Regions of Texas

Lesson 1: Mountains and Basins

ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS

How does geography influence the way people live? How do people adapt to their environment?

Terms to Know

- **intense**  existing in a high degree; strong, extreme
- **basin**  a sunken area in a plateau found between mountain ranges
- **region**  an area that is unified by one or more common characteristics
- **elevation**  height above sea level
- **maquiladora**  a factory in Mexico that assembles parts made in the United States and elsewhere into products for export
- **arid**  lacking enough water for things to grow
- **petroleum**  a type of oil that is the source for gasoline

Where in the world?

![Map of Texas and New Mexico](image_url)

- **Mountains and Basins Region**
- **Area outside the Texas Mountains and Basins Region**
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A Rugged Land

Guiding Question  What characterizes the landscape and climate of this region?

Picture a place that is so dry that few trees can grow there. The heat is intense. Mountains rise from the landscape. Wide dips in the land called basins also cover the area. This part of Texas is the Mountains and Basins region. It is located in West Texas, mostly west of the Pecos River. For this reason, it is sometimes called the Trans-Pecos. This means “across the Pecos River.”

The mountains in this region are part of the Rocky Mountain system, which extends from Canada through Texas. The Mountains and Basins region has the highest elevations in the state. Texas has seven mountains over 8,000 feet (2,438 m). All seven peaks are in the Mountains and Basins region.

The Guadalupe Range is among the highest in Texas. At 8,749 feet (2,667 m), Guadalupe Peak is the highest mountain in the state. The next highest mountain in the range is El Capitán, which is 8,085 feet (2,464 m). Near the center of the region rise the Davis Mountains and Mount Livermore. Mount Livermore stands at 8,378 feet (2,554 m). The Chisos Mountains are another tall range. They are the largest range in an area to the south known as Big Bend Country.

The Chihuahuan Desert covers much of the Mountains and Basins region. Rainfall is rare here. Areas that are higher in elevation have slightly cooler temperatures and get more rain than lower locations. Some parts of the region get from 14 to 18 inches (36 to 46 cm) of rain each year. Other parts get less than 14 inches. Summer temperatures are in the mid-90sºF (32ºC) in desert and basin areas. In the mountains, temperatures average in the 80sºF (27ºC).

Despite the harsh climate, the desert has a natural beauty. Flowering cactus plants lend bright color to the desert. Other desert plants, such as yucca and creosote bush, cover the ground. Snakes and paisanos, or roadrunner birds, make their homes in the desert areas of the region. The mountains here are home to cougars, mule deer, black bears, and elk. Elk have been reintroduced into the Guadalupe Mountains after a long absence.
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Marking the Text
5. Circle the names of the two main rivers in the Mountains and Basins region.

Finding the Main Idea
6. Why are farmers able to grow crops in some parts of this region?

Reading Progress Check
7. What is the importance of the Rio Grande to the region?

Marking the Text
8. Highlight the description of where most people in the Mountains and Basins region live.

Natural Landmarks

Guiding Question How can rivers and natural places affect life in a region?

The Mountains and Basins region is hot and dry even though it is nearly bounded on two sides by rivers. The Pecos River runs from the north to the northeast of the region. The Rio Grande flows from the western edge of the region and around its southern border. Rivers and other natural features are landmarks to residents and visitors.

Rivers provide an important water resource. Rio Grande is Spanish for “big river.” From its source well above sea level in Colorado through New Mexico and into West Texas, the Rio Grande carries water used for raising crops and livestock. The river allows farmers to raise mainly cotton but also pecan trees. Cantaloupes are an important crop of Pecos in Reeves County.

Cities and towns usually to develop along big rivers. This occurs because the rivers provide enough water to serve large populations. Industries along the Rio Grande provide work for many people of the Mountains and Basins region. The Rio Grande also creates a natural border with Mexico. Businesses on both sides of the border depend on the river and on their trade with one another.

As the Rio Grande flows along the Mountains and Basins region, it takes a turn at the southern end of West Texas. Then it heads northeast. The curve in the river is known as Big Bend. Big Bend National Park, the state’s first national park, covers over 1,250 square miles (2,012 sq km).

Over time the Rio Grande has carved a path along the southern border of West Texas. This created the spectacular Santa Elena, Marsical, and Boquillas canyons. The beauty, wildlife, and activities in the park draw many visitors.

Cities, Places, and Resources

Guiding Question How do location and available resources affect cities and places?

The largest populations in the Mountain and Basins region are found around El Paso. El Paso is on the Rio Grande at the far western end of Texas. The city has strong business ties with its neighbors, Mexico and New Mexico. El Paso has a strong Hispanic culture and many Hispanic traditions.
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Just across the river is the large Mexican city of Ciudad Juárez. Together, the population of the two cities form the largest urban center on the U.S.–Mexico border. This is partly due to the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA). Its purpose was to ease trade barriers between the United States and Canada and Mexico. Border trade has grown since it took effect in 1994. One result has been the building of maquiladoras, or factories on the Mexico side of the border. Goods from the maquiladoras go through El Paso. From there they are shipped around the world.

Another notable place in the region is the village of Fort Davis. Visitors there view the Davis Mountains and Fort Davis National Historic Site.

The region’s very arid, or dry, climate affects population size. For example, Loving County gets about 10 inches (about 25 cm) of rain each year. Although the Pecos River passes nearby, it does not provide enough water for farming in the area and its water is too salty to drink. This means that few people live there. The county seat is the smallest in Texas; its population is only 19 people.

The Mountains and Basins region has many natural resources. These include petroleum and natural gas. In Loving County, oil and gas production are the main industry. The region's other resources include limestone, shale rock, and clay. These are used to make cement. Talc from the region is used to make ceramics, paint, and rubber. Copper, sulfur, and salt are also found there.

**Writing**

**Check for Understanding**

1. **Descriptive** Describe the main geographic features of the Mountains and Basins region.

2. **Expository** What are the main businesses and industries of this region?