

GEOGRAPHY STANDARD 4: The physical and human characteristics of places



Image credit: Rik Katz

Shanghai illustrates both the physical and human characteristics of place. Located on the Yangtze River Delta in eastern China with a high population density, it is the busiest container port in the world.



Image credit: D.J. Zeigler

Both physical and human characteristics of the Great Plains define places like this abandoned farmstead in rural South Dakota.

The geographically informed person must understand the genesis, evolution, and meaning of places. Places are locations having distinctive features that give them meaning and character that differs from other locations. Therefore, places are human creations, and people's lives are grounded in particular places. We come from a place, we live in a place, and we preserve and exhibit fierce pride over places. Places usually have names and boundaries and include continents, islands, countries, regions, state, cities, neighborhoods, villages, and uninhabited areas.

Therefore, Standard 4 contains these themes: The Concept of Place and The Characteristics of Places.

Places are jointly characterized by their physical and human properties. Their physical characteristics include landforms, climate, soils, and hydrology. Things such as language, religion, political systems, economic systems, and population distribution are examples of human characteristics. Places change over time as both physical and human processes change and thus modify the characteristics of a place. Places change in size and complexity as a result of new knowledge, ideas, human migrations, climatic changes, or political conflicts. Places disappear and are renamed (e.g., Czechoslovakia became the Czech Republic and Slovakia, the Spanish rebuilt Tenochtitlan and renamed it Mexico City, and St. Petersburg changed to Leningrad and then reverted back to St. Petersburg).

Knowing the physical and human characteristics of their own places influences how people think about who they are. Personal, community, and national identities are inextricably bound with a person's and a population's experiences in those places. Knowing about other places influences how people understand other peoples, cultures, and regions of the world. Such knowledge not only broadens a person's world perspective and allows a better understanding of places with which they have a strong personal identity.

Students must understand how physical and human characteristics give meaning to places. They must also understand that these characteristics vary from place to place and change over time. Understanding these themes enables students to comprehend and appreciate the similarities and differences in places in their own communities, states, and countries, as well as across Earth's surface.

GEOGRAPHY STANDARD 4: The physical and human characteristics of places

4th GRADE

the student knows and understands:

The Concept of Place

1. Places are locations having distinctive characteristics that give them meaning and distinguish them from other locations

Therefore, the student is able to:

- A. Describe the distinguishing characteristics and meanings of several different places, as exemplified by being able to
 - ▶ Identify and describe categories of characteristics that define a location as a place (e.g., weather characteristics, population density, architectural styles, landforms, vegetation, cultures, types of industry).
 - ▶ Identify and describe the defining characteristics of the student's community as a place.
 - ▶ Describe how certain places may have meanings that distinguish them from other places (e.g., cemetery, historical park or battlefield, religious shrines or temples, state or national parks).



River boats and bridges are human characteristics that contribute to the place-based identity of New Orleans.

8th GRADE

the student knows and understands:

The Concept of Place

1. Personal, community, and national identities are rooted in and attached to places

Therefore, the student is able to:

- A. Explain how personal, community, or national identities are based on places, as exemplified by being able to
 - ▶ Describe and explain the factors that contribute to the identity of being from a specific place (e.g., a “New Yorker,” a “Southerner,” a “Texan,” a postal code such as 90210).
 - ▶ Explain how a place-based identity results from the characteristics of a place (e.g., environmentally conscious Inuit of Northwest Canada, seafaring traditions of Gloucester Harbor, Massachusetts, nomadic herders in the eastern steppes of Mongolia).
 - ▶ Explain how place-based identities can sometimes result in stereotypes of people from a specific place (e.g., fitness-conscious people from Colorado, cowboys from Wyoming or Texas, miners from Appalachia, coffee-drinking people from Seattle).

12th GRADE

the student knows and understands:

The Concept of Place

1. The effects of place-based identities on personal, community, national, and world events

Therefore, the student is able to:

- A. Explain how and why place-based identities can shape events at various scales, as exemplified by being able to
 - ▶ Explain how place-based identities contribute to patterns of fan support for sporting events (e.g., the World Cup, Olympic competitions, the US National Football League).
 - ▶ Explain how neighborhood place-based identities can shape politics in urban areas (e.g., ethnicity, age, socioeconomic status, university communities).
 - ▶ Explain how regional identities can be the basis for nationalistic movements within a country (e.g., Catalonians or the Basques in Spain, Native Hawaiians in Hawaii, the end of Indonesian occupation in East Timor).



The city of New Orleans is heavily influenced by all the surrounding water features including the Mississippi River and Lake Pontchartrain. Data source: Landsat 7, USGS Center for Earth Resources Observation and Science Center (EROS).

GEOGRAPHY STANDARD 4: The physical and human characteristics of places

4th GRADE

the student knows and understands:

The Characteristics of Places

2. Places have physical and human characteristics

Therefore, the student is able to:

- A. Describe and compare the physical characteristics of places at a variety of scales, local to global, as exemplified by being able to
- ▶ Describe and compare the climatic conditions at different places in the United States (e.g., deserts, mountains, rainy regions of the Pacific Northwest).
 - ▶ Describe and compare the vegetation in different places in the world (e.g., deserts, mountains, rain forests, plains).
 - ▶ Describe and compare the physical environments and landforms of different places in the world (e.g., mountains, islands, valleys or canyons, mesas).
- B. Describe and compare the human characteristics of places at a variety of scales, local to global, as exemplified by being able to
- ▶ Describe and compare the types of clothing, housing, and transportation used in different countries located at different latitudes in the world.
 - ▶ Describe and compare the human characteristics of rural versus urban locations in the United States (e.g., single family homes versus apartment buildings, different languages and cultures in urban areas).
 - ▶ Describe and compare the types of grocery and food items from different countries in the local supermarket.

8th GRADE

the student knows and understands:

The Characteristics of Places

2. Physical and human characteristics of places change

Therefore, the student is able to:

- A. Explain the ways that physical processes change places, as exemplified by being able to
- ▶ Describe and explain how places near a river may change over time (e.g., flood plains, alluvial soils, new channels).
 - ▶ Explain the ways in which islands and coastal places may change as a result of sea level rise.
 - ▶ Explain how changes in climate may result in changes to places (e.g., drought and stressed vegetation, more precipitation and increased vegetation, warmer temperatures and longer growing seasons at higher latitudes).
- B. Explain the ways that human processes change places, as exemplified by being able to
- ▶ Describe and explain how the introduction of a new industry or the closing of an existing industry could change the characteristics of a place.
 - ▶ Explain how the construction of a new bridge between two cities or creating a new traffic pattern could result in changes in those places.
 - ▶ Explain the ways in which a battle can change a place (e.g., the Battle of Gettysburg during the Civil War, the invasion of Normandy during World War II, the Battle of Salamis in ancient Greece, the American War for Independence).

12th GRADE

the student knows and understands:

The Characteristics of Places

2. The interaction of physical and human systems result in the creation of and changes to places

Therefore, the student is able to:

- A. Explain how physical or human characteristics interact to create a place by giving it meaning and significance, as exemplified by being able to
- ▶ Describe and explain how community identities are formed by the characteristics of a place (e.g., New Orleans as a port city and as an enclave for French cultural heritage; New York as the centers for US finance, fashion, and art; Hong Kong as a port and financial center in China).
 - ▶ Describe and explain the reasons why the Himalayas are home to many Buddhist monasteries (e.g., Tashichhodzong or Tiger's Nest Monastery in Bhutan).
 - ▶ Explain how human mythology can create special meaning and significance to a place (e.g., Uluru [Ayers Rock] in Australia as part of the Aboriginal creation story, Delphi as the navel of the Earth in Ancient Greece, the construction of Stonehenge in England).
- B. Explain how physical or human characteristics interact to change the meaning and significance of places, as exemplified by being able to
- ▶ Explain how the reforms of India's education system provided a foundation for the expansion of high-tech industries in Bangalore and Hyderabad.
 - ▶ Explain how the post-World War II treaties created Berlin as a divided city that represented the Cold War conflict between the United States and the former Soviet Union.
 - ▶ Explain how the physical features in Panama made it a favorable location to build a canal to reduce the travel time around South America.

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Image credit: Susan Gallagher Hefron

Mesa Verde National Park preserves a place where Ancestral Puebloans built stone villages in the natural alcoves of the canyon walls of what is today southwest Colorado.