down during the Civil War and then rebuilt. Today, it is the most important business center in the South.

The last Southern city we visited was New Orleans in the state of Louisiana. We especially liked the part of town called the French Quarter, which is full of beautiful old houses. Pretty little fences made of black iron surround the houses, and their balconies are covered with potted flowers. Just like Memphis and Nashville,



A jazz musician plays his saxophone in New Orleans.

New Orleans is famous for music, especially jazz. We really liked the sound of jazz! When you walk around, so much music is coming out of the buildings that it makes you want to dance in the streets. In fact, New Orleans is known for a once-a-year party when people do dance in the streets. It is called Mardi Gras.

New Orleans is located on the longest river in the United States, the Mississippi. This broad, brown river runs all the way from the state of Minnesota in the northern United States down to the Gulf of Mexico. It is the most important river in the United States for transporting goods by boat.

# Chapter 5

## The Midwest

**Exploring the Midwest** Leaving New Orleans, we followed the Mississippi River north. Hundreds of miles later, we reached another large city. The map said it was St. Louis, in the state of Missouri.

Missouri is in the area that Americans call the Midwest. Also part of this region are the states to the north and east—Ohio, Michigan, Indiana, Illinois, Wisconsin, Minnesota, and Iowa. Rivers and lakes are major features of this region.

We stopped for a while in St. Louis. There, we took a ride on the river in a large wooden boat with smokestacks. The boat was built to look just like a paddlewheeler, one of the boats that used to travel up and down the Mississippi in the 1800s.

The most interesting thing we saw from the paddlewheeler was a huge shiny arch of steel standing on the riverbank. The guide on the boat called this the Gateway Arch. She said that it was the tallest monument in the United States—even taller than the Washington Monument.

### **The Big Question**

How is life different in rural parts of the Midwest compared to busy cities?

# The Midwest Region



- ★ State capital
- Major city
- ◆ National monument

Three mighty rivers cut through the Midwest region. They are the Mississippi River, the Missouri River, and the Ohio River.

Reading about the Midwest in the library, we found out that the area has always been very important for **agriculture**. In Iowa and Illinois, we saw many farms where they grow crops, such as corn and soybeans.

The cornfields were an especially impressive sight, with their thousands of tall green stalks laid out in neat rows. Later, we found out that a lot of the corn grown is actually not used as food for people. More than half of it is used to feed animals that are raised for their meat, or to produce a number of products.

Midwestern farmers raise animals for other things, too. North of Iowa and Illinois is the state of Wisconsin, which is called America's Dairyland. It seems as if everywhere you go in Wisconsin, you see cows. These **dairy** cows are raised for their milk, which is a popular drink in America. The milk is also turned into other foods, such as cheese and butter.

But do not think that the Midwest is all cornfields and dairy farms, Admiral. It also has a number of big cities that are centers of **commerce** and industry. The states of Michigan, Wisconsin, Ohio, and Iowa are known for manufacturing all kinds of goods, including cars. Iowa is leading the way with a new kind of alternative energy—wind power. In fact, Iowa gets more than 30 percent of its energy from wind.

In the northern part of this region, there are huge bodies of water called the Great Lakes. There are five of these lakes: Lake Superior,

## Vocabulary

**agriculture**, n. the growing of crops and raising of livestock for food and other purposes

**dairy**, adj. relating to milk or milk products

**commerce**, n. the buying and selling of goods and services



Lake Michigan, Lake Huron, Lake Erie, and Lake Ontario. Rivers connect the lakes to the Atlantic Ocean. This makes it possible for Midwestern goods to be shipped all over the world. But the most amazing thing



Iowa has all kinds of farms, including wind farms!

about the Great Lakes, Admiral, is their size. They were not kidding when they called them “great.” When we flew over them, they just went on and on—more like seas than lakes. We measured Lake Superior on the map and saw that it was more than 350 miles long. Later, we read that it is the largest freshwater lake on Earth.



This aerial view shows the size of the Great Lakes.

## Visiting the Windy City

Chicago, Illinois, is located on the southern shore of Lake Michigan. It is the largest city in the Midwest. Chicago is a center of transportation where railways from both sides of the United States come together. It is also a major port city.

Chicago is the third most populated city in the United States. Los Angeles, in California, is number two, and New York, as I said before, is number one. Chicago reminded us of New York. It is a big, crowded city full of skyscrapers. In fact, we learned that the first skyscrapers in America were built in Chicago back in the late 1800s.

We walked through the busy streets. Later, we walked along the shore of Lake Michigan. Wind from the water whipped against us, making us chilly even though the sun was shining. We had heard that Chicago was called the Windy City, and now we knew why. Or so we thought. Later, while studying in the public library, we found out the real reason for the city's nickname.

Long ago, a newspaper writer from New York called Chicago the Windy City. He did so because he believed the people there were always boasting about how great their city was. You see, Admiral, when Americans think someone talks too much or brags, they say that person is a "wind bag," or full of hot air.

We did not think the people we met were full of hot air, but we did notice that Chicagoans are very proud of their sports teams. You see, Admiral, in America the big cities compete with each other in sports. There are three main sports in America: baseball,



**Wrigley Field is the home of the Chicago Cubs, one of Chicago's two professional baseball teams.**

basketball, and football. In Chicago, we went to a stadium called Wrigley Field to watch a baseball game. We enjoyed eating hot dogs, drinking sodas, and yelling along with the crowd.

After we left Chicago, we flew over the northern parts of Michigan, Wisconsin, and Minnesota. The land was covered with forests. Not as many people live in this area. Lieutenant Koola had been reading about the animals of the region. She told us about an animal called a wolf, a kind of wild dog, which used to live in many parts of the United States. Over the years, hunters have killed so many wolves that now northern Minnesota is one of the very few places where wolves still live. Lieutenant Koola said that if we looked closely into the forests, we might also see moose and bears. We had no such luck. But, we were still in good spirits on our way to the next region—the Great Plains.

# Chapter 6

## The Great Plains

**Exploring the Great Plains** From the Midwest, we traveled west to the region known as the Great Plains. This region is located near the center of the United States. It includes the states of Oklahoma, Kansas, Nebraska, South Dakota, and North Dakota. As you know, a plain is a flat area without hills or mountains. Flying over it, we were amazed at just how flat most of this region is. We noticed, too, that there are not as many big cities here as there are in the East or the Midwest. Instead, the land is covered with many farms and ranches.

### The Big Question

Why are the Great Plains less populated than other regions of the United States?

Flying over the eastern part of the Great Plains, we saw huge fields of wheat. So much wheat is grown in this area that it is called America's Breadbasket. Wheat is used to make the food called bread. In the western part of the region, we saw cattle ranches, where much of the country's beef is raised. Another important product of the region is oil. Oil is turned into gasoline that helps run the millions of cars that Americans drive.

50° N

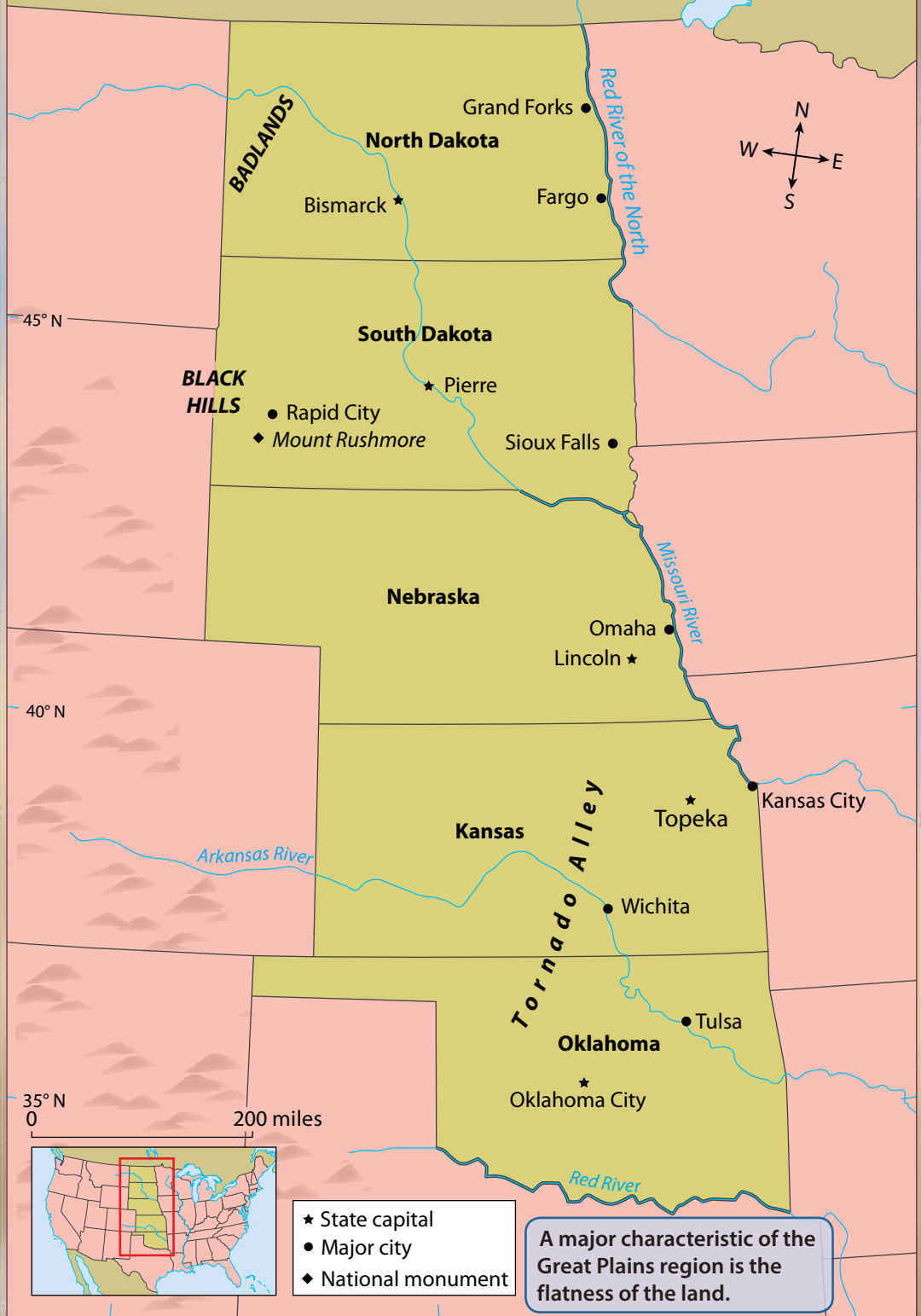
105° W

100° W

95° W

# The Great Plains Region

Canada



- ★ State capital
- Major city
- ◆ National monument

A major characteristic of the Great Plains region is the flatness of the land.

## Early Life on the Great Plains

When we read about the history of the Great Plains, we learned how much the region has changed in the last two hundred years. We learned that if we had flown over the plains in the early 1800s, we would have seen thousands of animals called bison. The Native Americans who lived in the region hunted the bison for food. They also made use of many parts of the bison, especially the **hide**.

### Vocabulary

**hide**, n. an animal's skin

In the 1800s, European settlers began moving into the Great Plains, taking over land that had belonged to the Native Americans. The



Bison were an important resource for Native Americans. Hunting by European settlers almost caused the bison to vanish completely.

settlers also hunted the bison, and later, in an attempt to defeat Native American resistance to increased European settlement, they killed so many bison that the great herds almost vanished. The destruction of the herds seriously harmed the Native American way of life on the Great Plains.

The Native Americans were unable to stop the advance onto their lands. When the U.S. Army came west to support the settlers, the Native Americans were eventually forced to move to special areas called **reservations**.

**Vocabulary**  
.....  
**reservation**, n.  
an area of land set aside by the federal government for Native Americans

At one time, the present-day state of Oklahoma was called Indian Territory, and many Native Americans from various parts of the United States were forced to move there. Although they lost large areas of land across the United States, the Native American cultures survived. Today, Native Americans live throughout the United States.

People have always had to be tough to survive on the Great Plains. The region has little water and a harsh climate, with hot summers and freezing winters.

Spring is tornado season in the Great Plains. A tornado is a type of storm that occurs when a swirling cloud shaped like a funnel passes over the land. Tornadoes bring destructive winds of more than one hundred miles per hour. Many of the tornadoes on Earth happen in a part of the Great Plains called Tornado Alley.

In the northern part of the region, the winter weather is especially harsh. This might be one reason why the states of North and South Dakota have so few people. North Dakota is bigger than the state of New York, but New York has more than twenty times as many people.

### Vocabulary

**erosion**, n. the carrying away of soil and rock by water, ice, or wind

**barren**, adj. having little or no vegetation

In South Dakota, we visited an area called the Badlands. There we saw colored hills of rock carved into different shapes by **erosion**. People called this land bad because it was dry and **barren**.



From left to right, Mount Rushmore features the faces of George Washington, Thomas Jefferson, Theodore Roosevelt, and Abraham Lincoln.



In a national park near the Badlands, four gigantic faces stare down from the side of a hill. The massive sculpture, called Mount Rushmore, features the faces of four American presidents: George Washington, Thomas Jefferson, Theodore Roosevelt, and Abraham Lincoln. Each face is almost sixty feet tall. As we flew on to the next region, the image of these men stayed with us for a long time.

# Chapter 7

## The Rocky Mountain Region

### Exploring the Rocky Mountain

**Region** Flying west from the Great Plains, we were greeted by a dramatic sight—a huge wall of tall mountains, stretching from north to south. Our map told us that this was the great range called the Rocky Mountains. The Rockies, as they are called, run from Canada through all of the states in the region that bears their name. These five states are Colorado, Wyoming, Montana, Idaho, and Utah. The Rocky Mountains themselves continue into New Mexico, which is part of another region.

#### The Big Question

What causes geysers to occur?

We noticed right away how different these mountains were from the ones in the Appalachians, the big **mountain range** in the eastern United States. Most mountains in the Appalachians have gentle slopes and rounded tops covered with trees. Mountains in the Rockies are more likely to have steep, craggy sides and jagged, rocky tops. Noticing that many

#### Vocabulary

**mountain range**, n.  
a line or group of mountains

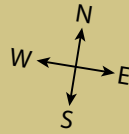
# The Rocky Mountain Region

115°W

110°W

105°W

Canada



Missouri River

Great Falls

Montana

Helena

Billings

45° N

Idaho

Boise

Idaho Falls

Snake River

Yellowstone National Park

Wyoming

Casper

Cheyenne

Great Salt Lake

Salt Lake City

Utah

Colorado River

Rocky Mountain National Park

40° N

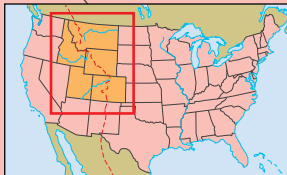
Denver

Mount Elbert

Pikes Peak

Colorado

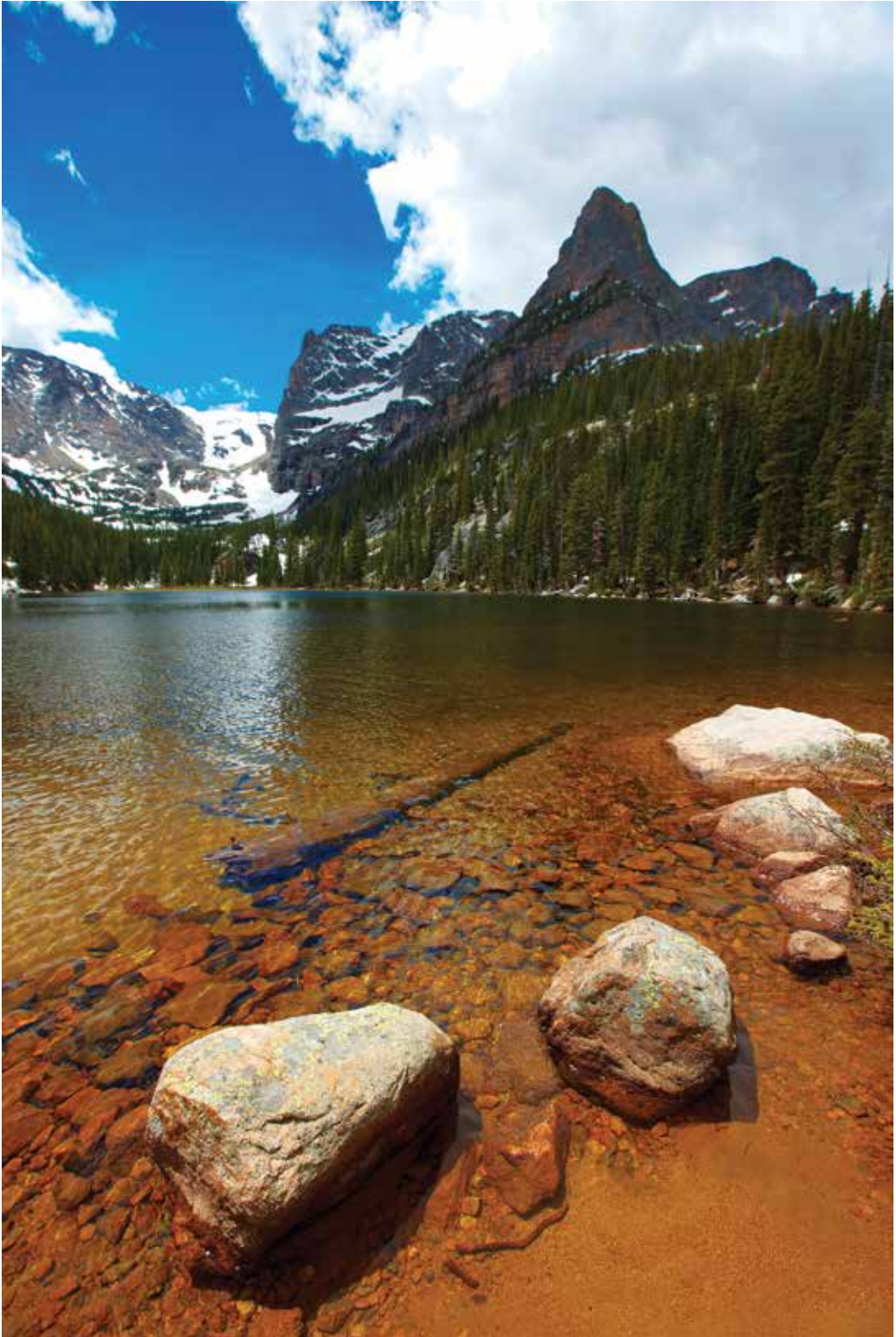
- ★ State capital
- Major city
- ▲ Mountain peak
- National park
- - Continental Divide



The Continental Divide runs through the center of this region. It is a line of mountain ridges that separates rivers that flow eastward, like the Missouri River, from those that flow westward, like the Snake River.

0

300 miles



Rocky Mountain National Park, in Colorado, contains many peaks more than ten thousand feet high. Longs Peak, shown here, is more than fourteen thousand feet high.

of the mountains had snow on their peaks, we guessed that the Rockies were much taller than the Appalachians, too. It turns out we were right. The tallest mountain in the Appalachian range is only around six thousand feet high. The Rockies have dozens of peaks towering more than fourteen thousand feet.

After the flatness of the Great Plains, we were eager to explore this mountainous region. According to our map, Colorado had more and taller mountains than any other Rocky Mountain state. We headed there first. We landed our ship in a park in the city of Denver, which the map said was Colorado's capital. We found out that it was a big, modern city, the largest in the whole Rocky Mountain region. It is called the Mile-High City because of its high elevation, or height above sea level.

As usual, we went to the public library to find facts about the region. I wondered what made people settle in the Rockies during the 1800s. After all, most of the land in the mountains was too steep to farm. I learned that the early settlers mostly came to **mine** valuable metals that were discovered in the mountains. Among the metals they mined were copper, lead, and the most valuable of all, gold and silver.

#### Vocabulary

**mine**, v. to dig into the earth in search of minerals or coal

Today, people who live in the Rockies work in many kinds of businesses and industries. One of the most important industries is tourism. People come from all over the country to admire the beauty of the mountains and to visit the region's famous national parks. People also come to ski.

Skiing is a sport practiced in many places in the Rockies. People go up to the snowy mountaintops. Then, they strap long boards on their feet and slide downhill over the snow. I know—it does seem kind of crazy!

## A Day at Yellowstone

From Colorado we flew north to Wyoming. This is the least populated state in the entire United States. We flew over a lot of wild, empty country on our way to Yellowstone National Park. Yellowstone is the oldest national park in the world.

In the day we spent wandering the park, we saw more amazing animals than we had in our whole time in the United States. Lieutenant Koola showed us big birds called eagles soaring in the sky. She told us



The bald eagle is a symbol of the United States.

that because the bald eagle was considered to be proud and free, it was made the national symbol of the United States.

Then Lieutenant Koola pointed out a herd of shaggy animals with horns and humped backs. “Remember the bison we read about when we studied the Great Plains?” she asked. “That is what those animals are. They were almost killed off by hunters in the 1800s,

but then the government decided to protect them in parks like this. Now there are thousands of bison in Yellowstone.”

In another field, Lieutenant Koola showed us some animals that looked like deer but were much bigger. On their heads were gigantic antlers, or horns, that branched out into many sharp points. Lieutenant Koola said that they were elk. Lieutenant Koola also told us about grizzly bears. “Grizzlies,” she said, “usually stay hidden in the woods, but if they smell food, they come looking for it. People who camp overnight in Yellowstone hang their food from high tree branches so it will not attract the bears.”

Later, Lieutenant Koola took us to a place where a sign said “Old Faithful.” We wondered what Old Faithful was—another kind of animal, perhaps? But there were no animals around. Lieutenant Koola said, “Just wait.”



Old Faithful erupts so consistently that scientists can predict when the eruptions will happen.

Suddenly a huge jet of steaming water came bursting out of the ground and shot at least a hundred feet into the air! Lieutenant Koola said, “That’s Old Faithful. It is the world’s most famous **geyser**.”

We asked her what made the hot water shoot out of the ground like that. She explained that deep inside the earth, there is a layer of hot liquid rock called **magma**. In a few places on Earth, like Yellowstone, the magma is especially close to the surface, and it heats the rocks just under the ground. When water from the ground seeps into the hot rocks, it boils and starts to turn into steam.

Pressure builds up, and the water and steam burst out of the ground together. She made it sound as if we were standing on top of a giant teakettle.

After leaving Wyoming, we flew north to Montana, another state with magnificent scenery and very few people. In the northwestern part of the state, we saw mountains and valleys that had been carved out of the landscape tens of thousands of years ago by **glaciers**—huge, slow-moving rivers of ice.

Then, we turned southwest and flew over the mountains of Idaho. I asked a crewmember, “Do you know what Idaho is most famous for?” He replied, “I do not know—mountains, maybe?” I said, “No—potatoes!” I explained that Idaho grows more potatoes than any other state.

## Vocabulary

**geyser**, n. a naturally occurring hot spring in which hot water and steam are released from the ground up into the air in a tall stream

**magma**, n. melted rock inside Earth’s crust

**glacier**, n. a large, slow-moving mass of compacted snow or ice



We flew farther south, to the last of the Rocky Mountain states, Utah. I had read that Salt Lake City was the capital of the state. It is also where the headquarters of the Mormon Church is.

Utah is only a partly mountainous state. West of Salt Lake City where the mountains end, there is a different kind of landscape. But I think I will wait until my next message to share it with you. We are now heading to the Southwest.

# Chapter 8

## The Southwest

**Exploring the Southwest** Our next job was to explore the states of Texas, New Mexico, Arizona, and Nevada. These states make up the Southwest region.

### The Big Question

How are the Southwest's climate and landscape connected?

First, we had to backtrack a little and fly east to Texas. This is a huge state—the map showed that it was more than seven hundred miles wide. Later we found out that Texas is the second largest state in size, after Alaska. It is also the second largest state in population, after California. We certainly saw a lot of really big things in Texas—big cities, big **oil fields**, and big **ranches**.

In fact, we found out that there is a ranch in Texas that is bigger than the whole state of Rhode Island!

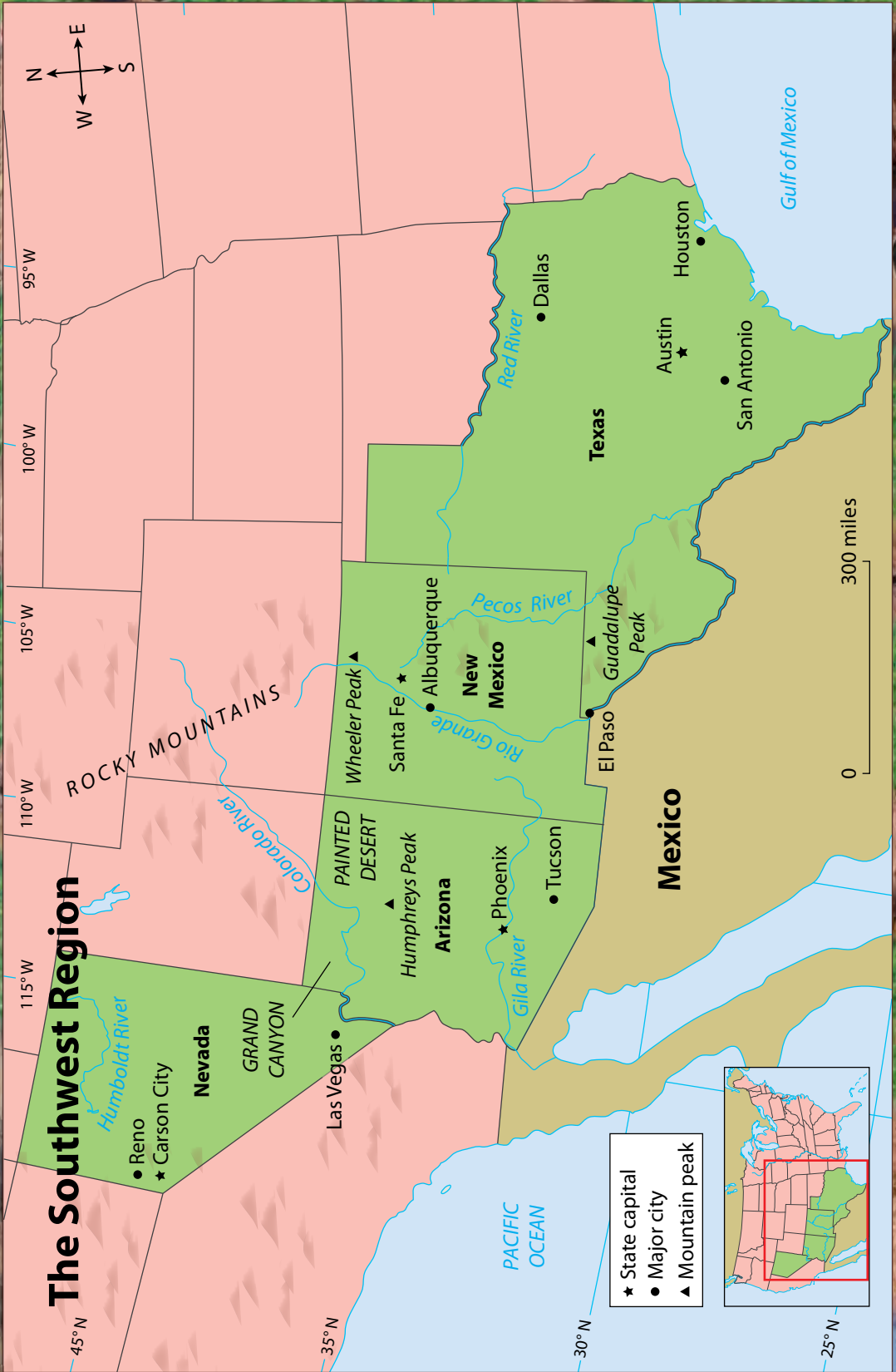
Texas raises more cattle than any other state. The cowboy, a person who takes care of cattle, is a symbol of Texas. In the late 1800s, Texas cowboys drove herds of cattle hundreds of miles to market in the northern states.

### Vocabulary

**oil field**, n. an oil-rich area where equipment is set up to remove the oil from the ground

**ranch**, n. a large farm where livestock is raised

# The Southwest Region



- ★ State capital
- Major city
- ▲ Mountain peak

The Southwest is home to the Grand Canyon, one of the natural wonders of the world.



Texas is still home to cowboys today.

It was hard, dangerous, adventurous work, so many people thought of cowboys as heroes. Over time, the cattle business changed so that there was less need for cowboys. Today, there are not as many cowboys in Texas. There are, however, many Texans who still dress like cowboys. They wear cowboy boots and a kind of tall cowboy hat they call a “ten-gallon” because it looks as if it could hold that much water.

Another symbol of Texas is the oil well. Texas produces more oil than any other state. Oil was first discovered near the city of Houston in the early 1900s.

Today, Houston is the largest city in Texas. The American **space program** has one of its largest facilities there. One man told us that *Houston* was the first word spoken on

### Vocabulary

**“space program,”**  
(phrase) the series of government-supported efforts to explore outer space

the moon. He explained that when an American became the first human to land on the moon in the 1960s, the first thing he did was radio back to Houston.

In our exploration of Texas and the other Southwestern states, we heard many people speaking Spanish, the same language we had heard spoken in parts of Florida. When we studied the history of the Southwest, we learned the reason for this. The Southwest region was not always part of the United States. Instead, it was part of Mexico, the country just to the south of the United States. There, people speak Spanish. In the 1840s, the United States and Mexico went to war over large areas of land in the Southwest. The United States won the war and gained the land that became parts of Texas, New Mexico, Arizona, Nevada, Utah, Colorado, and California.

Mexican culture still has a strong influence on this region. Many cities here have Spanish names, such as San Antonio, El Paso, and Santa Fe. Today, the region is home to millions of Mexican Americans, many of whom speak both Spanish and English. Mexican influence is especially strong in the state of New Mexico.

One of the best things about traveling in the Southwest is the wonderful Mexican food you can eat. Many Mexican dishes are made with a kind of thin pancake called a tortilla (/tor\*tee\*ya/). I especially liked the enchiladas (/en\*chih\*lah\*dahs/)—soft tortillas filled with meat or cheese and covered with a spicy sauce.

Much of the Southwest is desert—dry, sandy land with few trees. The desert begins in western Texas and covers much of New Mexico, Arizona, and Nevada. Very little rain falls in the desert. In the summer,



Cacti are among the few plants that grow in the deserts of the Southwest.

it gets hotter than any other part of the United States. Temperatures of 115 or 120 degrees Fahrenheit are not unusual.

We landed our ship in southern Arizona and went exploring. The desert was very different from most of the other landscapes we had seen. We almost felt as if we were on another planet. Instead of trees, we saw cacti—plants covered with sharp spines. Some of the cacti were short and round. Others were very tall and had thick “arms” sticking upward from their trunks.

Suddenly we saw something strange—a little bird with long tail feathers and spiky feathers on its head, running quickly across the sand. We had never seen a bird run before. Lieutenant Koola explained, “That’s a roadrunner. He can fly, but he would rather run.” She went on to say, “You know, a lot of people think there is no life in the desert, but that is not true. Look—there is a jackrabbit.” We saw a large brown rabbit hop out of a bush. Then I said, “Wow! I have found a little lobster.” When we looked down, I saw something that did look like a tiny lobster, except that it had

a long tail that curled over its body. Lieutenant Koola yelled, “Do not touch that! It is a scorpion. It has a poisonous stinger in its tail, and if it stings you, you will get very sick.” When I heard that, I jumped back a couple of feet.

After we had explored the desert for a little while, I decided that we should get back inside our ship and fly to northern Arizona. I really wanted to see the Grand Canyon. The Grand Canyon is one of the great natural wonders of the United States.

It is a gigantic **gorge** carved out by the Colorado River. It is a mile deep and up to eighteen miles across. If you peer over the edge, you can see the river glistening far, far down at the bottom. The walls of the canyon are all different colors—red, brown, white, and yellow. The colors come from the layers of different kinds of rock. Like most visitors to the canyon, we just stood there for a long time, looking at it in awe.

### Vocabulary

**gorge**, n. a steep, narrow canyon



The Colorado River cuts through Canyonlands National Park and continues to wind through the Grand Canyon.

# Chapter 9

## The West Coast

**Exploring the West Coast** After flying over Nevada, we headed west again, toward the Pacific Ocean. The part of the United States that borders the Pacific is known as the West Coast. There are three states on the West Coast—California, Oregon, and Washington. California is by far the biggest of the three, covering two-thirds of the coast. It also has more people than any other state in the country.

### The Big Question

Why are the Cascade Mountains important to the climate of the Pacific Northwest?

We decided to begin our exploration of the West Coast in California. We first visited the city of Los Angeles, the second largest city in the United States. Flying over the city, we were amazed by its size. It spread out as far as the eye could see in every direction. We learned that large roads called freeways tie this sprawling city together. Los Angeles is so spread out that people sometimes spend hours every day in their cars, driving from home to work and back again. Because almost everyone has a car, there are too many cars on the roads, and traffic gets jammed. Americans call the times that they drive to work in the morning and back home at night rush hour.

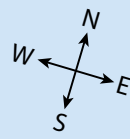


# The West Coast Region

Canada

50° N

Puget Sound



Seattle

Olympia

Washington

Portland

Salem

Columbia River

CASCADE MOUNTAINS

Oregon

45° N

COAST RANGES

SIERRA NEVADA

Sacramento

San Francisco

California

Mount Whitney

A long chain of mountains, called the Coast Ranges, extends along the coast from northern Washington to southern California.

PACIFIC OCEAN

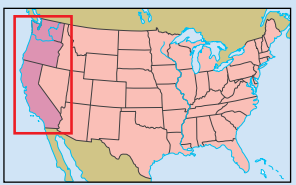
MOJAVE DESERT

Los Angeles

40° N

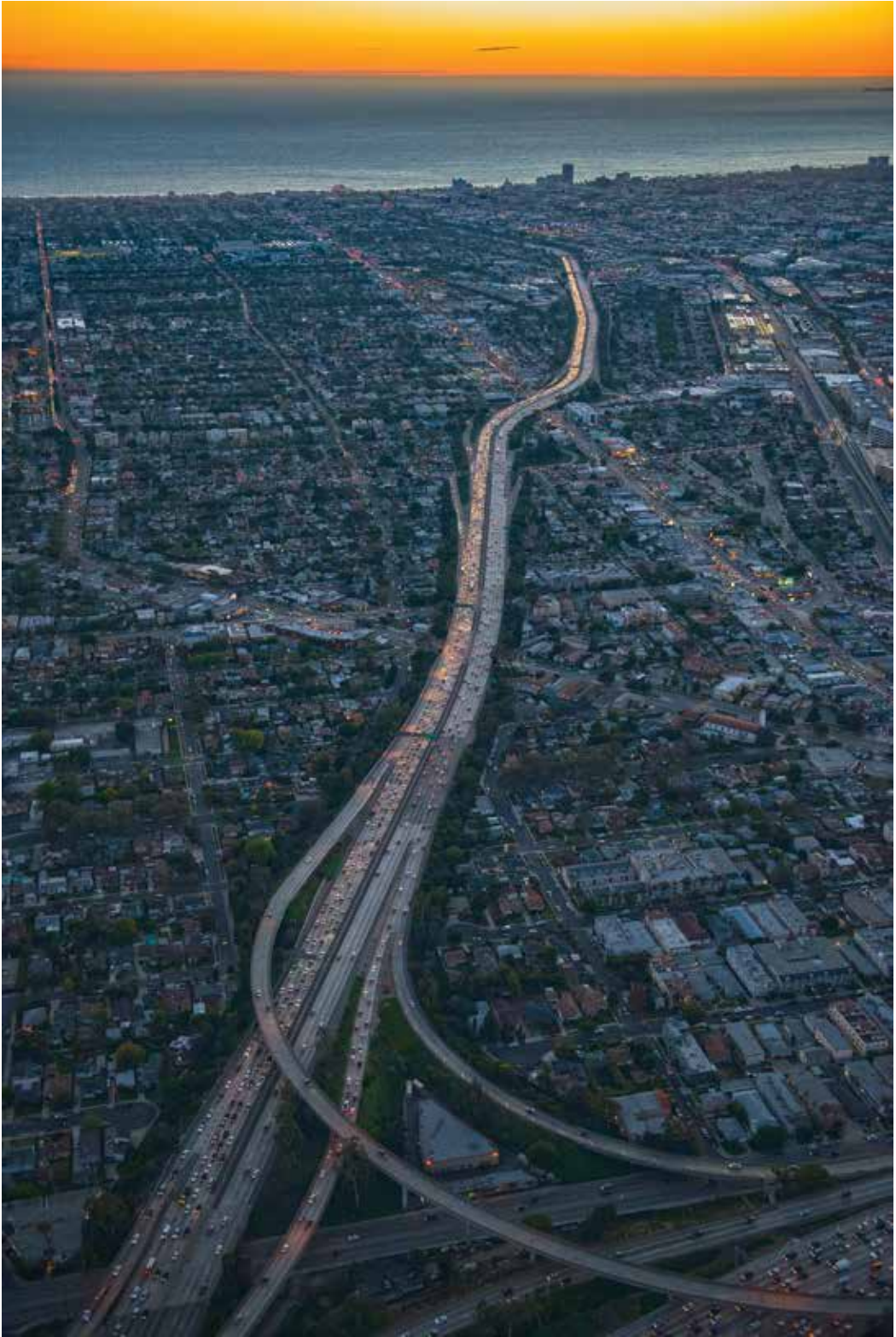
35° N

0 300 miles



- ★ State capital
- Major city
- ▲ Mountain peak

Mexico



The freeways that wind through Los Angeles are almost always busy.

The sprawling city of Los Angeles is home to people of many different backgrounds. For example, there are European Americans, Asian Americans, African Americans, and Hispanic Americans, to name a few. As you wander around L.A.—as the people who live there call it—you hear not only English and Spanish, but also other languages, such as Japanese and Korean.

Los Angeles is famous for its beautiful sandy beaches. On summer days, the beaches are packed with people who have come there to enjoy themselves. While exploring, we saw some people surfing. The surfers paddled out into the water with long boards.

The city of Los Angeles is also famous for being the world capital of the movie business. Thousands of movies have been made here. As you know, Admiral, Earthlings are very fond of sitting in dark rooms where they look at the flickering pictures they call movies.

Los Angeles is in the southern part of California. The southern part of California, like the Southwest, does not receive a large amount of rain. People there have developed new technology to solve water shortage problems. California now has several large seawater **desalination** plants that can transform seawater into freshwater.

**Vocabulary**  
.....  
**desalination**, n. the process of removing salt from water

Flying north to explore the rest of the state, we saw some very different landscapes. To the north, the California coast becomes



Desalination plants change sea water into fresh water so that it can be used by people in the community.

rocky instead of sandy. Tall cliffs plunge down to the ocean, and huge waves explode against the rocks.

## **Mountains, Valleys, and Steep Hills**

Flying inland from the coast, we crossed a range of mountains. Then we came to a long valley that stretches all the way down the center of the state. When we flew low over the valley, we saw that it was covered with farms. Later, we learned that this is one of the most important food-growing regions of the United States.

Flying farther east, we came to a range of tall mountains, which the map calls the Sierra Nevada. According to the map, the tallest mountain in the range is Mount Whitney. Later, we



**The San Francisco-Oakland Bay Bridge.**

learned that this is the tallest mountain in the United States outside of Alaska.

As beautiful as the mountains were, we were eager to see California's other famous city, San Francisco. So we turned our ship back toward the coast. San Francisco is very different from Los Angeles. San Francisco is full of new skyscrapers as well as old houses. Its parks are lush and green, displaying interesting trees and flowers collected from all over Earth. The city sits beside a beautiful blue bay. Spanning across this area of water is the famous Golden Gate Bridge. The bridge's two towers are seventy stories tall, and they are connected to the bridge by great swooping cables.

Much of San Francisco is built on steep hills. At the end of each day's exploration, we were tired and aching from all of the climbing up and down. We learned that more than a hundred years ago, someone felt sorry for the horses that had to haul heavy wagons up the steep hills. He felt so sorry for them that he invented a new way to haul things in San Francisco. It was a kind of little train, called a cable car, that was pulled along by an iron rope set in the ground. Today, people come from all over the world to ride the cable cars up San Francisco's steep hills.

After leaving San Francisco, we flew north to explore the states of Oregon and Washington, which make up the area called the Pacific Northwest. From the air, we noticed a long mountain range that runs through both states from north to south. The map said these were the Cascade Mountains. Later, we found out that these mountains were very important to the climate of the region.

When winds blow in from the Pacific Ocean, they pick up **moisture** from the sea. When the air rises to cross the mountains, it cools off. Because cold air holds less moisture than warm air, the moisture falls as snow or rain—*lots* of rain. The western part of Oregon and Washington is one of the rainiest areas in the United States.

### Vocabulary

**moisture**, n. small amounts of water, either in the air or on a surface

We were amazed by how wet the area was—it drizzled almost the whole time we were there. We were also surprised at how green it was. All that rain has helped give life to great forests full of towering trees. Many people in this region make their living

by logging—cutting down trees to use for building or to make products like paper. But many of the trees are protected from loggers. Instead, they are set aside in national parks for people to enjoy.

To finish our tour of the West Coast, we flew to Seattle, Washington, which is the biggest city in the Pacific Northwest. The most famous building in Seattle is known as the Space Needle. It is a tall tower with a funny-looking round top that looks like the toy that Americans call the yo-yo. The tower is called the Space Needle because the top is supposed to look like a spaceship that aliens might use to visit Earth. Of course, it looks nothing like a real spaceship. We all had a good laugh over that. Earthlings can be so funny!



From the top of the 605-foot-high Space Needle, spectators have a magnificent view of the city of Seattle.

# Chapter 10

## Alaska and Hawaii

**Exploring Alaska and Hawaii** Well, Admiral, we have described our journeys through the forty-eight continental states of the United States. “Wait!” I hear you saying.

“Didn’t you say there were fifty states?” You’re right, there are fifty. But two of them, Alaska and Hawaii, are not connected to the rest. Alaska and Hawaii are states that are bordered by the Pacific Ocean. Alaska is also bordered by the Arctic Ocean. They were the last two states to become part of the United States.

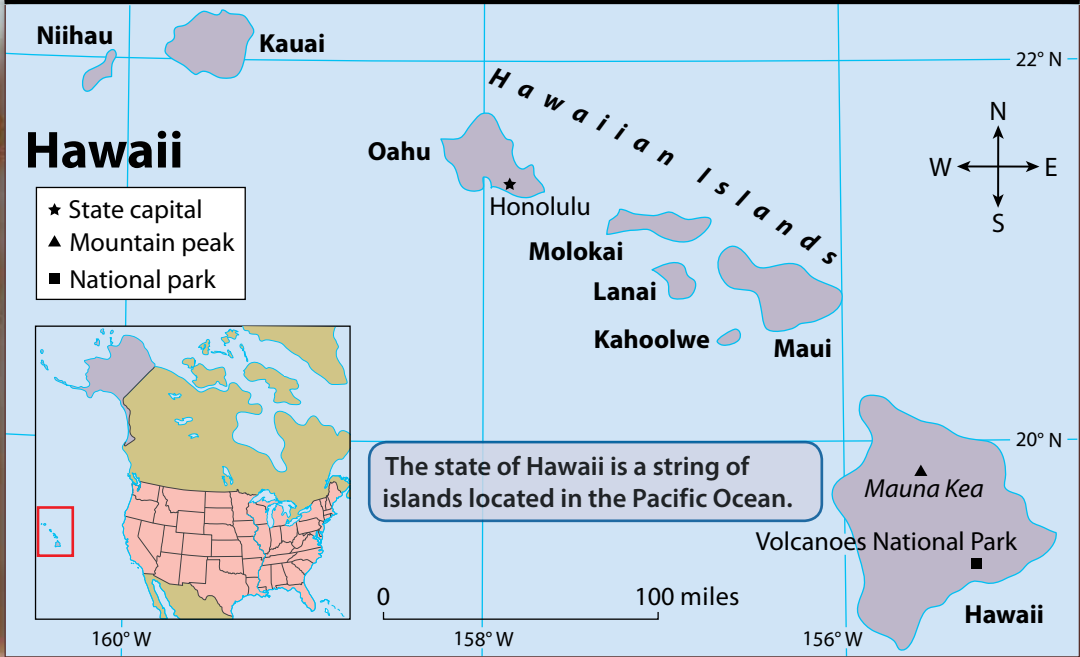
### The Big Question

How does Alaska compare to Hawaii?

Alaska is located five hundred miles to the north of Washington state. To get there, you have to fly or drive across the country of Canada. It is the largest state in the United States.

Hawaii is located two thousand miles west of California, in the middle of the Pacific Ocean. To get there, you have to fly or sail across the ocean. It is made up of a chain of 8 small islands and 124 even smaller islands. The most southern point of the United States is in Hawaii.





## The Rugged Landscape of Alaska

Alaska is the biggest American state by far. It is double the size of Texas. Yet few people, less than a million, live in this vast space. Most of the people who do live there live in the largest city, Anchorage. Much of the rest of the state is wild, rugged land—forests, rivers, lakes, and mountains. Boy, does Alaska have mountains. Seventeen of the twenty tallest mountains in the United States are located there, including the tallest of them all, Denali.

Alaska is so far north—a short distance south of Earth’s North Pole—that it gets freezing cold in the winter. Temperatures often fall as low as forty degrees below zero Fahrenheit. As we flew around, the mountains and glaciers of the state looked magnificent in their sparkling white robes of snow. Yet we did wish



Denali is the tallest mountain in the United States.

we could have seen Alaska in the summer. Lieutenant Koola explained that in the summer the hills, forests, and streams are full of wildlife, such as moose, bears, beavers, otters, eagles, wolves, and mountain goats. She said that if you stand by the ocean, you can sometimes see a huge whale come to the surface.

## The Islands of Hawaii

From Alaska, Hawaii was a long, long flight over the ocean. When we arrived, it was as if we were in another world. The state of Hawaii is made up of more than one hundred islands in the middle of the Pacific Ocean. Some of the islands are very small. Most people live on a few of the largest islands. The islands have forests which are green even in the middle of winter. When we flew low to get a better look, we saw that the forests were full of brightly colored flowers. Then we saw something truly amazing—a red river of liquid fire running down the side of a mountain!

Lieutenant Koola explained that the mountain was a **volcano**, and that the liquid fire was **lava**. She said, “Remember in Yellowstone, when I told you about the liquid rock called magma? Well, when a volcano erupts and the magma comes to the surface, it is called lava.” Lieutenant Koola then explained that the whole Hawaiian island chain was formed long ago by erupting volcanoes. Some of them are still active, pouring out streams of lava.

### Vocabulary

**volcano**, n. a mountain that has cracks leading to openings deep inside the earth from which hot, melted rock may sometimes erupt

**lava**, n. magma, or melted rock, that reaches Earth’s surface



Kilauea, a volcano located on the Hawaiian island known as Big Island, is active today.

We then flew to the island called Oahu. We landed our ship in Honolulu, the biggest city of the islands. When we got out, we were amazed at how warm the air was. People were crowding onto the white, sandy beaches around the city. We noticed surfers in the water, and someone on the beach told us that surfing was invented in Hawaii.

In the library in Honolulu, we learned that Hawaii was first settled about a thousand years ago by people who came from islands farther west in the Pacific Ocean. These first Hawaiians had their own culture, including language and religion.

Today, however, most people who live in Hawaii are Asian American or European American. Only a small minority are native Hawaiians. Few people speak the Hawaiian language. But some old Hawaiian traditions are still alive.



Surfers wait for a big wave to arrive. Then they stand up on the board and glide along the wave.

One night, we went to a traditional Hawaiian dinner called a luau (/loo\*ow/). One of the things we ate there was a kind of porridge called poi (/poy/). You eat poi with your fingers. We also enjoyed the main dish, which was roast pork. For dessert we had fresh pineapple. Some of America's pineapples come from Hawaii.

After dinner, we watched some Hawaiian men and women perform a traditional dance called the hula. Afterward, the dancers put chains of flowers around our necks. These flower chains, called leis (/lays/), are given to visitors as a way of saying "welcome."

Hawaii was a friendly and beautiful place. But we knew that it was time to head home to Proteus. Right now, our ship is leaving Earth's atmosphere.



Earth is sometimes called the “blue planet” because of the way it looks from space.

As I look back at the blue planet, I think of everything we have seen and learned. The United States, we learned, is made up of big, crowded cities and vast, empty deserts. It has towering mountains and deep canyons. It has forests and farmland, beaches and swamps. It has Hawaii’s rivers of fire and Alaska’s rivers of ice. The people of America are just as diverse as its landscape. They come from every corner of Earth, so that American culture is made up of many other cultures.

I am still wearing the lei that the Hawaiian hula dancers gave me. It reminds me of something I learned from some people who spoke Hawaiian. They told me that there is one Hawaiian word that every visitor to the islands learns. It is *aloha* (/ah\*loh\*ha/), which means both hello and goodbye. I like that. I think what it means is that saying hello and saying goodbye should give you the same happy feeling. After all, it is good to visit a new place, but it is also good to go home. If you liked the new place, there is always a chance you will visit it again.

I am signing off now, Admiral. I will see you soon. For now, I will just say: "Aloha, America! Aloha, Earth!"

## Cool Facts

As we explored the United States, we noted some cool facts.  
Here they are:

### **MAJOR MOUNTAIN RANGES**

Appalachian Mountains, Rocky Mountains, Sierra Nevada, Cascade, Alaska Range

### **LONGEST RIVERS**

Missouri, Mississippi, Yukon, Rio Grande, Colorado

### **LARGEST LAKES**

Superior, Michigan, Huron, Erie, Ontario

### **BORDERS**

Southern Border—Mexico

Northern Border—Canada

### **LARGEST STATE BY LAND MASS**

Alaska

### **SMALLEST STATE BY LAND MASS**

Rhode Island

### **NAMES OF OCEANS BORDERING THE UNITED STATES**

Atlantic Ocean (East Coast)

Pacific Ocean (West Coast)

Arctic Ocean (Northern Alaska)

### **NAMES OF REGIONS**

New England; the Mid-Atlantic; the South; the Midwest; the Great Plains; Rocky Mountain; the Southwest; and the West Coast.

There are also two states that don't belong to a region, because they are not connected to any other state. They are called Alaska and Hawaii.

### **U.S. TERRITORIES**

Puerto Rico

Northern Mariana Islands

U.S. Virgin Islands

Guam

American Samoa





## STATE CAPITALS

1. Montgomery, Alabama
2. Juneau, Alaska
3. Phoenix, Arizona
4. Little Rock, Arkansas
5. Sacramento, California
6. Denver, Colorado
7. Hartford, Connecticut
8. Dover, Delaware
9. Tallahassee, Florida
10. Atlanta, Georgia
11. Honolulu, Hawaii
12. Boise, Idaho
13. Springfield, Illinois
14. Indianapolis, Indiana
15. Des Moines, Iowa
16. Topeka, Kansas
17. Frankfort, Kentucky
18. Baton Rouge, Louisiana
19. Augusta, Maine
20. Annapolis, Maryland
21. Boston, Massachusetts
22. Lansing, Michigan
23. St. Paul, Minnesota
24. Jackson, Mississippi
25. Jefferson City, Missouri
26. Helena, Montana
27. Lincoln, Nebraska
28. Carson City, Nevada
29. Concord, New Hampshire
30. Trenton, New Jersey
31. Santa Fe, New Mexico
32. Albany, New York
33. Raleigh, North Carolina
34. Bismarck, North Dakota
35. Columbus, Ohio
36. Oklahoma City, Oklahoma
37. Salem, Oregon
38. Harrisburg, Pennsylvania
39. Providence, Rhode Island
40. Columbia, South Carolina
41. Pierre, South Dakota
42. Nashville, Tennessee
43. Austin, Texas
44. Salt Lake City, Utah
45. Montpelier, Vermont
46. Richmond, Virginia
47. Olympia, Washington
48. Charleston, West Virginia
49. Madison, Wisconsin
50. Cheyenne, Wyoming

# Glossary

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## A

**agriculture, n.** the growing of crops and raising of livestock for food and other purposes (34)

---

## B

**barren, adj.** having little or no vegetation (42)

**bay, n.** a part of a sea or ocean that extends into land (21)

---

## C

**commerce, n.** the buying and selling of goods and services (34)

**Congress, n.** the law-making branch of the American government that is made up of the House of Representatives and the Senate (21)

---

## D

**dairy, adj.** relating to milk or milk products (34)

**“densely populated,” (phrase)** having many people living in a small area (16)

**desalination, n.** the process of removing salt from water (61)

---

## E

**erosion, n.** the carrying away of soil and rock by water, ice, or wind (42)

---

## G

**“geographical features,” (phrase)** the different kinds of landforms, waterways, or physical characteristics in a region (24)

**geography, n.** the physical and human features of a place (2)

**geyser, n.** a naturally occurring hot spring in which hot water and steam are released from the ground up into the air in a tall stream (50)

**glacier, n.** a large, slow-moving mass of compacted snow or ice (50)

---

**gorge, n.** a steep, narrow canyon (57)

**Gulf Stream, n.** a warm ocean current that begins in the Gulf of Mexico and travels north along the coast from Florida all the way to Newfoundland in Canada (28)

---

## H

**hide, n.** an animal's skin (40)

---

## I

**immigrant, n.** a person from one country who moves to another country to live (18)

**indigenous, adj.** native to a particular region or environment (5)

**industry, n.** a business that manufactures a product or provides a service (11)

---

## L

**landform, n.** a natural physical feature on Earth's surface (5)

**lava, n.** magma, or melted rock, that reaches Earth's surface (69)

---

## M

**magma, n.** melted rock inside Earth's crust (50)

**mine, v.** to dig into the earth in search of minerals or coal (47)

**moisture, n.** small amounts of water, either in the air or on a surface (64)

**mountain range, n.** a line or group of mountains (44)

---

## N

**The National Mall, n.** a tree-lined park in Washington, D.C., that is surrounded by museums, monuments, and government buildings (22)

**national park, n.** a piece of land that is protected by the federal government because of its natural beauty or historical importance (27)

---

**natural resource, n.** something from nature that is useful to humans (2)

---

## O

**oil field, n.** an oil-rich area where equipment is set up to remove the oil from the ground (52)

---

## P

**peninsula, n.** a piece of land sticking out into a body of water, so that it is almost surrounded by water (28)

**populated, adj.** having people living in the area (15)

**port, n.** a town or city built around a harbor, where ships can dock (15)

---

## R

**ranch, n.** a large farm where livestock is raised (52)

**region, n.** an area of Earth's surface that has some unique geographic characteristic that sets it apart from other areas (2)

**reservation, n.** an area of land set aside by the federal government for Native Americans (41)

---

## S

**"space program," (phrase)** the series of government-supported efforts to explore outer space (54)

---

## V

**volcano, n.** a mountain that has cracks leading to openings deep inside the earth from which hot, melted rock may sometimes erupt (69)





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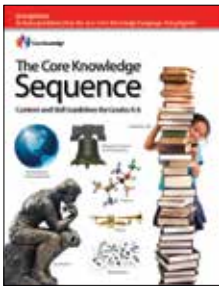
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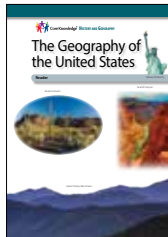
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