

RECOMMENDED GRADES: 4-8



TIME NEEDED: 45 MINUTES

Description

Students find major cities located in North America and describe how geographic features influence the location of these cities.

Learning Objectives

Students will:

- learn where major cities are located in North America and how geographic features influence the location of these cities

Materials

- A Tale of Twenty Cities Cards (20)
- Map Keys (optional)
- National Geographic Student World Atlas (optional)

Preparation

10 minutes

- Read over the activity, make adaptations for student grade level, and gather materials.

Rules



Have students remove shoes before walking on the map.

DIRECTIONS

PART ONE: FINDING THE TWENTY CITIES

1. Divide the class into 4 teams—red, yellow, green, and blue—and instruct each team to sit down on the yellow border behind their “Base Camp” (the colored circles in the corners of the map).

2. Give each team five (5) activity cards to place on their Base Camp. Tell students they will take turns finding the cities listed on their cards, placing the card on the map where the city is located. Only one person per team is allowed on the map at a time. Teammates can help but they must be on the yellow border near their Base Camp.
3. Tell students that the cities represented are urban or metropolitan areas with over one million people. (They are not necessarily the largest cities in North America.)
4. After all cards have been placed, ask all students to explore the map and make observations about where cities are located. As they explore ask them these questions:

What do you notice about where cities tend to be located? How do you describe the areas where you find no large cities?

PART TWO: THINK LIKE A GEOGRAPHER!

1. After students make their observations, have them return to their Base Camp and discuss what they observed. Tell teams to select one student to be their group spokesperson to report their findings to the class.
2. When the spokespeople are sharing their observations, assist them by emphasizing how human needs (food, shelter, transportation, economic opportunities) determine where cities are located. You may want to use the Water Features and Physical Features on the North America Map Key to help students interpret the map colors and symbols. Supplement the discussions as needed with these geographic terms and questions:

Topography

Is the land flat? Are there steep mountains that make it difficult to get around (or very high mountains where it may be difficult to breathe)? Is the elevation very low and likely to experience flooding?

Climate

Is it excessively hot or cold? Is it very dry? Humid? Does it receive a lot of snow, rain, or wind? Is the area likely to experience hurricanes or tornadoes? Are there other factors that may be hazardous to human settlement?

Transportation

Is the city near or on a body of water such as a river, lake, or ocean? Is it along a natural transportation route such as a river? Is it near a pass through a mountain range? Is it near a transition zone such as the beginning or end of a plain or range of mountains?

Natural resources

Is the city near a source of natural or raw materials such as an ocean (seafood) or minerals (iron ore, coal, copper, or oil)? Is it near an area where food may be easily grown?

3. Assist students with the helpful geographic characteristics of the cities found below. They and you may note others as well. Make note of what can and what cannot be observed on the map. For example, looking at Houston, one will notice it is on a port on the Gulf of Mexico and within trade reach of Latin America, but there is no indication on the map of oil wells. Yet oil has figured heavily in Houston becoming a large city.

EXTENDING THE LEARNING

- Deepen this discussion by directing students to look at climate, vegetation, population, and economic maps in the National Geographic Student World Atlas, pages 18–23 and 56–61.

NOTES ON THE TWENTY CITIES

Below are some of the geographic characteristics that help to tell the tale of why these cities are where they are.

Chicago: The Great Lakes; start of the Great Plains; railroad and shipping crossroads

Denver: Location at the western end of the Great Plains and the eastern edge of the Rocky Mountains

Detroit: Access to Great Lakes and close to raw materials for manufacturing

Guadalajara: Near rivers and lake; high elevation; near raw materials and minerals

Havana: Deep-water port with access to U.S., Mexico, Central America, and the Caribbean as well as Europe and Africa

Houston: Port on the Gulf Coast; near oil; trade with Latin America and Europe

Los Angeles: Pacific Ocean; trade with Pacific Rim countries, Asia, and Latin America

Managua: One of Central America's warmest capitals, located on a lake and not far from the Pacific Ocean

Mexico City: Central location; high elevation and cooler, wetter climate

Monterrey: Located near international border and Gulf Coast

Montreal: On St. Lawrence Seaway; access to Great Lakes; near raw materials; near international border

New York: Port on Atlantic Ocean; trade with Europe and Africa; Hudson River trade and transportation

Phoenix: Warm, dry climate for people with health concerns related to cold and humidity

Pittsburgh: Three-river junction; near deposits of iron ore and coal used to make steel

Puebla: Central location near mineral deposits; higher elevation and cooler climate

A TALE OF TWENTY CITIES

San Diego: Deep-water Pacific Ocean port; mild, warm climate

Santo Domingo: Caribbean deep-water port

St. Louis: Mississippi and Missouri River junction; trade north, south, west, and even east at the Ohio River just south of the city

Tegucigalpa: Central location between Atlantic and Pacific Oceans; higher elevation for cooler temperatures; in the tropics; rich mountain (volcanic) soil for crops

Toronto: On Lake Ontario; transportation route access to St. Lawrence Seaway