

Region: The Middle East

Unit Description

In this unit, you will explore various resources and think like a geographer to answer the guiding questions below. To show your understanding, you will develop a portfolio. There is no test for this unit.

1. What is the Middle East like in terms of its physical characteristics?
2. What is the Middle East like in terms of its human characteristics?
3. What are the exceptions that don't fit the general patterns and trends that answer the first two questions?

Understanding Place

To answer the guiding questions, we must understand *place* and *region*, two themes of geography.

A *region* is an area on the earth's surface that has unifying characteristics. For example, in the United States we commonly identify the following regions: the South, the Midwest, the Great Plains, the Pacific Northwest, New England, etc. Each of these regions has different characteristics that unify the states within that region.

Place answers the question, "What is it like?" When geographers describe a place, they take into consideration both physical and human characteristics. The physical characteristics of a place are the characteristics that make up the natural environment: climate, terrain and landforms, elevation, biodiversity (wildlife), natural resources, soil, tectonic activity, etc. The human characteristics of a place are have to do with the people: population density, land use, ethnicity, religion, language, architecture, economic activity, and so on.

In this unit, we will use the theme of *place* to describe the *region*. In other words, you will be looking at the physical and human characteristics that unify the countries of the Middle East, which is the region we are studying. You will also look for exceptions: which parts of the region don't fit the general pattern?

Working like a Geographer

- Ask Geographic Questions: Geographers usually start with some questions. Your overall goal is to thoroughly answer the three guiding questions above, but you will want to break them down into smaller questions. (Ex. What is the climate of the Middle East like?)
- Search for Geographic Information: Geographers search for information that helps them answer their questions. They know what tools will help them answer those questions. As they locate information, they evaluate it by determining whether or not it is current and whether or not the information is reliable. I have already done some searching for resources and linked those at my website, but you will need to look for additional sources of information to corroborate facts.
- Explore and Analyze Geographic Information: Geographers are skilled at getting information from all sorts of tools: maps, charts and tables, graphs, photographic images (including satellite images), and videos. You will be using a variety of these types of tools to get the information you need to answer your guiding questions.
- Draw Conclusions: Geographers draw conclusions based on their analysis of geographic information. To do this, they look for patterns in the data and information they have

gathered. They corroborate facts from different sources of information. They also note exceptions to the patterns they observe when they draw their conclusions.

Setting Up Your Portfolio

You will keep a portfolio of your work. Guidelines for portfolios are as follows:

- A digital portfolio is preferred over a paper portfolio. If there is a reason why you absolutely need to keep a paper portfolio, see me to talk about it.
- Use your GAPPS account. You can either create a document or a presentation; both have their pros and cons. If you have a really good idea for a different format, see me to talk about it.
- Give your document/presentation a title. “The Middle East” is fine, or you can come up with something a little more creative.
- Share your document/presentation with me. Select “can comment” so that I can give you feedback. Select the option to send me an e-mail.
- Each question or topic in your portfolio should begin on a new page or slide.
- Each page/slide in your portfolio should contain the following.
 - Your geographic question (at the top).
 - Your conclusion, written as a statement that answers the question.
 - The pieces of geographic information that support your conclusion. You can insert images and maps directly into your page or pull quotes from print sources. You **MUST** cite your sources by linking to the website where you got the information or otherwise describing how I might get to the same source you were looking at. You do not, however, need a formal bibliography. Use only reliable sources!
 - Your analysis of the geographic information. How do you know that your conclusion is correct? Explain how the geographic information you found supports your conclusion.

Some Additional Thoughts

- Start with the physical and human characteristics that sound the most interesting to you.
- Work mostly alone. In order for you to know whether or not you can really do this, you have to try it. In order for me to know whether or not you can really do this, I have to count on you to do the work and draw your own conclusions. It is perfectly acceptable to discuss a map, chart, graph, image, etc., with someone else, but when it comes to drawing conclusions based on that piece of information, YOU need to show me you can do it. I will be suspicious of portfolios that look very similar or exactly alike.
- Work at a steady pace. Do not be lazy for a week and then try to do this in one or two days.
- Do not wait to show me your work. When you have finished answering one of your geographic questions and have finished a slide/page, request feedback. (There will be some record-keeping charts for this specific purpose available in the classroom.) Mistakes that you make early on can be corrected and the rest of your portfolio will come easier. (This will also make my job easier and will make me happier, which only works out for you in the end.)
- Your portfolio should be neat and easy to read. Choose basic fonts. Choose black fonts on a light background.
- TAKE CARE WITH MECHANICS! PROOFREAD! There is no excuse for poor writing. I will ask you to redo poorly written pages and slides. Use spellcheck. Make sure you have read it a few times so it is clear. Take pride in your work.
- Due date: The last day of work in class will be Friday, March 22. Things should pretty much be wrapped up by then!