

The West



The History

The West region of the U.S. is made up of eleven states, including Alaska and Hawaii. Those two states are part of the West region, but are not part of the contiguous (connected) United States. The contiguous western states

have been populated by Native Americans since at least 11,000 BC. Alaska's history goes back even further than that. Around 14,000 BC nomads crossed an ancient land bridge that connected Asia and North America at that time.

In modern history, Europeans made contact with the native people living on the Hawaiian Islands when Captain James Cook arrived in 1778. In the late 1700s, Europeans also made contact in Alaska when Russians moved into the area. Over 80% of the native Inuit people died due to exposure to diseases for which they had no immunity. For the contiguous western states, there was a major population boom in the mid-1800s. It began with the Oregon Trail, which was a 2,200 mile long wagon trail. That route began in Missouri and led settlers all the way to the Oregon valleys. At that same time, the California Gold Rush brought around 300,000 people west. They were called *forty-niners*, from '1849' when many individuals arrived. They were hoping to strike it rich by panning or mining for gold.



The Oregon Trail was a long and difficult path.

Climate

The West is the largest of the five regions of the United States. It is also very spread out so the climate varies greatly in this region. The lower coastal areas along the Pacific Ocean have very warm summers and mild winters. The northwest states like Washington and Oregon usually don't have extreme temperatures. It isn't normally really hot or really cold there but they can get a lot of rain. Inland states with mountains such as

The West Region

Montana, Wyoming, Idaho and Colorado can get quite cold during the winter months at higher elevations. Much of Nevada and Utah are dry desert. The climate there does not offer much precipitation.

Alaska is the northern-most state in the United States. Since it is so far from the equator it is also the coldest state. Alaska receives a lot of precipitation throughout the year in the form of rain and lots of snow. Alaska has short summers and very long winters. In contrast, Hawaii is the state located closest to the equator. As a result, it is warm all year round. Hawaii also receives a lot of precipitation. The rains are heavy during the wet season which lasts from October until April.



Hawaii and Alaska are located far from the contiguous states.

The Land

The West region has many mountain ranges. The longest mountain range is the Rocky Mountains which are over 3,000 miles long! Also called the Rockies, this range begins in



Canada and stretches all the way down to New Mexico in the Southwest region of the United States. Other large mountain ranges include the Sierra Nevada, located mostly in California, and the Cascade Range. Also called the Cascades, this range extends from Canada down through Washington, Oregon and Northern California. Mountains are also found in both Hawaii and Alaska.

The Great Basin lies between the Sierra Nevada and Rocky Mountains. The basin is a very large,

mostly dry area. It is about 200,000 square miles of desert.

The West Region

In addition to mountains and deserts, much of the land in the west is covered with forests. For example, about 45% of California's surface area is covered by forests. It contains more forestland than any other state except Alaska.

Since Hawaii and Alaska are located so far away from the other states, the land there is very different as well. Hawaii is made up of eight main islands and many smaller islands. The islands were formed by volcanoes that erupted a long time ago. The land in Hawaii is made up of sandy beaches, tropical rainforests, mountains and volcanoes. Today, two Hawaiian volcanoes are active above ground and one is active underwater.



Lava lake inside Hawaii's Kilauea volcano.

Alaska is connected by land to Canada and sits across a narrow sea from Russia. Alaska is the largest state in the United States. Its land is more than twice the size of Texas. Alaska has mountains and flat land but very little farming takes place due to the cold climate. The short 100 day growing season limits the crops that can be grown.

Economy

The location of so many states along the Pacific Ocean plays a big part in the economy of this region. Fishing is important to many state and local economies along the Pacific Ocean. Deep-sea fisherman catch crab, tuna and cod off the coasts of Alaska, Washington and Oregon. There are also many ports along the Pacific coast that are important to the economy. Ships full of food or products dock at the ports. This access allows the United states to easily trade goods with other countries.

Trade also happens within the states to provide resources that the country needs. Alaska provides a large amount of seafood that it ships to other states. Washington is a leading agricultural state. It grows a large amount of cherries, apples, raspberries and many other crops. Idaho supplies about one-third of all the potatoes grown in the U.S. California exports (sells) a lot of dairy products and grapes. Even Hawaii provides food by exporting coffee, pineapple and sugarcane.

The West Region

In addition to the crops grown, ranchers in rural areas raise cattle, horses and hogs. Timber is also a large industry that employs many people living in rural areas. The trees that are cut down can become wood to build houses, paper to write on or several other products that we see and use every day.

There are many large businesses found in the West region. For example, Boeing (builds airplanes) and Microsoft are located near Seattle, Washington. Silicon Valley is an area in northern California where many large technology companies are found. In southern California, Los Angeles is home to a large entertainment industry where movies and TV shows are made. Tourism is also a major part of the economy in the West region, especially in California and Hawaii.



Famous Hollywood sign in California

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 West region has several valuable natural resources. Oil is found underground and under the sea in Alaska. The oil is pumped out, then used for energy and turned into products such as gasoline. Timber is another resource found in the West. There are many forests in the region that provide timber which can be made into a lot of different things that we use every day. Gold, silver and copper have all been mined out of the Rocky Mountains.

Did you know that the water around us is also a natural resource? Dams have been built to harness the power that results from the force of falling or fast moving water. Hydropower (water power) can be used to create electricity for people to use in their homes and businesses. This is a great way to create energy and it is not bad for the environment. The dams use the water's power without creating dangerous pollution. Plus, it is a *renewable* resource. Renewable means that we won't run out of it. The largest location of hydropower creation in the U.S. is in the Columbia River basin. It is located in the Pacific Northwest part of this region. It is the source of almost half of the country's hydroelectricity.

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 eleven states that make up the West region. Here, we will take a look at just a few of them.

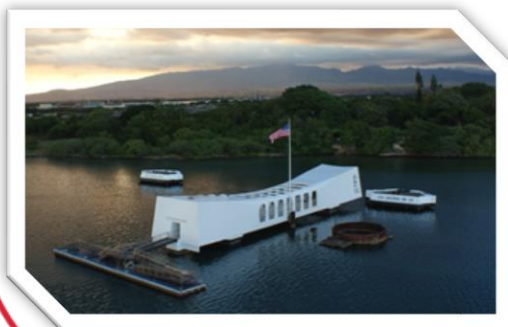


Old Faithful (Yellowstone National Park in Wyoming)

Old Faithful is a geyser. A geyser is a spring that shoots hot water and steam up from the ground. The name Old Faithful was given to the geyser because it faithfully erupts at regular time intervals. With a margin of error of 10 minutes, Old Faithful will erupt 65 minutes after an eruption lasting less than 2.5 minutes or 91 minutes after an eruption lasting more than 2.5 minutes. When it erupts, it shoots boiling water into the air to a height of up to 185 feet!

Golden Gate Bridge (San Francisco, California)

The Golden Gate Bridge is a suspension bridge located in northern California. The bridge is about 1.7 miles long. The suspension design allows the bridge to move, swaying slightly in strong winds. Allowing movement in the bridge is a good thing in earthquake prone California. The design lets the bridge flex, if it needs to during an earthquake, rather than break. The bridge is very recognizable because of its orange coloring. That color was chosen because it blends well with the natural surroundings but it also stands out in the fog. San Francisco has very heavy fog at times.

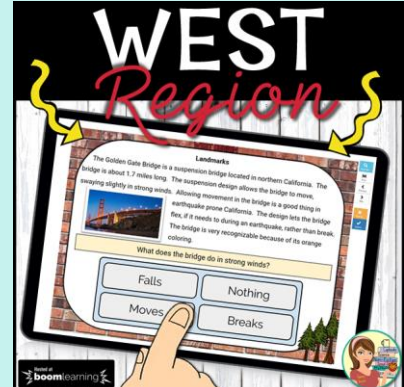
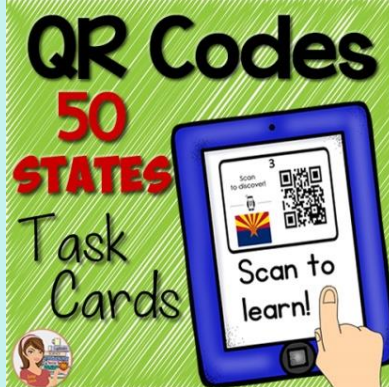
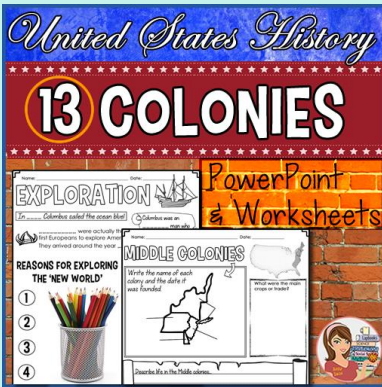


USS Arizona Memorial (Honolulu, Hawaii)

This memorial, located at Pearl Harbor, marks the final resting place of 1,102 of the 1,177 sailors and marines killed aboard the USS *Arizona* battleship. They died when the Japanese WWII military planes bombed Pearl Harbor in a surprise attack. The ship was sunk and the people on board were trapped inside. This memorial is accessible only by boat. It is located on the water above where the USS *Arizona* still rests.

Thank you For your purchase!

Check out these resources...



<https://www.teacherspayteachers.com/Store/SunnyDaze>

Connect with me



Terms of Use



Download of this resource is for one license for individual classroom use by a single educator. For school or district-wide use, please purchase additional licensing. Redistributing, editing, selling, or posting this item or any part thereof on the Internet is strictly prohibited. Violations are subject to the penalties of the Digital Millennium Copyright Act.

Feedback ★★★★★

I'd love to hear about what you think! Visit my store again on TPT and leave a comment in the **feedback** section to earn credits for future purchases.



Clip Art From:

Map image by:
[The 3am Teacher](https://www.teacherspayteachers.com/Store/The3amTeacher)

Photos from Wikipedia.
<https://en.wikipedia.org>