

Three Regions of North Dakota

This lesson is best used after students have read about or been taught about the three regions of North Dakota geography, [Part 2, Sections 3-7](#) of the fourth grade North Dakota Studies textbook *Geology, Geography, and Climate*. In this lesson, students will analyze items, pictures, and graphs to better understand the three regions of North Dakota. They will learn about the geography and economics of the state by region.

Historical Skills	Historical Question	Standards
Examining critically Sharing your findings	What distinguishes the three regions of North Dakota?	E.3_5.7 Explain how natural resources affect the economies of the geographical regions of the United States. G.3_5.4 Explain how North Dakota regions have been influenced by physical and human characteristics. G.3_5.5 Compare and contrast the three geographical regions of North Dakota.

Objective

- Students will be able to identify and describe the three main regions of North Dakota: the Red River Valley, the Drift Prairie, and the Missouri Plateau.
- Students will describe each region's main physical and economic features.

Supplies

- Large North Dakota map that includes the counties for each student
- All of the supplies listed in the Appendix for each region

Setup

- Set up three exploration stations, one for each North Dakota region.
 - Red River Valley
 - Drift Prairie
 - Missouri Plateau

Background

The geography of North Dakota is divided into three distinct regions, which have historically shaped the economies of those regions. The first region is the Red River Valley, which boasts very broad, flat fertile land. The soil was formed from the ancient lakebed of Lake Agassiz. The second region is the Drift Prairie, which is located south of the Souris River and west of the James River. This region was formed by ice sheets that resulted in rocky soil and glacial ponds. The Turtle Mountains, Devils Lake, and the Sheyenne River delta are major features of this region. The third region is the Missouri Plateau. It was molded by wind and water exposing dramatic geological features called the Badlands. A continental divide also runs through North Dakota, resulting in smaller rivers discharging into either the Missouri River flowing south or the Red River flowing north.

Activity

1. Remind students that North Dakota is divided into three main regions: the Red River Valley, the Drift Prairie, and the Missouri Plateau.
2. Have them draw in those regions on the map.
3. Assign a group of students to each station.
4. Tell the students that they will be learning about the physical features, resources, and how each region is different.
5. The students will work in groups to go through the three exploration stations to investigate and discuss the items for each region and how they represent the region.
6. They will then write a three to five sentence paragraph about each region using items at each station to describe the region.
7. Have the students rotate through each station/region.
8. Discuss the following:
 - What did you learn about each region?
 - What makes each region unique?
 - How does the geography affect the people who live there (e.g., farming in the Red River Valley, oil extraction in the Missouri Plateau)?

Reflection questions

1. Ask the students to draw a picture of one of the regions of North Dakota. It can be a landscape or something specific to that region such as a field of crops, a pasture of cattle, prairie potholes, the Missouri River, the Badlands, etc.

Red River Valley

At this station, set out pictures of the following items or include the actual item if available. Photographs of some of these items are included below.

- Potato or sugar beet
- Map of North Dakota with Lake Agassiz
- Soil
- Picture of North Dakota State Mill and Elevator
- Toy tractor or combine
- Graph of population by county

Lake Agassiz

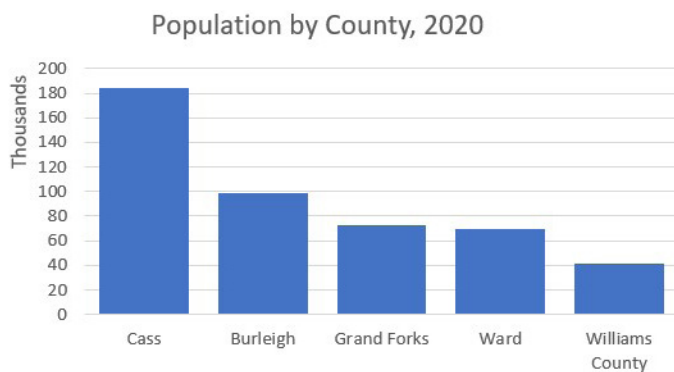


North Dakota Studies



Aerial view of the State Mill and Elevator, Grand Forks, circa 1938. SHSND SA 2019-P-134-00036

[Details](#) | [North Dakota Heritage Center & State Museum](#)



[Based on U.S. census data](#)

Drift Prairie

At this station, set out pictures of the following items or the actual items if available.

- Flax, sunflowers, or soybeans
- Bison
- Cattle
- Coal
- Prairie
- Sloughs



Prairie road, circa 1915. *SHSND SA 00001-00037*

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Prairie potholes. *North Dakota Game and Fish*

Missouri Plateau

At this station, set out the following pictures.

- Prairie dogs
- Mountain lion
- Oil rigs
- Missouri River and Badlands





Aerial view of the Missouri River and the North Dakota Badlands. *SHSND SA 11617-00024*

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