



AMERICA: THE LAST BEST HOPE

How To Incorporate the Five Themes of Geography Into the Teaching of *America: The Last Best Hope*

All social studies teachers realize that students cannot fully comprehend history without an accompanying knowledge of geography. However, teachers often limit students' exposure to the discipline of geography to the simple concept of location.

[The Five Themes of Geography](#), developed by the National Council for Geographic Education in 1984, offer teachers a way to integrate more complex geographic themes into everyday instruction.

In the Geography Resources, Student View, of the Roadmap, and in the Teacher Toolkit, Geography for Teachers, Teacher View, students and teachers will find "Geography Applications" for each chapter - always organized under the framework of The Five Themes of Geography. Please note that no teacher will touch on all five themes in each chapter. But through the course of a semester or a school year, classes can keep geography at the center of America's story by reflecting on how geography has impacted the history of each significant period of our nation's past. When looking back, classes should have had ample opportunities to explore examples of all five themes.

Teachers should think about the following when deciding how to incorporate The Five Themes of Geography when teaching the American history illuminated by each chapter of *Last Best Hope*.

Location: Early in the course, teachers should review the concepts of latitude and longitude and make sure students know the difference between *absolute* and *relative* location. Teachers can then use maps of the United States and other global areas, found in every chapter of the Roadmap under Chapter Images and Maps, both Teacher and Student Views, to insure that students can find the location of the terms listed in "Geography Applications" and that appear in the chapter.

Place: Teachers will notice that the terms listed under "Place" are more than a specific location. They are often an entire colony, state, or country. Finding the place's location is not enough for the students to understand the concept of place. To understand place, students will need to explore more deeply to find physical and human characteristics of each place. Included in discussion might be:

- What was the topography of the Place? What were key resources?
- What language was spoken there? What was the dominant religion?
- How did people make a living?
- What kind of government existed?



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Teachers and students cannot undertake such an exploration of every place listed in each chapter, but teachers should certainly engage students in such a study of some places and be sure students understand the distinction between simple *location* and *place*.

Human/Environment Interaction: Teachers realize that humans interact with and impact the environment every day. And this is certainly a topic students are well aware of in their own era of climate change. But teachers can help students understand that humans have always changed their environment in dramatic ways – even in the pre-industrial era. Primitive men on our continent hunted large game to the point of extinction. Indians in historic times used fire to hunt game and thus changed the landscape. And of course what we call the “settlement” of North America entailed changing the environment during every step of the process. To understand Human/Environment Interaction teachers can use the terms listed in “Geography Applications” and challenge students to consider:

- How did the environment change from the beginning of the period covered in the chapter until the end of the period? What human actions led to those changes?
- If you could travel in time to a historic place, what did the environment of that place look like? What human actions have led the environment of that place to appear as it does today?
- What distinguishes between desirable, necessary human interactions with the environment and harmful interactions? Why do such harmful interactions continue? Do all people agree that they are harmful? Why or why not? Are all changes to the environment negative?

Movement: The geographic theme of movement is continually present during the course of America’s history. America’s story is a story of movement: movement of the immigrants who came here, movement of the Indians displaced by European and American settlers, and movement of Americans from place to place in search of new opportunities to fulfill the “American Dream.” As students study the examples of movement listed in “Geography Applications,” they should consider:

- What “push” and what “pull” factors led to the movement in the chapter?
- What forces most often led to movement? Economic? Religious? Conflict? Persecution? Other?
- What characteristics distinguish people who move in a historical period and people who do not?
- What are major movements within our nation today? What is causing such movements? What movements are likely in the future?



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Region: Students studying the history of the United States will become quite aware of the role of regions in our nation's past. "America" was never a distinct place. For instance, from the outset, colonial Virginia and colonial Massachusetts were very different regions. Later the North and the South and the West became very different regions with very diverse physical, cultural and human characteristics. Students studying the idea of region should consider:

- What are the key climate regions of the U.S.?
- What economic activities distinguished various regions of the U.S.?
- What role has immigration played in creating distinct regions within the United States?
- When looking at a specific region, either within the U.S. or abroad, what key physical, cultural or human characteristics work together to lead us to consider that area of the globe a "region?"