

**Cartoon**  
**MEDIA SPOTLIGHT**

## What is Geography?

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<http://education.nationalgeographic.com/media/what-geography/>

This cartoon is an introduction into the complex and rich world of geography and geographic education. It acts as a catalyst to thinking about the multi-faceted functions of geography, and the myriad of applications of the discipline. The world of geography is much more than place names and state capitals, and this cartoon aims to show the full breadth of the field.

### QUESTIONS

- Geography is clearly more than just dots on a map. So, what *is* geography?  
**Geography is interdisciplinary**—it incorporates bits and pieces from the fields of science, arts, health, humanities, law, business, engineering, and technology. The “geographic perspective” (a way to understand a topic or area using spatial relationships) focuses these bits and pieces into a dynamic kaleidoscope of ideas and data. Geography is something you do, not just something you know.

Those who study geography identify relationships between these varied subjects, graft those relationships onto a geographic space, and explain why certain systems are where they are. A common shorthand for geography is "*the why of where.*"

- Geography explores three different systems. What are they and how are they related?  
**Geographers explore physical, human, and biological systems.** The systems are often interwoven on the landscape.

For instance, how many times have you seen a river run through a city? The physical system is the river itself, the path it takes, and the landforms it influences. The human system includes communities that live along the river, and their cultural and economic livelihoods. The biological system is the series of habitats and ecosystems created by the river.

Any decision that impacts one system along the river will impact the other two. Diverting the river might cause people to relocate (human system), wildlife to lose habitat (biological system), and contribute to the health of the watershed (physical system). All three spheres of influence are connected, and all three must be considered when making decisions as a geographer.

- How might a geographer approach global problems differently than other scientists?  
**Geographers look at the spatial layout of an area in its entirety, and try to understand how the three major systems (human, biological, and physical) work together** in this environment. By looking at this spatial aspect of global issues, geographers see patterns and develop innovative solutions to complex global problems. This approach is different from other scientists because geographers look at the holistic view of major issues, and try to find a solution that benefits all three systems, while still solving the problem.

- When a geographer says that he or she examines things from a "spatial perspective", what do they mean? The old saying "location, location, location," isn't just a cliché. **Geographers focus on location more than any other factor when investigating issues on the local or global level.** Focusing on the layout of the Earth, geographers are able to come to conclusions from a spatial perspective. Understanding spatial distribution is key to understanding how the natural and man-made processes on Earth relate to one another. This is why maps and GIS technology are so important to geographers.
- Critical Thinking: How do you see the work of geographers in your everyday life? *Answers will vary!* Look around your neighborhood, school, or town for examples of the work of geographers and others using the geographic perspective. **Some examples are the road system, sewer system, weather stations, the landscape of parks and other "green areas," the placement of hospitals or stores, etc.** Think about what local systems, structures, and planning methods are rooted in geographic knowledge.

## VOCABULARY

Term	Part of Speech	Definition
<b>climate</b>	<i>noun</i>	all weather conditions for a given location over a period of time.
<b>ecologist</b>	<i>noun</i>	scientist who studies the relationships between organisms and their environments.
<b>geographic information system (GIS)</b>	<i>noun</i>	any system for capturing, storing, checking, and displaying data related to positions on the Earth's surface.
<b>geographic perspective</b>	<i>noun</i>	a way to understand a topic or area using spatial features and relationships.
<b>geography</b>	<i>noun</i>	study of places and the relationships between people and their environments.
<b>geo-literacy</b>	<i>noun</i>	the understanding of human and natural systems, geographic reasoning, and systematic decision-making.
<b>geomorphology</b>	<i>noun</i>	study of geographic features on the landscape and the forces that create them.
<b>human geography</b>	<i>noun</i>	the study of the way human communities and systems interact with their environment.
<b>location</b>	<i>noun</i>	position of a particular point on the surface of the Earth.
<b>physical geography</b>	<i>noun</i>	study of the natural features and processes of the Earth.
<b>political geographer</b>	<i>noun</i>	person who studies the spatial relationships present in government policies.
<b>relationship</b>	<i>noun</i>	how human and/or physical features of the Earth are connected to each other.



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