



Geography



What is geography?

Geography, one of the oldest sciences, is the study of the earth, people and places. It was used by ancient civilizations to explore strange new lands, satisfy curiosity, observe and describe why places were different. The word came from the Greeks and has the following meaning: “geo” = earth + “graphy” = to write about. Most people today still want to know what other places are like. Many people wish to travel to different parts of the planet such as Mount Everest, the Amazon Jungle, Florida, Europe, or Hawaii to satisfy their curiosity. The same desire takes scientists to the icy waters of the arctic, the dark cold depths of the Pacific Ocean and even to distant places in outer space in the present century. A Geographer tries to do more than just satisfy his/her curiosity about places. His/her special task is to explain how and why they differ from one another and to determine any similarities that may exist between them. In essence, geography is the science dealing with the earth’s surface, continents, climates, plants, animals, resources and the environment.

Maps

When people first began to move away from their homelands, they needed to record information to find their way home again. Eventually, they began to measure distances and readings from stars to determine their location. This led to the production of simple maps and diagrams showing distribution of land, water, and other features including vegetation, settlement patterns and transport routes. A map shows not only where places are located but also their spatial relationship to other places.

The Uniqueness of Places

No two places on the earth are identical. Geographers want to know the answers to such questions as why some parts of the earth are more densely settled than other parts; what the earth was like before humans changed its appearance; why cities have been built where they are; what might the earth look like in the future. In other words, they want to know why places are unique. No features exist on the earth without the influence of other features. Rocks are worn away by water, plants depend on climate and minerals in the soil for growth, railways affect the movement of goods and people adjust their way of living to the interrelationship between all the features on the earth.

The Landscape

The visible surface of the earth is called landscape. It results from the interaction of people with their environment. Humans have altered every part of the planet in some way whether directly or indirectly. The most obvious features of the landscape vary from place to place because people modify or change the surface of the earth to satisfy their needs. Depending on the extent of these changes, the landscape may be dominated by either natural features (particularly landscapes, climate, and vegetation) or cultural features (buildings, crops, cities, transportation routes and industry). It is not enough simply to observe the landscape. Descriptions and explanations of the interrelationships that exist between people and their environment are necessary for a complete understanding of why places are unique.

Why Study Geography?

Geography is studied to understand the world, to learn how it functions, to gain knowledge of other people, to explore places and to study the environment. If we know how people live in other parts of the world we can understand them better. We can set about to help solve problems if we have knowledge of an area, its climate and its natural resources. Knowledge of geography promotes greater understanding of the books, magazines and newspapers we read. Geography helps businesses to make decisions regarding the establishment of a factory; it helps farmers to choose crops best suited to the areas in which they live. Maps help sailors and pilots to travel from place to place. Geography can make any journey more interesting and rewarding. Above all, it helps all of us to know a little more about the planet on which we live.

[1] What is geography?

[2] Where does the term geography come from and what does it mean?

[3] What do humans use to assist them in finding their way around the earth?

[4] What does a map show?

[5] Why study geography?
