

Investigating History

Grade 4, Unit 5

Regions of the United States



How do the people, the land, and the challenges of a place shape each region of the United States?

Framing the Unit

The first cluster examines how diverse peoples have shaped the cultures of different regions of the United States. Students learn about the settlement patterns of Indigenous nations, enslaved Africans, and waves of immigrants from around the world, including Europeans and later groups from Latin America, Asia, and Africa. Through investigations of regional cuisine, art, and music, students discover how diverse peoples have left lasting cultural contributions in each region. Students work in regional expert groups throughout the cluster, building deep knowledge of the cultures of their assigned region.

The second cluster investigates how people have adapted to and shaped the land in different regions. Continuing to work in regional expert groups, students explore how each region's climate, topography, and natural resources shape what is possible for the people who live there. They examine how Indigenous peoples, farmers, and industries have adapted to regional conditions and, in some cases, changed the land in the process.

The third cluster investigates how communities respond to regional challenges, focusing on natural disasters. Students learn that different regions face different disasters: wildfires in the West, hurricanes and storm surge in the Southeast, and nor'easters and coastal flooding in the Northeast. They examine the strategies governments and communities use to mitigate harm and prepare for future disasters, including prescribed burns, seawalls, mangrove forests, managed retreat, and oyster reef restoration. An optional extension explores how the people of New Orleans drew on their culture and traditions to recover after Hurricane Katrina.

The Summative Assessment asks students to recommend a flooding strategy for their community and create a public service announcement poster urging a specific audience to take action. Students apply knowledge from Clusters 2 and 3 to explain why flooding happens where they live and then draw on evidence from across the unit to make an evidence-based argument aimed at a real audience.

Prepare to teach this unit by exploring the [Background Brief: Regions of the United States](#), which was designed to help you build content knowledge through a variety of resources. The

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brief also highlights current perspectives and research—along with potential misconceptions and any debates you should know about—so you can present this unit with confidence.

Enduring Understandings

1. When people move, they bring their cultural traditions with them. These traditions blend with and build upon the cultures already rooted in a place. This creates the diverse regional identities we see across the United States today.
2. People adapt to the land where they live, using its climate and resources to build communities, economies, and industries. The ways people have used the land, from building homes to developing industries, reflect the needs and knowledge of every group that has lived there.
3. Communities face different natural disasters depending on where they live. People respond by working together and drawing on what their region offers and what its people know: natural resources, local knowledge, and cultural traditions.

Connections to Current Events and Issues

Connections to today's world and students' lives are built into this unit. Other contemporary connections could be added or developed for various topics of study within this unit, and we encourage you to take advantage of opportunities to connect students' learning to contemporary local, national, and global developments that may arise as you teach this unit. Some ideas for linking this unit to current events and issues include:

- Massachusetts is home to a diverse range of cultures and communities. For example, one of the largest Cambodian communities in the United States lives in the city of Lowell. Each August, the community holds the Lowell Southeast Asian Water Festival. People come from around the country for dragon boat races, food, music, and dance. In 2010, the city officially named part of Lowell “Cambodia Town” to honor the community’s role in revitalizing the neighborhood. Read the article from NewEngland.com “[Welcome to Cambodia Town | A Celebration of Cambodian Culture in Lowell, Massachusetts](#)” to learn more.
- Renewable energy comes from sources that don't run out, like sunlight, wind, and moving water. Unlike coal or oil, these resources can be used again and again. People are building more renewable energy now because it makes electricity without the air pollution from burning fossil fuels and because it has become one of the fastest, most affordable ways to meet the growing need for power. One local example is [Vineyard Wind](#), the first large offshore wind farm in the United States. It was completed in 2026, and, when fully running, it is expected to power around 400,000 Massachusetts homes.
- Indigenous fire practices are returning across the West. In 2024, California passed a law recognizing the right of Indigenous nations to bring back cultural burning, and in 2025, the Karuk Tribe became the first to sign an agreement with the state to lead these burns on their ancestral lands. Tribes like the Karuk and Yurok are now using fire the way their ancestors did, working alongside state and federal agencies to keep forests healthy and prevent the most destructive wildfires. Read the press release “[California](#)

[Partners with Karuk Tribe on Groundbreaking Cultural Burning Agreement](#)” to learn more.

Vocabulary (in order of appearance)

Tier 3 Vocabulary		
emigrate immigrate	natural disaster Indigenous knowledge	
Priority Tier 2 Vocabulary		
region culture diverse cuisine adapt	climate natural resource agriculture sustainable extract	industry strategy mitigate coastal flooding

Lesson Clusters

Cluster 1: Peoples and Cultures (Lessons 1-8)

How have diverse cultures influenced regions in the United States?

Focus Standards: 4.T4.4, 4.T4a.1, 4.T4a.4, 4.T4a.5, 4.T4b.1, 4.T4b.2, 4.T4c.1, 4.T4c.2, 4.T4d.1, 4.T4d.3, 4.T4e.1, 4.T4e.3, PS 3, PS 6, PS 6, RI.4.9, SL.4.1

In this cluster, students investigate how diverse peoples have shaped the cultures of different regions of the United States. Students learn about the settlement patterns of different cultural groups across regions, including Indigenous nations who were here first, enslaved Africans who were brought against their will, European immigrants, and later waves of immigrants from around the world. Through investigations of regional cuisine, art, and music, students discover how diverse peoples have left lasting cultural contributions in each region of the United States. Students work in regional expert groups throughout the cluster, building deep knowledge of the cultures of their assigned region. In the Formative Assessment, students create a Cultural Diversity Map that illustrates the cultural contributions of people in their region.

Cluster 2: Land and Adaptation (Lessons 9-15)

How have people adapted to and shaped the land in different regions?

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Focus Standards: 4.T4a.4, 4.T4a.5, 4.T4b.2, 4.T4c.2, 4.T4d.3, 4.T4e.3, PS 3, PS 6, PS 7, RI.4.3, SL.4.1, W.4.1, W.4.2

In this cluster, students investigate how people have adapted to and shaped the land in different regions of the United States. Students learn that each region's climate, topography, and natural resources make different ways of life possible and that people respond to the land by building homes, farming, and developing industries such as mining, drilling, and logging. They also explore how these activities can shape and sometimes harm the land and how people use sustainable practices to care for it. Students continue working in regional expert groups, building deep knowledge of how people in their assigned region have adapted to its particular conditions, including the knowledge of the Indigenous nations who have lived there longest. In the Formative Assessment, students write an explanation of how a feature of their region's land led people to adapt to it in two different ways.

Cluster 3: Challenges and Responses (Lessons 16-22)

How do communities respond to regional challenges of the United States?

Focus Standards: 4.T4a.4, 4.T4a.5, 4.T4b.1, 4.T4b.2, 4.T4b.3, 4.T4c.1, 4.T4c.2, 4.T4d.1, 4.T4d.3, 4.T4e.1, 4.T4e.4, PS 3, PS 6, PS 7, RI.4.3, SL.4.1, W.4.1, W.4.8

In this cluster, students investigate how communities respond to the regional challenges they face because of where they live. Students learn that a region's land and climate shape which natural disasters it is most vulnerable to: wildfires in the hot, dry West; hurricanes and storm surge along the warm Southeast coast; and nor'easters and coastal flooding in the Northeast. Through investigations of specific challenges, students examine the strategies that governments, communities, and Indigenous nations use to respond. In the Formative Assessment, students choose one regional challenge and write an evidence-based grant proposal recommending a strategy and naming who should receive funding to carry it out.

Summative Assessment: Regions of the United States (Lessons 23-24)

Focus Standards: 4.T4b.3, PS 3, PS 6, PS 7, SL.4.1, W.4.1

During this unit, students explored the diverse regions of the United States—the cultures that shaped them, how people have adapted to the land, and the challenges different regions face. Students learned that natural disasters such as flooding affect regions in serious ways and that communities and governments respond using a range of strategies. The Summative Assessment focuses on flooding, a growing challenge for Massachusetts.

In the Summative Assessment, students work in project teams over two days to create a PSA (public service announcement) poster about flooding. On Day 1, students are reintroduced to flooding as a regional challenge that is particularly relevant to their community and learn that it affects both coastal and inland communities. They

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evaluate strategies that communities and states use to respond, choose two to focus on, and complete a planning guide. On Day 2, students use their completed planning guide to create a PSA poster that names the problem, recommends strategies, and makes a call to action backed by evidence. Then, they share their work in a brief Gallery Walk. Finished PSAs are displayed publicly so students' work reaches an authentic audience.

Unit Focus Standards

Content Standards

- **4.T4.4:** Explain that many different groups of people immigrated to the United States from other places voluntarily and some were brought to the United States against their will (as in the case of people of Africa).
- **4.T4a.1:** On a political map of the United States, locate the states in the Northeast (listed alphabetically: Connecticut, Maine, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, New Jersey, New York, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island and Vermont).
- **4.T4a.4:** Develop questions, conduct research, and analyze how people have adapted to the environment of the Northeast, and how physical features and natural resources affected settlement patterns, the growth of major urban/suburban areas, industries or trade.
- **4.T4a.5:** Describe the diverse cultural nature of the region, including contributions of Native Peoples (e.g., Wampanoag, Iroquois, Abenaki), Africans, Europeans (e.g., the early settlements of the Dutch in New York, French near Canada, Germans in Pennsylvania, the English in Massachusetts, Rhode Island, Connecticut, Vermont and New Hampshire, subsequent 19th and early 20th century immigration by groups such as Irish, Italian, Portuguese, and Eastern Europeans) and various other immigrant groups from other regions of the world in the later 20th and 21st centuries (e.g., Puerto Ricans, Dominicans, Mexicans, Salvadorans, Colombians, Guatemalans, Brazilians, Haitians, Vietnamese, Cambodians, Chinese, Indians, and Somalis).
- **4.T4b.1:** On a political map of the United States, locate the states and the national capital city in the Southeast, and the U.S. territories in the Caribbean; add to the timeline the admission dates for states in the Southeast (listed alphabetically: Alabama-1819, Arkansas-1836, Delaware-1787, Florida-1845, Georgia-1788, Kentucky-1792, Louisiana-1812, Maryland-1788, Mississippi-1817, North Carolina-1789, South Carolina-1788, Tennessee-1796, Virginia-1788, West Virginia-1863); territories Puerto Rico, and the United States Virgin Islands.
- **4.T4b.2:** Describe the diverse cultural nature of the region, including contributions of Native Peoples (e.g., Powhatan Chiefdom, Seminole, Cherokee, Creek), African Americans, Europeans (e.g., the early Spanish settlements in Florida) and immigrant groups from other regions of the world.
- **4.T4b.3:** Explain how natural disasters, such as hurricanes and floods, have affected the region, and how government and citizens have responded to catastrophic natural events.

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- **4.T4c.1:** On a political map of the United States, locate the states in the Midwest; add to the timeline the admission dates for states in the Midwest (listed alphabetically: Illinois-1818, Indiana-1816, Iowa-1846, Kansas-1861, Michigan-1838, Minnesota-1858, Missouri-1821, Nebraska-1867, North Dakota-1889, Ohio-1803, South Dakota-1889, Wisconsin-1848).
- **4.T4c.2:** Describe the diverse cultural nature of the region, including contributions of Native Peoples (e.g., Sioux, Mandan, Ojibwe/Chippewa), African Americans, Europeans and immigrant groups from other regions of the world.
- **4.T4d.1:** On a political map of the United States, locate the states in the Southwest; add to the timeline the admission dates for states in the Southwest (listed alphabetically, Arizona-1912, New Mexico-1912, Oklahoma-1907, and Texas-1845).
- **4.T4d.3:** Describe the diverse cultural nature of the region, including contributions of Native Peoples (e.g., Pueblo, Navajo, Apache, Comanche), African Americans, Europeans (e.g., the Spanish in Texas, Arizona, and New Mexico), Mexicans, and immigrant groups from other regions of the world settling in the region over time.
- **4.T4e.1:** On a political map of the United States, locate the states in the West and the U.S. territories in the Pacific Ocean; add to the timeline the admission dates for states in the Southwest (states listed alphabetically, Alaska-1959, California-1850, Colorado-1876, Hawaii-1959, Idaho-1890, Montana-1889, Nevada-1864, Oregon-1859, Utah-1896, Washington-1889, Wyoming-1890); territories: American Samoa, Guam, Midway Islands, Northern Mariana Islands, and Wake Island.
- **4.T4e.3:** Describe the diverse cultural nature of the region, including contributions of Native Peoples (e.g., Paiute, Coast Salish) African Americans, Europeans (e.g. the Spanish in California), the Mexicans, the Chinese, Japanese, and immigrant groups from other regions of the world over time.
- **4.T4e.4:** Explain how disasters, such as drought and forest fires, have affected the region, and how government and citizens have responded to catastrophic events.

Practice Standards

- **PS 3:** In response to an inquiry question, integrate information from two sources on the same topic.
- **PS 6:** Identify evidence from a source in response to an inquiry question.
- **PS 7:** Describe a specific local, regional, and/or national issue and explain various strategies students and others could use in working alone and together to address it.

Literacy Standards

- **RI.4.3:** Explain events, procedures, ideas, or concepts in a historical, scientific, mathematical, or technical text, including what happened and why, based on specific information in the text.
- **RI.4.9:** Integrate information from two texts on the same topic in order to write or speak knowledgeably about the topic.

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- **SL.4.1:** Engage effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners on grade 4 topics and texts, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly.
- **W.4.1:** Write opinion pieces on topics or texts, supporting a point of view with reasons and information.
- **W.4.2:** Write informative/explanatory texts to examine a topic and convey ideas and information clearly.
- **W.4.8:** Recall relevant information from experiences or gather relevant information from print and digital sources; take notes and categorize information, and provide a list of sources.

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Note: The Native Education Council does not rate or endorse curriculum materials. See the Curriculum Guidebook for more information.

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