

# Lesson 1: Geography of Mesoamerica

**Directions:** Read the summary to reveal how the early civilizations in Mesoamerica used the rich natural resources of the region. As you read, underline important details in each section that relate to that section's title. Think about what you already know, what you want to know, and what you have learned after reading the summary.

## Vocabulary

**peninsula** an arm of land sticking into the sea so that it is nearly surrounded by water

**cenote** a natural well

### A Land of Rugged Mountains (p.163)

Mesoamerica runs from southern North America to the central part of Central America and includes the present day countries of Mexico, Belize, Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua, and Costa Rica. Jade was a common resource used for creating sacred statues and Mesoamericans traded it for other items they needed. So are basalt and obsidian, which are types of black rocks formed from lava. Some Mesoamerican peoples carved huge statues out of basalt. Others made arrowheads and knives from obsidian. Mesoamerica is a rugged, or rough, land. There are two mountain ranges in northern Mesoamerica. These are the Sierra Madre Occidental and the Sierra Madre Oriental. The Plateau of Mexico sits between these ranges. A plateau is a high, flat area. Volcanoes are south of the plateau. They produce fertile soil for farming. South of the volcanoes are highlands. This rugged area has ridges and gorges. The climate of Mesoamerica changes depending on where you are. Some places are dry deserts. In other places enough rain falls for crops and forests to grow. Mesoamericans have grown maize (corn), beans, and squash for thousands of years.

### A Land of Lush Coasts (p. 164)

The interior of Mesoamerica is a land of rugged mountains and plateaus. Mesoamerica also has long coastlines. No place in Mesoamerica is farther than about 200 miles from the coast. The Gulf of Mexico is to the north. Much of the land near the gulf's coast is covered with tropical rain forest. The climate is hot and humid. There are also grasslands, swamps, and rivers. The Yucatán Peninsula forms the southeastern border of the Gulf of Mexico. A **peninsula** is an arm of land sticking into the sea so that it is nearly surrounded by water. The Yucatán Peninsula has few rivers. But it does have many underground streams and caves. The roofs of many of these underground streams have collapsed because the rainfall has dissolved much of the limestone, which creates **cenotes**, or natural wells. Cenotes were used as sources of drinking water. The southwest coastline of Mesoamerica sits on the Pacific Ocean. It is a mountainous area.

### A Land of Many Peoples (p. 164-165)

Many peoples lived in Mesoamerica. Its different environments and climates helped them develop different cultures. Yet the peoples of Mesoamerica had many things in common. They all had advanced forms of agriculture. They grew crops such as beans, maize, chili peppers, and squash. Many people lived in rural areas. Others lived in cities and towns. Cities contained temple-pyramids and large works of art such as stone monuments. People developed very accurate calendars. They also used hieroglyphic writing different from that of other civilizations.

# Lesson 1: Geography of Mesoamerica

**Directions:** Answer the following questions on the lines provided. Use complete sentences for all of your responses and remember to restate the question. You will use your textbook and provide the page number where you found your answer.

**1      2      3**

p. 162 1. What did the people of Mesoamerica do with **jade**, **basalt**, and **obsidian**? (*describe all 3 resources*)  
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p. 163 2. Name the **two main mountain ranges** in northern Mesoamerica.

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p. 163 3. DESCRIBE the **climate** of Mesoamerica.

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p. 164 4. DESCRIBE the **land** along the **Gulf of Mexico**.

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p. 164 5. When it rains, what happens to the **limestone** of the Yucatán Peninsula? What is created?

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p. 165 6. What did the **cultures** of the peoples of Mesoamerica **have in common**?

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