

Regions of North Dakota: Valley, Prairie, Plateau

In this lesson, students will learn about the three regions of North Dakota and how those regions impact the people who live there.

Historical Skills	Historical Question	Standards
Learning the context	How does the diverse geography of North Dakota influence its climate, natural resources, and human activities?	ND.6_12.1.1 Identify the three landscape regions of North Dakota and describe the major features of the regions and the forces that formed them. ND.6_12.1.2 Explain the human settlement patterns in North Dakota.

Objective

After completing the Unit 2, Lesson 1 activity, students will be able to do the following:

- Identify the location of North Dakota's geographic features.
 - Missouri Plateau (MP)
 - Drift Prairie (DP)
 - Red River Valley (RRV)
- Communicate how the different geographic areas of North Dakota impact its development, settlement, and economy.

- Place a sign with each region's label in a prominent location in that section of the room.

Background

Unit 2, Lesson 1 shares information about the changing landscape of North Dakota from 1201 to 1860. 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.

The climate of North Dakota can swing to extreme heat and cold within a year. Prior to the introduction

Supplies

- Three signs representing each region of North Dakota
- Student worksheets

Setup

- Have student worksheets printed or available electronically.
- Prepare the room.
 - Organize the room into the three geographic regions of North Dakota. It can be helpful if the three regions mimic the layout of North Dakota as viewed on a map, with the front of the room representing north on a compass. The Missouri Plateau will be on the students' left, the Drift Prairie in the middle, and the Red River Valley on the right.

of roads, prairie fires commonly spread through the state. These prairie fires were necessary to the grassland ecology of North Dakota but posed danger to prairie settlers. The presence of bison who grazed on prairie grasses helped to control the fires.

The borders of what would become North Dakota were defined in a series of political events in the 1800s. When the United States purchased the Louisiana Territory from France in 1803, it acquired the land that would become North Dakota. The government knew little about what was in the territory at the time. Native American maps of the territory show how Indigenous people interacted with the land. In 1818, the northern border was created through an agreement with Great Britain that established the 49th parallel as the border between the U.S. and Canada. Fur-bearing animals played a vital role in the region's early economy. Beaver was highly sought after because of its use as felt for men's hats. Companies such as the Hudson's Bay Company, North West Company, and the American Fur Company all raced to harvest beaver pelts. This competition nearly resulted in the extinction of the beaver from the area. The bison, valuable to Native Americans' way of life, eventually succumbed to the pressures of commercial hunters as settlers expanded west.

Activity

1. Introduce the activity.

- Sample prompt: *Today, we are going to explore the diverse geography of North Dakota through a fun and interactive activity called "Valley, Prairie, Plateau." Each portion of the room represents a different region of North Dakota: Missouri Plateau in the west, Drift Prairie in the central part of the state, and the Red River Valley in the east. I will read a series of statements about North Dakota's geography, and you will decide which region you believe best fits the statement. Once you decide, move to the area of the room that represents your choice.*

2. Read each statement from the worksheet and follow the facilitation tips below.

- This region is known for the rough terrain known as the Badlands. **(MP)**
- Devils Lake, in the eastern part of the region, is North Dakota's largest and deepest natural lake. **(DP)**
- This area of the state is known as the Hair Hills, at one time the beaches of the ancient Lake Agassiz, where bedrock rises sharply to form hills. **(RRV)**
- This region was formed by glacial deposits composed of rocks of different sizes covering the area. Glacial melt caused small ponds or "potholes" to form. **(DP)**
- In this region, White Butte, the highest point in North Dakota, rises 3,500 feet above sea level in Slope County. **(MP)**
- The Turtle Mountains rise 300 feet above the northern section of this geographic region of North Dakota. **(DP)**
- The lowest point in North Dakota is located in this region at 824 feet above sea level in Grand Forks. **(RRV)**
- The Sheyenne River delta formed dry sand hills in the southeastern portion of the region. **(DP)**
- This region is known as the premiere fertile soil in North Dakota. **(RRV)**
- The Killdeer Mountains lie in this region of North Dakota. **(MP)**
- A continental divide lies in this region of North Dakota; it determines if rivers flow to the Mississippi and then south or to the Red River and then north. **(DP)**
- This region is most affected by flooding due to its proximity to major rivers and low-lying terrain. **(RRV)**
- This area is essential for North Dakota's natural resources, including oil, gas, and coal. **(MP)**

3. Facilitation tips
 - Allow students a few minutes after each statement to move and discuss.
 - Encourage all students to participate in the discussions.
 - Choose a spokesperson from each region to summarize their group's discussion for the class.
 - Use the discussions to emphasize the diverse characteristics and importance of each geographic region in North Dakota.
4. Discussion
 - After each statement, students move to the region that best represents their opinion. Have them discuss why they chose that region, and write down key points.
5. Sharing
 - After each discussion, select a spokesperson from each region to share their group's thoughts with the class.
6. Class reflection
 - Facilitate a discussion with the entire class on what they learned about North Dakota's geography and how different regions contribute to the state's overall character.

Reflection questions

1. Have students complete a notes sheet matching the responses to their respective region.
2. Exit ticket: Have students write one interesting fact they learned about a specific region in North Dakota and how that fact has impacted the state's development.