

Connections to TODAY

GIS/GPS

Technology has changed the way we make maps. Most mapmakers use software programs called geographic information systems (GIS). This software combines information from satellite images, printed text, and statistics. A Global Positioning System (GPS) helps people locate places based on data broadcast by satellites.



Five Themes and Six Essential Elements of Geography

GUIDING QUESTION *How do geographers use the five themes and six essential elements of geography?*

To understand how our world is connected, some geographers have broken the study of geography into five **themes** or six essential elements.

Five Themes of Geography

The Five Themes of Geography are (1) location, (2) place, (3) human-environment interaction, (4) movement, and (5) regions. You will see these themes highlighted in the geography skills questions throughout the book.

Six Essential Elements

Recently, geographers have begun to divide the study of geography into Six Essential Elements. Understanding these elements will help you build your knowledge of geography.

The World in Spatial Terms What do geographers do when studying a certain place? They first take a look at where the place is located. Location is a useful starting point. By asking “Where is it?” you begin to develop an **awareness** of the world around you.

Places and Regions Place has a special meaning in geography. It refers to more than where a place is. It also describes what a place is like. It might describe physical characteristics such as landforms, climate, and plant or animal life. Or it might describe human characteristics, such as language and way of life.

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

Physical Systems When geographers study places and regions, they analyze how physical systems—such as hurricanes, volcanoes, and glaciers—shape the Earth’s surface. They also look at the communities of living things. The populations of plants and animals depend upon one another and their surroundings for survival.

ReadingHELPDESK

Academic Vocabulary

theme a topic that is studied or a special quality that connects ideas

awareness the state of having understanding or knowledge

Human Systems Geographers are interested in human systems. Human systems refer to how people have shaped our world. Geographers look at how borders are decided and why people settle in certain places and not in others. A basic theme in geography is the movement of people, ideas, and goods.

Environment and Society How does the relationship between people and their natural surroundings influence the way we live? The theme of human-environment interaction investigates this. It also shows how people use the environment and how their actions affect the environment.

The Uses of Geography Geography helps us understand the relationships among people, places, and environments. Mastering the tools and technology used for studying geography can also help us in our daily lives.

PROGRESS CHECK

Identifying Which Essential Elements of Geography might be involved in the study of an area's landforms and how they affect people living there?



Central Park in New York covers 843 acres of open land. People use the park for recreation. A yearlong study recorded about 35 million visits by people from the city and from around the world.

The 1980 eruption of Mount St. Helens in Washington state removed the top 1,314 feet (400 meters) of the volcano's peak and leveled nearly 230 square miles (595 square km) of surrounding forest. The destruction happened in a matter of minutes.

CRITICAL THINKING

Analyzing What does this photo suggest about the wildlife living in the region?

