

**RESOURCE LIBRARY**  
**LESSON**

## Gathering Ideas About Europe

Students gather their ideas about the land and peoples of Europe. They map and create lists of things they know about Europe and generate questions they have about the land and peoples of Europe.

**GRADES**

6 - 8

**SUBJECTS**

*Geography, Human Geography, Physical Geography*

**CONTENTS**

3 Activities

## ACTIVITY 1: INFLUENCE OF SHAPE AND SIZE

### 1 50 MINS

## DIRECTIONS

### 1. Introduce the activity and assign countries.

Tell students they will examine the shape of a country in Europe with coastal borders and analyze the influence that shape may have on the human activities within the country. Divide students into five small groups, and assign each group a country in Europe from the following list:

- Bulgaria
- Estonia
- Germany
- Italy
- Spain

## 2. Have groups use mapping tools to explore countries.

Have each small group use the MapMaker Interactive to explore the physical features of their assigned country, and the MapMaker 1-Page Map tool to explore the political geography.

## 3. Have groups draw and label borders, physical features, and cities in their countries.

Ask groups to sketch the general shape of their assigned country on a blank sheet of paper and work together to do the following:

- identify the borders that are on a coast
- identify the borders that are on land
- note physical features, if any, that define the land borders
- identify any countries that share a border with the assigned country
- locate the capital and other major cities

## 4. Have students discuss the following questions within groups and as a whole class.

Write the questions below on the board for students to refer to during their discussions. Encourage them to make any notes on their maps and to be prepared to share their ideas with the whole class.

- *How would you describe the country's shape?*
- *How much of the border is coastal? How much is land?*
- *How many countries border yours?*
- *Where is the capital city located relative to the shape?*
- *Where are other major cities located relative to the shape?*
- *What problems or advantages might these locations offer given the shape of the country?*
- *How might the shape influence such human activities as transportation, government, defense, regional identities within the country, and similar activities?*

Discuss each question as a class. Give each small group an opportunity to share their ideas as you move through the list of questions.

## 5. Make a connection to what students will do in Lesson 2, Activity 2 of this unit.

Restate the guiding question: How does the shape of a country influence the human activities within the country? Remind students that these factors of shape and size define a physical space over which a country exercises control and can influence the ways in which human activity is structured. Tell students that, in Lesson 2, Activities 2 and 3 of this unit, they will explore what they know about these factors at a larger scale: in the continent of Europe and its physical and cultural landscape.

# Modification

For Step 2: If you do not have a computer for each small group, project the mapping tools at the front of the class and have each group take turns using the computer to explore their assigned country.

# Extending the Learning

Have students use National Geographic Traveler guides to find more information about each country in Europe with coastal borders that they explored in this activity.

- Bulgaria
- Estonia
- Germany
- Italy
- Spain

## OBJECTIVES

# Subjects & Disciplines

### Geography

- Human Geography
- Physical Geography

# Learning Objectives

Students will:

- examine the shape of a selected country in Europe
- analyze the influence that shape may have on the human activities within the country

## Teaching Approach

- Learning-for-use

## Teaching Methods

- Cooperative learning
- Discussions
- Hands-on learning
- Multimedia instruction
- Research

## Skills Summary

This activity targets the following skills:

- 21st Century Student Outcomes
  - Learning and Innovation Skills
    - Communication and Collaboration
- Critical Thinking Skills
  - Analyzing
  - Creating
  - Understanding
- Geographic Skills
  - Acquiring Geographic Information
  - Analyzing Geographic Information
  - 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 15:**

How physical systems affect human systems

- **Standard 4:**

The physical and human characteristics of places

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

- **Standard 2:**

Communication and Collaboration

### **Preparation**

## BACKGROUND & VOCABULARY

### Background Information

Borders of regions or of countries define an area, which has a particular shape and size. Sometimes physical features define the border of a region or a country. For example, coastlines are borders between the regions of land and water, and mountains may serve as borders between different countries or different cultural groups. Country borders, however determined, define a physical space over which a country exercises control. When a political border is imposed on the physical landscape, it defines the area, shape, and size of the country, as well as the physical features and natural resources available. These factors of shape and size can influence the ways in which human activity is structured; for example, land use, transportation, and settlement patterns. Sometimes the shape and size suggest that a country may want to expand its borders in order to increase its size, change its shape, and/or control more resources.

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, an extensive radial river system, and a shape that aids fishing. Consisting of approximately 6,437,376 kilometers (4,000,000 square miles), Europe is a relatively small area. Islands are near the mainland, and water widths are about the same. There is no endless expanse of sea, and no land area is far away.

# Prior Knowledge

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## Recommended Prior Activities

- None

## Vocabulary

Term	Part of Speech	Definition
border	noun	natural or artificial line separating two pieces of land.
capital	noun	city where a region's government is located.
city	noun	large settlement with a high population density.
climate	noun	all weather conditions for a given location over a period of time.
coast	noun	edge of land along the sea or other large body of water.
country	noun	geographic territory with a distinct name, flag, population, boundaries, and government.
cultural landscape	noun	human imprint on the physical environment.
island	noun	body of land surrounded by water.
natural resource	noun	a material that humans take from the natural environment to survive, to satisfy their needs, or to trade with others.
physical features	noun	naturally occurring geographic characteristics.
political boundary	noun	imaginary line separating one political unit, such as a country or state, from another.
region	noun	any area on Earth with one or more common characteristics. Regions are the basic units of geography.
transportation	noun	movement of people or goods from one place to another.

# ACTIVITY 2: THE PHYSICAL AND CULTURAL LANDSCAPE OF EUROPE I 50 MINS

## 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**

## 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

### Recommended Prior Activities

- None

## Vocabulary

Term	Part of Speech	Definition
border	<i>noun</i>	natural or artificial line separating two pieces of land.
climate	<i>noun</i>	all weather conditions for a given location over a period of time.
compass rose	<i>noun</i>	symbol indicating the cardinal directions (N, S, E, W).
continent	<i>noun</i>	one of the seven main land masses on Earth.
country	<i>noun</i>	geographic territory with a distinct name, flag, population, boundaries, and government.
cultural landscape	<i>noun</i>	human imprint on the physical environment.

Term	Part of Speech	Definition
culture	noun	learned behavior of people, including their languages, belief systems, social structures, institutions, and material goods.
landscape	noun	the geographic features of a region.
language	noun	set of sounds, gestures, or symbols that allows people to communicate.
location	noun	position of a particular point on the surface of the Earth.
longitude	noun	distance east or west of the prime meridian, measured in degrees.
mountain	noun	landmass that forms as tectonic plates interact with each other.
ocean	noun	large body of salt water that covers most of the Earth.
physical features	noun	naturally occurring geographic characteristics.
prime meridian	noun	imaginary line around the Earth running north-south, 0 degrees longitude.
religion	noun	a system of spiritual or supernatural belief.
river	noun	large stream of flowing fresh water.

## ACTIVITY 3: OBSERVING PHYSICAL AND CULTURAL LANDSCAPES | 50 MINS

### DIRECTIONS

#### 1. Practice differentiating between physical and cultural landscape features.

Draw a T-Chart on the board. Add the left column head: Physical or Natural Features, and the right column head: Cultural or Human Features. Shuffle and then tape each of the index cards you prepared ahead of time to the board, to the left or right of the chart, to serve as a word bank. Ask students to do a word sort by moving the words into the correct columns. Then discuss the completed chart. Ask: *How did you know which words were physical, or natural, landscape features? How did you know which words were cultural, or human, landscape features?* Tell students that they will use their understanding of physical and human landscape features to make observations about locations in Europe in photographs.

#### 2. Make observations about the physical and cultural landscapes in the Europe photo gallery.

Write the following questions on the board for students to refer to:

- *Does this photo look like Europe to you? Why or why not?*
- *Where do you think this is located? What clues in the photo helped you determine the location?*
- *What else can you see in this photo? What is happening? How can you tell?*

Distribute a copy of the worksheet *Make Observations: Multiple Countries or Regions* to each student. Project the Europe photo gallery so all students can view it. Be sure to cover the captions, which include location information, with a sheet of paper. Make sure students understand that the gallery includes images from different countries and regions of Europe. Pause on each photo and provide students with enough time to take notes about their observations about the physical and cultural landscapes. As students look at each photo, encourage them to think about the questions on the board. Continue until students have completed the worksheet for the full photo gallery. Students may have some difficulty classifying physical and human features in photos of landscapes when there is some ambiguity. For example, if a line of trees was planted for effect, students may not know if it should be classified as natural or human. Provide support, as needed.

### **3. Have students make inferences about the locations, places, and people in the photos.**

Divide students into small groups. In groups, have students share the observations they made and note the differences and similarities between observations. Then have students use their observations as a basis to make inferences about the locations, the places, and the people and list them on the backs of their worksheets.

### **4. Discuss students' observations and inferences as a whole class.**

Regroup as a whole class. Invite volunteers to share their observations and the inferences they made based on those observations. Allow other students to ask questions and comment.

### **5. Confirm and identify on a map the location of each photograph.**

Project the Europe photo gallery a second time. Scroll through the gallery, pausing on each photo to read aloud its caption. Have students show, by raising their hands, if they correctly inferred the location of each. Invite volunteers to share what geographic clues helped them

infer correctly. If time allows, use the MapMaker 1-Page Map of Europe to identify where each location is on a map.

# Modification

In Step 2, model the observation of one, familiar landscape for the whole class before asking students to make observations using the Europe photo gallery.

# Modification

This activity uses photographs from different countries and regions of Europe. You may choose to use photographs from one country or one region. If so, use provided worksheet Make Observations: One Country or Region.

## Extending the Learning

- Have students search for other images of Europe either online, in [National Geographic Traveler magazine](#), or in magazines or other media. They can sort pictures into groups: those that match students' current understanding of Europe and those that do not match. Ask students to write descriptions and analyses of each picture to support their grouping.
- Have students work independently to read a book and look at its pictures or photographs. Have them complete the provided worksheet Make Observations: Fiction or Nonfiction Books.

## OBJECTIVES

## Subjects & Disciplines

### Geography

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

## Learning Objectives

Students will:

- view photos of Europe to determine if the photos match their own ideas about Europe
- search for geographic clues within photos to learn more about the subjects shown

# Teaching Approach

- Learning-for-use

# Teaching Methods

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

# Skills Summary

This activity targets the following skills:

- 21st Century Student Outcomes
  - Learning and Innovation Skills
    - Communication and Collaboration
- Critical Thinking Skills
  - Analyzing
  - Applying
  - Understanding
- 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:



## NATIONAL GEOGRAPHY STANDARDS

- **Standard 4:**

The physical and human characteristics of places

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

- **Standard 2:**

Communication and Collaboration

### Preparation

## BACKGROUND & VOCABULARY

### Background Information

In addition to using maps, making observations is another critical tool for understanding our world. In the field, discoveries are communicated to others in descriptions of our observations, and as such represent the varied perspectives of observers. For example, observers may select different phenomena to observe, may carry out observations in different ways, and may differ in how those observations are recorded. While students may not be able to take a field trip to foreign lands, you can provide opportunities for observation and discovery through the use of photographs, drawings, and writings. Making observations is a valuable skill that scientists use in the field.

This activity is useful for helping students to build visual landscape observations skills, and build and/or refine a mental construct for shared characteristics within a region. It is important for students to understand that regions are not uniform across their area. Geographers often establish sub-regions to help in understanding an area. For example, the United States is divided into the following sub-regions: West, Southwest, Midwest, Northeast, and Southeast. And according to the United Nations, the continent of Europe has four distinct geographic sub-regions: Eastern Europe, Northern Europe, Southern Europe, and Western Europe.

# Prior Knowledge

["mental construct of Europe"]

## Recommended Prior Activities

- None

## Vocabulary

Term	Part of Speech	Definition
border	<i>noun</i>	natural or artificial line separating two pieces of land.
continent	<i>noun</i>	one of the seven main land masses on Earth.
country	<i>noun</i>	geographic territory with a distinct name, flag, population, boundaries, and government.
cultural landscape	<i>noun</i>	human imprint on the physical environment.
culture	<i>noun</i>	learned behavior of people, including their languages, belief systems, social structures, institutions, and material goods.
landscape	<i>noun</i>	the geographic features of a region.
location	<i>noun</i>	position of a particular point on the surface of the Earth.
observation	<i>noun</i>	something that is learned from watching and measuring an object or pattern.
physical features	<i>noun</i>	naturally occurring geographic characteristics.
region	<i>noun</i>	any area on Earth with one or more common characteristics. Regions are the basic units of geography.

