

GEOGRAPHY STANDARD 6: How culture and experience influence people's perceptions of places and regions



Image credit: D.J. Zeigler

As the urban landscape changes over time, so do our perceptions of the city and its functions. Two very different architectural styles reflect change in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia.



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Travel offers experiences that often change an individual's perceptions about people, places, and regions.

The geographically informed person must understand that our own culture and life experiences shape the way we perceive places and regions. Perceptions are the basis for understanding a place's location, extent, characteristics, and significance. Throughout our lives, culture and experience shape our worldviews, which in turn influence our perceptions of places and regions. Children growing up in the Netherlands, for example, have a much different understanding of the role of water in their lives than their peers in the Sahara Desert. The difference between the abundance and scarcity of water in each of these physical environments affects every aspect of their respective cultures, including the global perceptions they will carry with them throughout their lives.

Therefore, Standard 6 contains these themes: The Perception of Places and Regions and Changes in the Perception of Places and Regions.

Worldviews, and therefore our cultural identities, reflect multiple factors. Ideology, race, ethnicity, language, gender, age, religion, history, politics, social class, and economic status influence how we perceive the place where we live and other parts of the world. The significance that an individual or group attaches to a particular place or region may be influenced by feelings of belonging or alienation, a sense of being an insider or outsider, a sense of history and tradition or of novelty and unfamiliarity. Some places and regions hold great significance for some groups of people, but not for others. For example, for Muslims the city of Mecca is the most holy of religious places, whereas for non-Muslims it has only historical and cultural significance.

Perceptions of places and regions change. In cities, perceptions of neighborhoods change over years as they pass through cycles of decline and gentrification, and regions such as the US Great Plains, once perceived as the Great American Desert, the Dustbowl, and now the Breadbasket of America, change over decades.

Students must understand the factors that influence their own perceptions of places and regions, paying special attention to the effects that personal and group points of view can have on their understanding of the worlds of other groups and cultures. Understanding these themes enables students to reflect on their own perceptions of places and regions, thereby avoiding the dangers of egocentric and ethnocentric stereotyping of the worlds of others.

GEOGRAPHY STANDARD 6: How culture and experience influence people's perceptions of places and regions

4th GRADE*the student knows and understands:*

The Perception of Places and Regions

1. People can have different views of the same places and regions*Therefore, the student is able to:*

- A. Describe how people view places in their community differently, as exemplified by being able to
- ▶ Identify and describe how people may view places in the community differently (e.g., teenagers and senior citizens responding to a skateboard park versus a senior citizens center).
 - ▶ Describe how students view three well-known places in the community (e.g., police station, hospital, grocery store, shopping mall, school, park) and use the descriptions to illustrate the differences in their views.
 - ▶ Identify and describe the different views that can exist about the design and use of places and objects in the community that are controversial (e.g., an abandoned railway right of way converted for use as a green space or trail, a public sculpture, the conversion of streets to a pedestrian mall, the addition of bike lanes to city streets).

Changes in the Perception of Places and Regions

2. People's perceptions of places and regions change as they have more life experiences*Therefore, the student is able to:*

- A. Describe how a place becomes more familiar the more it is experienced (e.g., being in a place at different periods in our lives, learning about and visiting new places), as exemplified by being able to
- ▶ Describe students' perceptions of what they thought their classroom/school setting would be like prior to attending and their current perceptions after attending.
 - ▶ Describe students' experiences with a favorite place they visit often and a new place they have only visited once to illustrate how their understanding of the frequently visited place may have changed over time.
 - ▶ Describe the experience of what it might be like moving to a new place (e.g., learning street names, finding such places as the library, parks, and playgrounds, grocery stores, and shopping malls).

8th GRADE*the student knows and understands:*

The Perception of Places and Regions

1. People's different perceptions of places and regions are influenced by their life experiences*Therefore, the student is able to:*

- A. Describe examples of how perceptions of places and regions are based on direct experiences (e.g., living in a place, travel) and indirect experiences (e.g., media, books, family, and friends), as exemplified by being able to
- ▶ Describe students' perceptions of a place that are based on indirect sources (e.g., television, films, movies, travel brochures).
 - ▶ Describe students' perceptions of a place that are based on direct sources (e.g., visiting the place, multiple visits, or residing in the place).
 - ▶ Describe students' possible stereotypical perceptions of US regions (e.g., the West as open and sprawling region, the East Coast as densely populated and noisy, the South full of small towns where people move at a slower pace) and upon what experience or information their perceptions are based.

Changes in the Perception of Places and Regions

2. Perceptions of places and regions change by incorporating multiple direct and indirect experiences*Therefore, the student is able to:*

- A. Analyze the ways in which people change their views of places and regions as a result of media reports or interactions with other people, as exemplified by being able to
- ▶ Describe the changing views people may develop about places featured prominently in the news (e.g., Super Bowl site or World Series cities, the scene of a natural disaster, a venue hosting a significant international meeting).
 - ▶ Analyze the way in which traveling to a new place (city, state, or country) may change prior views of that place to more informed and developed views based on the experiences there (e.g., travel for sporting contests at schools, travel for outdoor recreational activities, travel for historical interests or visiting museums).
 - ▶ Analyze the effects of different sources of information that may cause people to change their views of a place or region (e.g., travel brochures or guidebooks, cable travel channels or documentaries, information from friends or family).

12th GRADE*the student knows and understands:*

The Perception of Places and Regions

1. People can view places and regions from multiple perspectives*Therefore, the student is able to:*

- A. Explain how and why people view places and regions differently as a function of their ideology, race, ethnicity, language, gender, age, religion, politics, social class, and economic status, as exemplified by being able to
- ▶ Explain how and why gated communities in wealthy suburban areas may be viewed differently by people from different socioeconomic groups.
 - ▶ Explain how and why senior citizens and college students may view recreational destinations in Florida differently.
 - ▶ Explain how and why groups of people may view a place differently (e.g., Harney Peak, South Dakota, viewed by the Lakota Sioux or the US Forest Service; Mount Fuji viewed by Japanese citizens or foreign tourists).

Changes in the Perception of Places and Regions

2. Changing perceptions of places and regions have significant economic, political, and cultural consequences in an increasingly globalized and complex world*Therefore, the student is able to:*

- A. Explain the possible consequences of people's changing perceptions of places and regions in a globalized and fractured world, as exemplified by being able to
- ▶ Explain how international alliance networks are responses to changing views about places and regions (e.g., North Atlantic Treaty Organization [NATO], European Union [EU], Organization of American States [OAS]).
 - ▶ Analyze the changes in the US perceptions of increasing consumer demand and consumption in emerging national economies, especially in such Asian nations as China, India, Singapore, and South Korea.
 - ▶ Explain the consequences of people's changing perceptions of places due to natural and human disasters (e.g., reevaluating the use of artificial levees in New Orleans after Hurricane Katrina in 2005, decreased tourism after the eruption of Indonesia's Mount Merapi in 2010, responses to terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center in 1993 and 2001).