

The Midwest

"The Breadbasket of the United States."



The History

Twelve states make up the Midwest region. While each state has its own unique history, there are certain details that they all have in common. Before the European explorers arrived, the Midwest region had many different Native American tribes living there. The native people had been living on the land for thousands of years. One interesting group of people living in the region were advanced mound builders. While we are not certain why their civilization vanished, many of their mounds remain and can be visited today.

Some mounds were made for burial places while others were used as platforms for homes to be built.



Monks Mound at the Cahokia Mounds located in Illinois.

European explorers created settlements throughout the Midwest region in the 1500s-1700s. Some explorers arrived searching for gold and other riches. Other explorers were traders. The Midwest offered many excellent trading locations because of its water sources. Major rivers, including the Mississippi and Ohio rivers, are located in this region. In addition, four of the five Great Lakes border the Midwest: Superior, Michigan, Huron and Erie.

The Land

In the Midwest you'll find three types of landforms. There are flat plains, rolling hills and mountains. Typically, when we think of the Midwest region we picture farmland. However, that is not all that you will find in the Midwest. North Dakota and South Dakota have mountains. Even though North Dakota, South Dakota, Nebraska and Kansas are all part of the Midwest region, they are also part of the Great Plains. The Great Plains is a grouping of states that have certain characteristics in common. Great Plains states are known for cattle ranching and for growing winter wheat crops in dry land.

The Midwest Region



Farming is very important in the Midwest. Wisconsin has many dairy farms and is one of the nation's largest producers of cheese. Indiana is famous for growing popcorn kernels. Iowa, Kansas, Nebraska, North Dakota and South Dakota grow many grain crops. Illinois, Iowa, and Kansas grow soybeans. Minnesota and Michigan grow fruit and berry crops. These are just some examples of the many important crops that are farmed in the Midwest region.



Much of the land in the Midwest was once home to millions of bison (also called American buffalo) who grazed on the grasses there. Due to over-hunting the bison became nearly extinct.

Production in the Midwest Region

In addition to growing crops, there are some other important industries in the Midwest. Mining, shipping, tourism, timber, and manufacturing are all important to the economy here. Coal mines are found in several Midwestern states. Access to major rivers and the Great Lakes makes the Midwest very important in the shipping industry. Those major waterways are used to move many types of products across the country and into Canada. Many people visit the Great Lakes as tourists each year. The timber industry is valuable not only for providing the wood to build things but also for making paper. Manufacturing has been an important part of the Midwestern economy for over 100 years. The automobile industry has a long history in Detroit, Michigan and the surrounding areas. Henry Ford built his Model T car here. He used a moving assembly line to build his cars. That allowed many people to build a car together and to produce them much faster than they were built before.

Natural Resources

Natural resources are materials that are found in the environment, not made by humans. Humans can then use the natural resources to make other helpful things.

The Midwest Region

In the Midwest, many states have coal mines. The coal is taken out of the ground and turned into an energy source. Some states in this region have oil underground. The oil is pumped out of the ground and also used for energy and turned into gasoline. We can even find gold in the Black Hills mountains in South Dakota! There are many forests in the Midwest that provide timber which can be made into a lot of different things. However, people must be careful not to cut down too many trees too fast. It takes a long time for trees to grow really big.

Did you know that the air around us is also a natural resource? In the Great Plains states, wind turbines have been set up to capture the power of the wind to create energy. This is a great way to create energy and it is not bad for the environment. The turbines use the wind without creating dangerous pollution. Plus, wind is a *renewable* resource. Renewable means that we will not run out of it.



Wind turbines use the power of the wind to make energy.

Climate

The Midwest has four distinct weather seasons. The summers are warm with some rainfall.



Fall (autumn) leaves changing color in the Midwest.

The fall cools down and many leaves change colors. Fall leaves can turn bright orange, yellow and red. The winters in the Midwest are very cold with snowstorms. Spring brings a bit of warmer air with some rainfall. Sometimes there is too much rainfall, too fast, and the states have very bad floods. Usually all the precipitation (snow and rainfall) is a good thing for the land. It allows the soil to stay moist where many different crops will grow. This climate also allows for the formation of tornadoes. Many of the states in the Midwest are part of Tornado Alley. That is an area that gets many tornadoes every year. Tornadoes can be very deadly.

They can form quickly and become very powerful, causing a lot of damage.

Landmarks

Landmarks are important places. They can be man-made things such as a monument. They can be historical locations that help to remind us of important events that happened there. They can also be things created by nature that are unique in some way. There are many landmarks in the twelve states that make up the Midwest region. Here, we will take a look at just a few of them.



Mount Rushmore

Mount Rushmore is a sculpture carved into the granite on a side of a mountain in South Dakota. The sculpture contains the carved faces of four U.S. Presidents. We can see the faces of George Washington, Thomas Jefferson, Theodore Roosevelt and Abraham Lincoln. The sculpted heads are 60 feet tall!

Gateway Arch

The Gateway Arch is a 630 foot monument in St. Louis, Missouri. It is the tallest stainless steel monument in the world. It was built as a monument to the westward expansion of the United States. In particular, it was meant to be a public memorial to remember the hard work of President Jefferson, the explorers Lewis and Clark and the many pioneers who moved west.

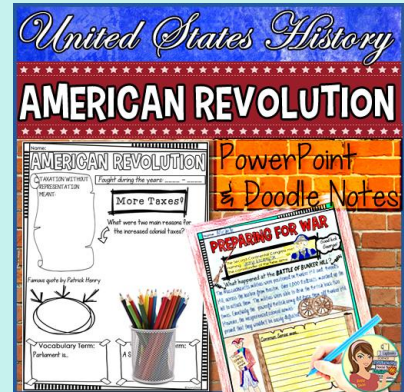
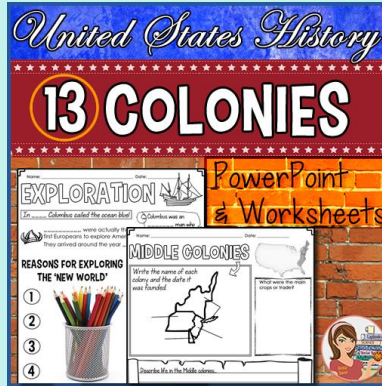


Cave of the Mounds

Cave of the Mounds is a natural limestone cave located in southern Wisconsin. The cave has been designated as a *National Natural Landmark*. The limestone that the cave was carved from began forming around 488 million years ago. Cave of the Mounds is unofficially called the "jewel box" of major American caves. The cave's beauty comes from the many varieties of mineral formations found there.

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