

RESOURCE LIBRARY  
ACTIVITY : 50 MINS

## The Physical and Cultural Landscape of Europe

Students brainstorm what they already know about the land and peoples of Europe and what they want to learn. Then they draw as much as they can of Europe on a blank map, including its borders, physical and human geography, and anything else that they recall.

### GRADES

6 - 8

### SUBJECTS

*Geography, Human Geography, Physical Geography*

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## OVERVIEW

Students brainstorm what they already know about the land and peoples of Europe and what they want to learn. Then they draw as much as they can of Europe on a blank map, including its borders, physical and human geography, and anything else that they recall.

For the complete activity with media resources, visit:

<http://www.nationalgeographic.org/activity/the-physical-and-cultural-landscape-of-europe/>

## DIRECTIONS

### 1. Activate students' prior knowledge about Europe.

If you have personally been to Europe, you may want to share some of your experiences, maps, or photos. Invite volunteers to share their personal experiences with Europe. Then ask: *What do you already know about Europe from other classes, maps, books, television, or movies?*

## 2. Have students generate ideas about Europe.

Write the following phrases on the board: What I Know, What I Think, and What I Wonder About. Divide students into pairs. Ask students to work with their partners to write down five ideas that they have about Europe. Encourage them to use the phrases on the board to help them generate ideas. Make sure they understand that their ideas can be about the people who live in Europe, the cultures, languages, land, climate, or any other ideas they have about the continent. Gather the lists together, either by asking students to orally share their ideas, or by having students write their ideas on the board in the front of the room. Make sure students understand that they will not be graded on how much they do or do not know about Europe. Explain to them that you just want to get an idea of what they know and want to learn about Europe. Students will return to these ideas later in this unit, as they learn more about Europe.

## 3. Draw physical and cultural features on a borderless map of Europe.

Distribute a copy of the map Europe Without Borders to each pair of students. Write the following list on the board:

- compass rose
- the border between Europe and Asia
- the prime meridian (0° longitude), which runs through England
- oceans
- borders of countries in Europe
- country names
- rivers, mountains, and other physical features
- areas where different languages are spoken and where particular religions are found
- historical country borders in Europe and how those have changed

Ask students to work with their partners to draw and label as much as they can from the two lists: the brainstormed list you generated as a class in Step 2 and the list you wrote on the board. Encourage students to think about and take notes about why they drew things where they did as they work. Rotate around the room as students work, using the following prompts

to better understand what students are thinking: *Why do you think that country (or physical or cultural feature) is in that location? How did you learn about that? How certain are you about your drawing?*

#### **4. Have small groups share their maps, ideas, and questions.**

Combine pairs of students to form small groups. Ask students to share their maps within the groups and to discuss their ideas and list their questions about Europe.

#### **5. Have a whole-class discussion.**

Collect students' maps for use in later lessons in this unit. Then regroup for a whole-class discussion about how difficult it was to draw features of Europe. Ask: *What were you confident about? What did you have trouble with?* Begin a class list of questions that students have about Europe. Encourage students to record the list on a separate sheet of paper, and to add to this list throughout the unit so they can find the answers before completing the unit.

## Modification

If students already have sufficient background on Europe, divide them into groups of four and ask each student to draw a different map based on only one of the following: political borders; cultural groups; physical geography; or historical change. Then have each student share his or her map with their small group, giving others in the group a chance to comment or add to the map. Finally, have the group make a list of questions that they have about Europe, and a list of things that they already know about Europe. Save the maps and lists for use in later lessons in this unit.

## Modification

If students have difficulty with this activity because they have little to no background on Europe, use the encyclopedic entries listed in the "For Further Exploration" section of this activity and/or atlases to provide them with additional background information.

## Informal Assessment

During the group discussions in Step 4, ask students to explain their understanding of the political, cultural, physical, and historical landscape of Europe. Examine students' maps to ascertain student learning. Clarify information, as needed.

## OBJECTIVES

# Subjects & Disciplines

### Geography

- [Human Geography](#)
- [Physical Geography](#)

# Learning Objectives

Students will:

- map their own prior knowledge and ideas about Europe
- develop a list of questions about Europe

# Teaching Approach

- Learning-for-use

# Teaching Methods

- Brainstorming
- Cooperative learning
- Discussions
- Hands-on learning
- Visual instruction

# Skills Summary

This activity targets the following skills:

- 21st Century Student Outcomes
  - Learning and Innovation Skills
    - Communication and Collaboration
- Critical Thinking Skills
  - Remembering
- Geographic Skills
  - Analyzing Geographic Information
  - Asking Geographic Questions
  - Organizing Geographic Information

# National Standards, Principles, and Practices

## NATIONAL COUNCIL FOR SOCIAL STUDIES CURRICULUM STANDARDS

- Theme 3:

People, Places, and Environments

## NATIONAL GEOGRAPHY STANDARDS

- Standard 1:

How to use maps and other geographic representations, geospatial technologies, and spatial thinking to understand and communicate information

- Standard 2:

How to use mental maps to organize information about people, places, and environments in a spatial context

- Standard 4:

The physical and human characteristics of places

## ISTE STANDARDS FOR STUDENTS (ISTE STANDARDS\*S)

- Standard 2:

Communication and Collaboration

### Preparation

### What You'll Need

## MATERIALS YOU PROVIDE

- Paper
- Pencils
- Pens

## REQUIRED TECHNOLOGY

- Internet Access: Optional
- Tech Setup: 1 computer per classroom, Projector

## PHYSICAL SPACE

- Classroom

## GROUPING

- Large-group instruction
- Small-group instruction

## OTHER NOTES

Review students' lists from Step 2 to get an idea of what students know and want to learn about Europe. You can use this information to help shape the lessons that follow.

## BACKGROUND & VOCABULARY

### Background Information

Europe as a continent is usually separated from Asia along the Ural Mountains and from Africa by the Mediterranean Sea. It is in the northern hemisphere and the eastern and western hemispheres. The latitudinal extent is such that Europe extends from the subarctic to Mediterranean realms; from approximately 75° North to 35° North. Europe is farther north in its latitudinal extent than the United States. Europe's latitudinal position subjects it to the cyclical movements of global pressure belts and wind systems, and thus changeable climate. Europe is located in the heart of the world's landmasses, placing it in a location for maximum efficiency of world contact. Convergence of sea routes on Europe fostered the exchange of ideas and goods. Europe's shape allows for a mingling of land and sea, which has moderated

the climate and provided access to other world areas. No place is over 483 kilometers (300 miles) from the sea. Europe has a moderate climate, no deserts, ice-free ports, and an extensive radial river system.

Consisting of approximately 6,437,376 kilometers (4,000,000 square miles), Europe is a relatively small area. Although small in area, Europe is both densely populated and extremely diverse in its cultural makeup and has been a world interaction zone of people and cultures. Key cultural components that shape national and cultural identity in Europe are language and religion. There are over 30 languages spoken in Europe today. Most Europeans speak one of six Indo-European languages, including: Hellenic (Greek); Romance (Latin-based languages of the Mediterranean and Romanian); Celtic (largely extinct, but Gaelic, Welsh, and Breton); Germanic (Scandinavian languages, modern German, Dutch, and English); Balto-Slavonic; and Illyrian-Thracian (Albanian). There are several prominent non-Indo-European languages in Europe, too. These languages belong to their own language families, including the: Uralic family (Finn-Ugric); Semitic family (Arabic and Hebrew); Altaic family (Turkish); and Basque (unknown origin).

The major religions currently dominating European culture are Christianity, Islam, and Judaism. Though Europe is predominantly Christian, in the Balkans, a handful of states have a majority, plurality, or large minority of the population that is affiliated with Islam. These states include Albania, Kosovo, Bosnia Herzegovina, and Macedonia. In addition, Arab, Turkish, and other non-European originating immigration has increased the number of people practicing Islam throughout Europe. Most of the Jewish populations of Europe were eradicated or forced to flee before and during the World War II. Afterward, many of those surviving resettled in Israel. Following the two world wars, Christianity in Europe has largely begun to wane. Though it is still very much a cultural component, the amount of people practicing and affiliating with churches continues to rapidly decline.

## Prior Knowledge

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## Recommended Prior Activities

- None

# Vocabulary

<b>Term</b>	<b>Part of Speech</b>	<b>Definition</b>
<b>border</b>	<i>noun</i>	natural or artificial line separating two pieces of land.
<b>climate</b>	<i>noun</i>	all weather conditions for a given location over a period of time.
<b>compass rose</b>	<i>noun</i>	symbol indicating the cardinal directions (N, S, E, W).
<b>continent</b>	<i>noun</i>	one of the seven main land masses on Earth.
<b>country</b>	<i>noun</i>	geographic territory with a distinct name, flag, population, boundaries, and government.
<b>cultural landscape</b>	<i>noun</i>	human imprint on the physical environment.
<b>culture</b>	<i>noun</i>	learned behavior of people, including their languages, belief systems, social structures, institutions, and material goods.
<b>landscape</b>	<i>noun</i>	the geographic features of a region.
<b>language</b>	<i>noun</i>	set of sounds, gestures, or symbols that allows people to communicate.
<b>location</b>	<i>noun</i>	position of a particular point on the surface of the Earth.
<b>longitude</b>	<i>noun</i>	distance east or west of the prime meridian, measured in degrees.
<b>mountain</b>	<i>noun</i>	landmass that forms as tectonic plates interact with each other.
<b>ocean</b>	<i>noun</i>	large body of salt water that covers most of the Earth.
<b>physical features</b>	<i>noun</i>	naturally occurring geographic characteristics.
<b>prime meridian</b>	<i>noun</i>	imaginary line around the Earth running north-south, 0 degrees longitude.
<b>religion</b>	<i>noun</i>	a system of spiritual or supernatural belief.
<b>river</b>	<i>noun</i>	large stream of flowing fresh water.

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## For Further Exploration

### Articles & Profiles

- [National Geographic Education: Europe—Resources](#)
- [National Geographic Education: Europe—Physical Geography](#)



- [National Geographic Education: Europe—Human Geography](#)

## Maps

- [NG MapMaker Interactive: Europe](#)
- [NG MapMaker 1-Page Map: Europe](#)
- [Europe MapMaker Kit](#)

## Websites

- [National Geographic Education: National Teacher Leadership Academy \(NTLA\)](#)



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