

The term **geography** may be familiar to many students, but they often consider it just another subject and have little knowledge of what the term really means. Do you know what the term **geography** means?

For many students, geography is little more than studying **globes**, colouring **maps**, and memorizing the names and **locations** of **features** and **places**. Although these are important components of geography, there is much more to this exciting and dynamic discipline.

Geography includes the study of **landforms**, **vegetation**, and **climates** of the world. Knowledge of landforms may help determine whether the land is suitable for agriculture or for the construction of roads and railways. Plains, mountains, plateaus, and other landforms all have unique characteristics. In geography, the term vegetation refers to **natural vegetation** that is found in a region without human influence. Forests, grasslands, and tundra are examples of natural vegetation types. Knowledge of climate, including **temperature** and **precipitation**, is critical for agricultural production and many other human activities. Much of our daily life is influenced by weather and climate.

The study of geography also includes knowledge of **natural resources** and where they are located. An understanding of various types of **rocks** and **minerals** and their origins is necessary in order for us to predict where they may be found and how they can be used. Knowledge of natural resources also helps us understand the development of various **industries** and their **locations**, as well as patterns of **trade**. Frequently, the presence of a natural resource is a major factor in determining where people will live.

Geography also includes the study of **natural** and **human-caused** events such as **erosion**, **floods**, **landslides**, **earthquakes**, **volcanic activity**, and severe **weather** conditions. Many human activities are affected by such disasters as people seek to protect themselves or rebuild their lives after experiencing nature's wrath. Often people do not realize that their own activities, such as clearing vegetation or constructing roads in mountainous areas, may trigger disasters such as floods and landslides. Understanding the **interrelationships** between the **physical** environment and **human** activities is an important component of the discipline of geography.

In addition to these components, geography includes a variety of **skills** and **tools** necessary for geographers (and students) to do their work. **Map**, **air photo**, and **satellite image** interpretation, as well as skills such as working with **scales**, **distances**, and **directions**, are critical in geography. Use of equipment such as **stereoscopes**, **Global Positioning System (GPS)** receivers, **meteorological** instruments, and many others allow geographers to collect important data. Computer software, such as **Geographic Information Systems (GIS)** software, allows geographers to develop maps, and manipulate and interpret data to make important decisions in **planning** and **resource use**. These skills and tools enable geographers to study the world around us and help us understand our place in it.

What is geography? It's certainly much more than a subject in school!