

**GEOGRAPHY STANDARD 17: How to apply geography to interpret the past**

Map credit: Library of Congress, Geography and Map Division

*In 1803, the Lewis and Clark Expedition started up the Missouri River to explore the recently acquired Louisiana Territory which essentially doubled the land area of the United States at the time. This map published in 1814 by Samuel Lewis shows the track of the expedition.*

**The geographically informed person** must understand the importance of bringing spatial and ecological perspectives of geography to bear on the events of history, and vice versa, and the value of learning about the geographies of the past. An understanding of geography informs an understanding of history. There is a significant inherent link between the two disciplines.

Therefore, Standard 17 contains these themes: Using Geography to Interpret the Past, Changes in Geographic Contexts, and Perceptions of Geographic Contexts.

The geographies of past times carry important messages for understanding the world of today. The events of human history have played out on a vast and complex geographic stage; countless generations have tried to adapt to what Earth has provided in the form of climate, land and water resources, plants and animals, and transportation routes. All of these things are shaped by the ongoing interactions and interdependence of physical and human systems and have created the contexts in which history has unfolded.

History is about changes over time set into the context of space and environment. The events of history are all place-based. Students need to understand the fundamental processes of change in geographic contexts. Events are influenced by people's perceptions of geographic contexts and by their perspectives on events.

Students must understand the spatial organization of the world in the past; consider the ways in which different people understood and assessed the physical and human geographical features of their spatial and environmental contexts; and pay attention to the beliefs and attitudes of people in the past regarding the environment, human migration, land use, and their own rights and privileges versus those of others.

Understanding these themes enables students to interpret and understand historical issues by knowing what the world was like in the past, how it changed, and how it was perceived by different people and groups at a given place at a given time.



Image credit: Phil Geramehl

*Canals greatly increased the efficiency and lowered the costs of transportation in the eastern United States during the early 1800s. A restored canal boat passes through a lock in one of the historically preserved canal sections.*



Essential Element: The Uses of Geography

**GEOGRAPHY STANDARD 17: How to apply geography to interpret the past**

**4<sup>th</sup> GRADE**

the student knows and understands:

**Using Geography to Interpret the Past**

**1. Geographic contexts (the human and physical characteristics of places and environments) are the settings for events in the past**

Therefore, the student is able to:

- A. Describe the geographic context in which a historical event occurred, as exemplified by being able to
  - ▶ Describe the geographic context of famous events in US history using maps and narrative accounts (e.g., read accounts of Paul Revere's ride and follow the route on a map, compare the overland and water routes to California during the 1849 gold rush).
  - ▶ Identify physical landforms that affected overland travel during the expansion of the United States (e.g., mountain ranges and passes, river crossings, deserts).
  - ▶ Identify and describe the differences between the geographic contexts of Native American original settlement areas and the current tribal reservations in the United States.

**8<sup>th</sup> GRADE**

the student knows and understands:

**Using Geography to Interpret the Past**

**1. A historical event is influenced by the geographic context (the human and physical characteristics of places and environments) in which it occurred**

Therefore, the student is able to:

- A. Analyze and explain the influence of the geographic context on historical events, as exemplified by being able to
  - ▶ Analyze the significance of physical features that have influenced historical events (e.g., the role of hydrologic features such as the fall line, Cumberland Gap, the Ohio River, the Ogallala Aquifer, or artesian wells of the Great Plains in the settlement of the United States, the role of ocean currents and prevailing winds in exploration by Columbus, the forced transport of Africans to North and South America).
  - ▶ Explain how physical geographic features and levels of technology influence the course and outcome of battles and wars (e.g., weather conditions at Valley Forge and the outcome of the American Revolution, weather and beach features on D-Day during World War II, the role of the typhoon winds in the defeat of the Mongols invading Japan in the 1200s).
  - ▶ Describe and explain how access to the open range of the Great Plains provided the context for the expansion of the cattle industry (e.g., free grasslands for grazing, trails across open areas to railroad trailheads).

*During the 19th century, cattle replaced bison on the grasslands of the Great Plains. An open range and free grass encouraged grazing, and unrestricted trails facilitated the movement of cattle to railroad towns where they could be shipped to eastern markets. Today, Wind Cave National Park has reestablished the American bison on South Dakota's prairie.*

*The Wilderness Road channeled westward-bound pioneers through the Cumberland Gap into the trans-Appalachian west. Today, the road is a hiking trail that passes over the crest of the Appalachians offering the opportunity to experience a part of historical geography.*

**12<sup>th</sup> GRADE**

the student knows and understands:

**Using Geography to Interpret the Past**

**1. Geographic contexts (the human and physical characteristics of places and environments) can explain the connections between sequences of historical events**

Therefore, the student is able to:

- A. Analyze and explain the connections between sequences of historical events and the geographic contexts in which they occurred, as exemplified by being able to
  - ▶ Analyze and explain how the vast size and physical geographic characteristics of Russia helped it to survive multiple military invasions (e.g., scorched-earth policy and continuous retreat, severe winter weather, length of logistical support lines for armies, distances to travel during short summer seasons).
  - ▶ Analyze the long-term development of the connections between Europe and the Americas in terms of trade of products and resources, migrations (forced and voluntary), disease diffusion, cultural diffusion, and colonization.
  - ▶ Analyze the restructuring of Africa by explaining how colonial-era boundaries were imposed on preexisting cultural geographies (e.g., race, ethnicity, language, religions) and have resulted in current boundary tensions.



Image credit: D.J. Zeigler



Image credit: Mary Claire May



## GEOGRAPHY STANDARD 17: How to apply geography to interpret the past

**4<sup>th</sup> GRADE**

the student knows and understands:

## Changes in Geographic Contexts

**2. Places, regions, and environments change over time**

Therefore, the student is able to:

- A. Analyze how places, regions, and environments change over time, as exemplified by being able to
- ▶ Construct a time line illustrating changes in land use, settlement, housing, and economic activities in the local community or region (e.g., the effects of migration, demographic changes, economic conditions).
  - ▶ Describe and analyze the change in the number of states in the United States and their boundaries.
  - ▶ Describe how the physical environment of a county or state was changed by processes of forest clearing, damming of rivers, cultivation of fields, or land leveling.

**8<sup>th</sup> GRADE**

the student knows and understands:

## Changes in Geographic Contexts

**2. Change occurs in the geographic characteristics and spatial organization of places, regions, and environments**

Therefore, the student is able to:

- A. Describe and explain changes in the geographic characteristics and spatial organizations of places, regions, and environments in the past, as exemplified by being able to
- ▶ Describe and compare population settlement patterns during different historical periods (e.g., discuss regional differences in colonial settlement patterns in North America, trace the westward expansion of the United States through land acquisitions and government incentives for land ownership).
  - ▶ Analyze the changing patterns of spatial organization in an area that has been occupied by different cultures (e.g., the settlement of the Mexico City area by Aztecs, Spanish, and the modern Mexican State).
  - ▶ Describe the changes in the spatial organization of cities over the past 100 years (e.g., the effects of suburbanization, freeway systems, public transit, skyscrapers, shopping malls).

**12<sup>th</sup> GRADE**

the student knows and understands:

## Changes in Geographic Contexts

**2. The causes and processes of change in the geographic characteristics and spatial organization of places, regions, and environments over time**

Therefore, the student is able to:

- A. Identify and explain the causes and processes of change in the geographic characteristics and spatial organization of places, regions, and environments over time, as exemplified by being able to
- ▶ Explain the diffusion of a phenomenon and the effects it had on regions of contact (e.g., the spread of diseases such as bubonic plague or species such as the African honey bee, diffusion of cell phone technology, the migration of urban dwellers to the suburbs in 20th-century United States, the spread of religious faiths).
  - ▶ Explain the causes of and short- and long-term effects of migrations on the receiving and sending regions (e.g., the Great Migration of African Americans to the cities of the North, the move to “El Norte” of Mexicans and other Central Americans in 1900 to the present, the population shift out of the Dust Bowl in the 1930s).
  - ▶ Analyze how technological changes in infrastructure have affected human activities in places, regions, and environments over time (e.g., the effects of processes of technological change, particularly suburbanization, through creation of an interstate highway system, development of the railroad spurring migration and influencing changes in land-use patterns with access to markets).



Image credit: D.J. Zeigler

High in Peru's Andes Mountains, Machu Picchu was built by the Incas, possibly as a retreat for the emperor. It survived the Spanish decimation of the Inca Empire in the 1500s and then disappeared into the rainforest for over three centuries. It has since reemerged to become one of the most valuable indigenous archaeological and historical sites in South America.

Essential Element: The Uses of Geography  
**GEOGRAPHY STANDARD 17: How to apply geography to interpret the past**

**4<sup>th</sup> GRADE**

the student knows and understands:

Perceptions of Geographic Contexts

**3. People’s perceptions of the world—places, regions, and environments—changed over time**

Therefore, the student is able to:

- A. Describe examples of people’s changing perceptions of the world, as exemplified by being able to
  - ▶ Describe how people might have perceived a place 50 or 100 miles away before the invention of the automobile, buses, or trains.
  - ▶ Describe how the reports and maps of early nautical explorers changed people’s perceptions of the world (e.g., the world was not flat, the sea did not drop off into nothingness, the world could be circumnavigated).
  - ▶ Describe how people’s perception of the environment changed over time from limitless exploitation to sustainability (e.g., pollution of rivers during industrialization, pollution of air or scarring of land from mining, depletion of American bison from overhunting).

**8<sup>th</sup> GRADE**

the student knows and understands:

Perceptions of Geographic Contexts

**3. Historical events were influenced by people’s perceptions of places, regions, and environments**

Therefore, the student is able to:

- A. Explain how historical events were influenced by people’s perceptions of people, places, regions, and environments, as exemplified by being able to
  - ▶ Explain how geographic perceptions impacted decisions of and actions by an individual, a group, or a nation (e.g., the perception of land uses and its values leading to the creation and later dissolution of the Indian Territory in the United States, views held resulting in Australia initially being used as a penal colony, perceptions of desert regions as resource-poor changed when oil was discovered).
  - ▶ Analyze and explain how letters, promotional literature, advertisements, and newspapers in the 19th century shaped public perceptions of the American West and led to its settlement.
  - ▶ Explain how the perception of oceans as buffers on both coasts contributed to US isolationist foreign policy until 1898.

**12<sup>th</sup> GRADE**

the student knows and understands:

Perceptions of Geographic Contexts

**3. Historical events must be interpreted in the contexts of people’s past perceptions of places, regions, and environments**

Therefore, the student is able to:

- A. Analyze and evaluate the role that people’s past perceptions of places, regions, and environments played as historical events unfolded, as exemplified as being able to
  - ▶ Describe the changes in perceptions about a group, place, or geographic feature and analyze the effects of those changes (e.g., opinions about the role of fires in national forests and parks, attitudes towards and therefore treatment of wetlands in the United States from 1700 to today, changes in attitudes about the characteristics of the Great Plains from the idea of the Great American Desert to the Dustbowl to the Breadbasket).
  - ▶ Analyze the effects of changes in environmental perception on the decision-making processes (e.g., Jamestown, Virginia, settlers perceived Virginia to be laden with gold and a continental climate conducive for settlement, African Americans migrating to the “Promised Land” of northern industrial centers to escape Jim Crow laws, Nevada’s cities changing from desert outposts or silver mining boom towns to entertainment and gold resort destinations).
  - ▶ Analyze and compare the changing perceptions of the tropical Latin American rainforests on the development policies towards their use (e.g., as a source of rubber and timber, as a barrier to transcontinental travel, as a home to indigenous populations, as a source of raw materials, as areas rich in biodiversity and in need of preservation, as a carbon sink).

Map credit: Library of Congress, Geography and Map Division



*This 1851 “Map Of The Upper Great Plains And Rocky Mountains Region” by Pierre Jean De Smet shows the territories of various North American Indian nations and early boundaries for some US states. A growing US population and desire for a transcontinental railroad to the Pacific would contribute to changes in future boundaries.*