

Year 6 North America

Key end points of this unit, North America, are:

- The North American continent spreads from close to the North Pole, south towards the equator.
- Rivers stretch across the continent providing a source of water and also transport links.
- Many of North America's major rivers have been affected by human actions.
- Many people live in large cities in North America, this presents challenges.

This unit builds on children's understanding of world geography and focuses on the continent of North America. Children have already studied Europe in depth, studied two units on Asia, and in Year 5 studied Australia and the South Pacific. Following this unit, children will study South America, Africa and finally a unit that builds on all of their previous knowledge in Geography; Globalisation. Children's understanding of biomes will be developed in this unit as they look at the tundra in the northern parts of the continent and the tropical forests of the southern parts of the continent. Children will build on their map skills as they explore maps of North America and develop their research skills using online map tools.

You may like to adapt the lesson that compares two locations; one in the UK (and the example given is London) and Anchorage, a state in the USA located in the northern part of North America. Please adapt the lesson to look at a comparison with your local area, or a nearby major town or city. If there is another location within North America that would suit the context of your school, please adapt this. Anchorage was chosen for its stark differences to London and its interesting climate and geography.

Lesson Sequencing:

The sequence of lessons in this unit has been designed to build on prior knowledge and introduce new material in small manageable steps. Children's prior knowledge is essential to understanding the content of this unit.

The first lesson in this unit offers an introduction to the North American continent. Children will identify the countries within this continent including the United States of America, Canada and Mexico. When looking at the United States of America, children will learn that the states have not always been united, and many battles have been fought over land and power. This builds on children's knowledge of the British Empire and the Transatlantic Slave Trade in Year 5. Children will use atlases to identify locations in North

America. Children will locate the Bearing Sea and learn that it is thought that the ancestors of Native Americans travelled from Asia, across a bridge of land that is now under the Bering Sea, to begin populating the North American continent.

In lesson 2, children will study the biomes of the North American continent including coniferous forest, deciduous forest, temperate grassland semi-desert and tundra. They will learn about the permafrost that lies under the ground in the most northern parts of North America, creating a cold, tree-less landscape. They will contrast this with the temperate grassland in the Great Plains, and the prairie. In turn, this is will provide contrast with the tropical forest biome of some regions in Central America.

In lesson 3 children will learn that the rivers in North America are important to the economy, for trade and transport and also help to sustain a large population. In this unit, children will build on their knowledge of the world's rivers and will study the Mississippi River, one of the longest rivers in the world. Children will study how this huge physical geographical feature changes along its path and how people's interactions with the river are changing it. The question of sustainability is addressed in the context of the Mississippi River. This understanding will be built upon in the forthcoming unit on Australia when children study the Murray-Darling.

As the National Curriculum requires, children will then study a region of North America and compare it with a region of the United Kingdom. In the lesson plans Anchorage in Alaska will be compared with the local area, providing some important contrasts including climate, physical features, population, environment, and regional activities. We suggest that teachers consider if this is the right choice for a comparison with their local area/nearest major town or city and adapt the planning as necessary.

Finally in an assessment lesson children will write to explain why a geographer might say this statement: North America is a large and diverse continent. This will help them to develop their disciplinary understanding relating to what geographers do and what they notice about places in the world around us. Children should receive appropriate scaffolding to enable them to succeed in this task. This will include modelling, input on how geographers write (thinking about the tone; to inform not entertain) and may include specific scaffolds for children with additional needs.

The key substantive concepts focused on in this unit include interconnection and landscape.

The key disciplinary understanding in this unit is that geographers look at the human and physical geography of regions of the world and communicate their knowledge to help us understand the world around us.