

The Five Themes of Geography

1. Location: Position on the Earth's Surface (Absolute/Relative)

Geographic study begins with the location of places on the earth. Places have absolute locations that pinpoint them on the earth, and relative locations that place each location in respect to other locations. For example, Kentucky has an absolute location that can be identified on any basic map. Places also have absolute points that can be expressed in terms of latitude and longitude (degrees, minutes, seconds). Kentucky also has a relative location – it can be described as a location within the economic system based on its characteristics and position within the global economy. Kentucky has its absolute location's characteristics for soil and climate, yet the success of its automobile factories is related to its location along the I-65 and I-75 transportation corridors.

2. Place: Physical and Human Characteristics

Places have physical and human characteristics that make them what they are. Geography emphasizes the understanding and analysis of both of these factors and their integration together.

3. Human/Environment Interactions: Shaping the Landscape

The landscape of the earth no longer is a purely physical feature. Humans have influenced every area of the earth, but in varying ways. The geography of places is influenced by the degree to which humans have shaped their local environment.

4. Movement: Humans interacting on the Earth

The contemporary world is one of great interaction between places – both physical and non-physical. This movement is inherently geographic, whether by train, automobile, telecommunications, or airplane.

5. Regions: How they form and change

The most fundamental geographic feature is the region. A region is any unit of space that is unified by the presence of some characteristic. Regions can be formal, functional, or vernacular (perceptual). The Corn Belt, stretching from Indiana to eastern Nebraska, is an area where corn is a dominating, and unifying, product. The Corn Belt is a functional (and perceptual) region within the United States.

