

North Carolina's physical and cultural geography

BY PAULINE S. JOHNSON

In this lesson students will be making assumptions about the influence of geography on various aspects of historical human and cultural geography. Students will design their own questions. This activity will give teachers a chance to evaluate the thinking levels of their classes. While this is designed as a group activity, students can work individually.

Learning outcomes

- Students will evaluate the influence of physical geography on aspects of historical human and cultural geography.
- Students will use critical thinking in making assumptions.

Teacher planning

MATERIALS NEEDED

- Completed charts from the lesson “The Regions of North Carolina¹”
- Physical map(s) of North Carolina — this can be on the computer, a large pull-down map, or individual paper maps (can be highway maps from the NC Department of Transportation)
- Optional (required if accessing a map via computer): Computer with internet access for each group of students OR one computer with an LCD projector

TIME REQUIRED FOR LESSON

20 minutes

ADVANCE PREPARATION

Students should have completed the lesson “The Regions of North Carolina.”

Procedure

1. Ask the students to get out their charts from the “Regions of North Carolina” lesson.
2. Put students into groups of three or four. These can be the same groups that worked on the regions charts.
3. Give each group North Carolina maps or project the North Carolina map from the “Natural Diversity²” page.
4. Write the following question on the board or overhead: “Which region do you think was settled first, which second, and which third?”
Coastal Plain, Piedmont, then Mountains
5. Give the groups two minutes to discuss this. Ask for their ideas. Then ask what aspects of geography affect settlement. Allow the groups to talk about this, and then have the class discuss.
Student answers may vary, but they should understand that the ocean and rivers provide transportation, that mountains are a hindrance to movement but valleys can provide access, and that weather is moderate. They should also talk about what was needed — fresh water, food, and shelter.
6. Next, write on the board “Which region do you think developed into the industrial center of North Carolina?” and “What geographical clues help you to infer this?” For the first question, students should answer *the Piedmont*. For the second question there will be several answers.
Students should understand that the region with the most population (most cities), with available resources, possible power (water), transportation (railroads and later interstate highways) are all parts of what make an area a good one for industry.
7. After groups have several minutes to talk over this question have a whole class discussion about the topic, leading the students to the reasons the Piedmont became an industrial region.
8. Ask each group to examine their charts and come up with two questions that the other groups could think about. Each question should be one that cannot be answered with a one-word answer. The questions need to be “thinking questions” that can be inferred by looking at the charts and at North Carolina maps. Give the students 10 minutes to work on this.
9. Collect the questions and choose several to ask the class. You will want to choose the questions that will require some higher level thinking.
10. Allow students to discuss the questions. You can also choose to lead a class discussion of some of the more interesting questions.

Assessment

This activity is an assessment activity in itself. You will have the chance to assess the thinking levels of your students as they try to design their own “thinking questions” and then attempt to answer the questions designed by other groups. The class will learn the importance of analyzing data or checking with several sources. Assessment grades can be taken from group participation on a pass/fail basis.

North Carolina Curriculum Alignment

SOCIAL STUDIES (2003)

Grade 8

- **Goal 1:** The learner will analyze important geographic, political, economic, and social aspects of life in the region prior to the Revolutionary Period.
 - **Objective 1.01:** Assess the impact of geography on the settlement and developing economy of the Carolina colony.

On the web

Natural diversity

<http://www.learnnc.org/lp/editions/nchist-twoworlds/1.1>

North Carolina has within its borders the highest mountains east of the Mississippi River, a broad, low-lying coastal area, and all the land in between. That variety of landforms, elevations, and climates has produced as diverse a range of ecosystems as any state in the United States. It has also influenced the way people have lived in North Carolina for thousands of years.

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Notes

1. See <http://www.learnnc.org/lp/pages/1981>.
2. See <http://www.learnnc.org/lp/editions/nchist-twoworlds/1.1>.

About the author

PAULINE S. JOHNSON

I am currently the Director of a Teaching American History Grant for Buncombe County Schools, Asheville City Schools, and Madison County Schools. I have taught history and English in the seventh and eighth grades for over twenty-six years at Reynolds Middle School in Asheville, North Carolina. I am currently doing adjunct work for Mars Hill College and Western Carolina University. I have a Masters Degree from Western Carolina University and am Nationally Board Certified in Early Adolescence/Social Studies-History. I am certified to teach K–12 and I also have Academically-Intellectually Gifted certification.