

Name _____

Date _____

Interactions of Land and Water in Europe

Read the following passage two times. Read once for understanding. As you read the second time, underline or highlight each proper name of a physical feature of Europe.

The interactions of land and water in Europe have shaped the geography of Europe. These interactions have also shaped the lives of the people who live there. The continent of Europe is nearly 10,359,952 square kilometers (4,000,000 square miles). Its finger-like peninsulas extend into the Arctic and Atlantic Oceans and the Baltic and Mediterranean Seas. The oceans and seas lie to the north, south, and west of the continent. Only the eastern edge of the continent is landlocked. It is firmly attached to its larger neighbor, Asia, along Russia and Kazakhstan's low Ural Mountain range.

Mountains, rivers, and seacoasts dominate the landscape from north to south and east to west. Europe is the only continent with no large deserts. The Scandinavian Peninsula and islands of Great Britain are partially covered with eroded mountains laced with fjords and lakes carved out by ancient glaciers. The northern edge of Europe lies in the frozen, treeless tundra biome. But forests once covered more than 80 percent of the continent. Thousands of years of clearing the land for farming and building towns and cities has left only a few large forest areas remaining in Scandinavia, Germany, France, Spain, and Russia.

Warm, wet air from the Atlantic Ocean allowed agriculture, or farming, to thrive in chilly northern Europe. This is especially true on the North European Plain, which stretches all the way from France and southern England to Russia. Agriculture there thrives in areas that were formerly deciduous and mixed deciduous-coniferous forest. This fertile strip of land is some of the most valuable—and fought over—territory in Europe. It is so valuable because it gets plenty of rain, has good soil, and has access to rivers such as the Elbe, Rhine, and Seine that can be used to transport, or move, crops. Part of this flat, smooth plain is actually below sea level. But the people of the Netherlands built an empire by reclaiming the land for crops and pasture.

Farther south, the peaks of the Pyrenees and Alps mountain ranges form a dividing line between northern and southern Europe. These mountains stop the flow of moist air. As a result, Spain, Portugal, Italy, and other countries bordering the Mediterranean are the chaparral biome, which is a much hotter, drier climate. Olive and fruit trees thrive in this climate. Farmers raise grain, vegetables, and fruits in the Po River valley. Italy's longest river flows out of the Alps and into the Adriatic Sea in this valley.

Central and eastern Europe includes mountain ranges such as the Carpathian and Caucasus mountains. These scattered mountains interrupt grassy lowlands and river basins with rich, black soil. Trade flourishes along the Danube River. This river connects central Europe to Asia via the Black Sea.

Mountains divide Europe. But its rivers do the opposite. The great rivers begin in the mountains. They flow past historic cities and towns. They water crops and provide transportation and hydroelectric power along the way. The rivers reach their final destinations in the surrounding seas and oceans, where Europeans then reach out to connect to the rest of the world.