

Oklahoma Studies Weekly

OUR NATION

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The Great Plains

Given their name, you may wonder what makes the Great Plains so great. “The Great Plains” is the name given to a huge area of flat land stretching from southern Canada to Texas. The Great Plains run right through the middle of the United States. They almost cut our great country into two perfect halves, but not quite. They cover an area roughly eight times the entire area of the state of Oklahoma. That’s an area of land of nearly half a million square miles!

A plain is any large area of flat land. The plains are also sometimes referred to as prairies. The Great Plains cover part of southern Canada and 10 states in the United States. In the Midwest Region of the United States, the Great Plains cover only four states: North and South Dakota, Kansas and Nebraska. The Great Plains start at the Rocky Mountains in the west and continue to the Mississippi

River in the east.

The Great Plains formed mostly because the ground was so flat between the Rocky Mountains in the west and the Appalachian Mountains in the east. Low amounts of rain and scorching sunlight make it hard for trees to grow here. Tall and short grass varieties grow well in the Great Plains. The grasses on these plains die every year when the region experiences harsh winters. The dead grasses help to make the soil richer each year for new grasses to grow back in the spring.

The flat land and rich soil mean that the Great Plains have always been an excellent spot for farming. These tall and short grass species make the Great Plains an excellent home for many different types of wildlife. Bison, pronghorn, foxes, prairie dogs, bobcats, ferrets and gophers are just some of the animals that call the Great Plains

home. There are also 200 species of birds that call the Great Plains home. Many of these birds are small and are colored to fit in well with the grass for camouflage. Blackbirds, buntings, meadowlarks and sparrows are just some examples of these small birds that live in the Great Plains.



Connections

The Big Muddy

The Missouri River is the longest river in the United States. Combined with the Mississippi River, it forms one of the largest river systems on Earth. The Missouri River travels through the heart of the Great Plains. The Missouri flows south and east from its start in Montana. It ends in Missouri, where it joins the Mississippi River. The Missouri flows through five states in the Midwest. The five states it flows through are North and South Dakota, Nebraska, Iowa and Kansas. The Missouri River’s muddy waters are the reason it has the nickname “Big Muddy.” The Missouri picks up soils as it travels through all of the states. This river flows through the Great Plains.

Aerial Photo of the Missouri River





Black Hills and Badlands

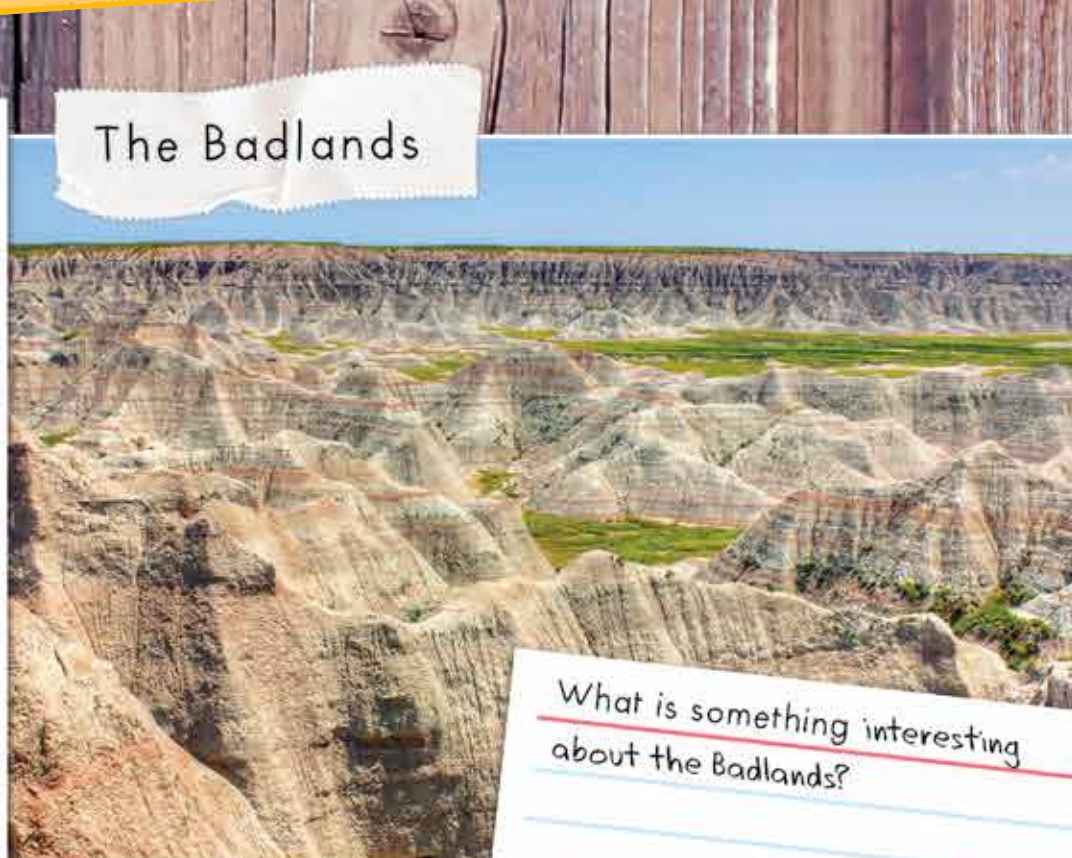
The Black Hills are a small mountain range in the state of South Dakota. They rise out of the Great Plains. They were first called the "Black Hills" because, from a distance, the shade from the trees of the forest made them look almost black. The Black Hills are the oldest mountain range in North America. They are in the top 10 oldest mountain ranges in all the world. They are part of the millions of acres that make up Black Hills National Forest. The Black Hills National Forest is 110 miles long and 70 miles wide.

This mountain range has many interesting things to see, both natural and man-made. The Black Hills are not just tiny hills like their name may suggest. The highest peak in the Black Hills is called Black Elk Peak. Black Elk Peak is over 7,000 feet tall. It is taller than any mountain peak in the United States

east of the Rocky Mountains. The Black Hills are separated into the Northern Hills and the Southern Hills. In the Northern Hills, you will find high prairies with rolling meadows and thick forests of spruce trees. In the Southern Hills, there are outcroppings of rocks and clear blue lakes. The amazing mountain peaks above have the third-largest cave system in the world underneath them. Jewel Cave has nearly 200 miles of passageways, and visitors today use an elevator and stairs to help them explore it all. Jewel Cave is the third-largest cave on Earth. The famous carvings at Mount Rushmore are also part of the Southern Hills section.

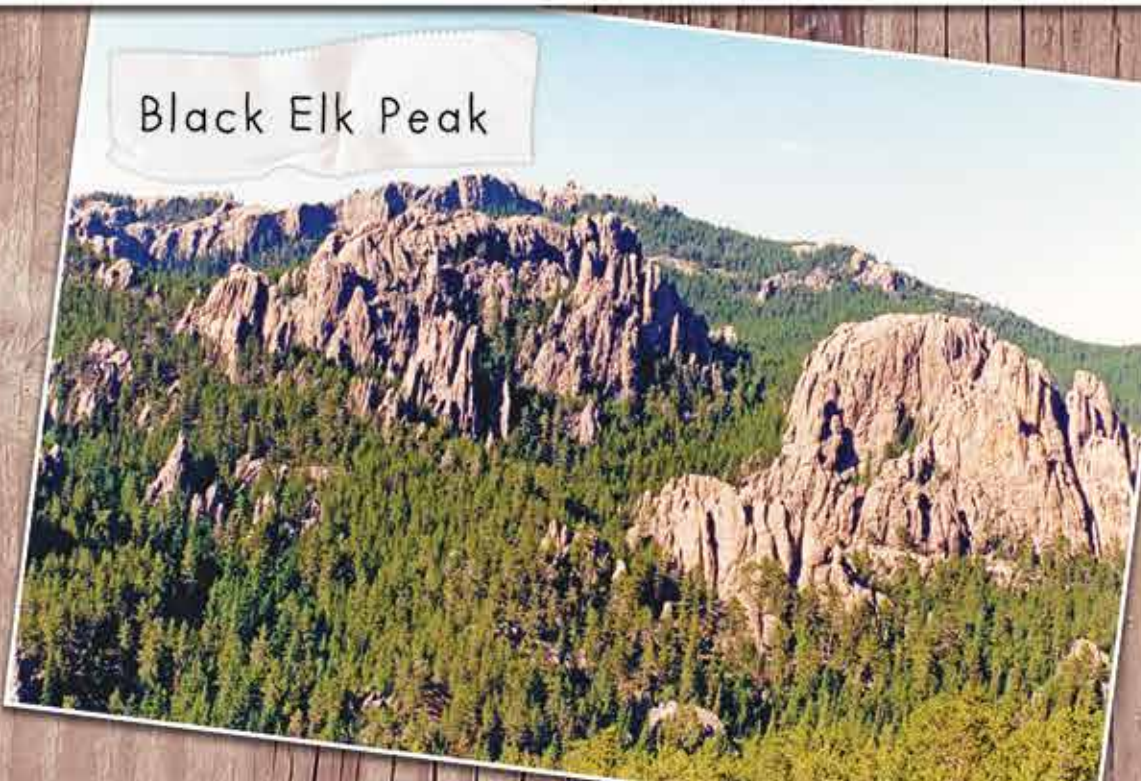
The Badlands of South Dakota are just a short drive from The Black Hills. Badlands are a type of very dry and rugged land. Badlands form where soft rock and clay have

been taken away by erosion from wind and rain. This leaves only the harder rocks still sticking up in very unique shapes. The word badlands is perfect to describe these areas because they have steep slopes and deep canyons and are not easy to walk through. Since the soil is also very poor and the rocks are so hard, almost no plant life grows in these areas. Almost no trees grow in the Badlands. This makes the surrounding unusual rock formations really stand out. It is often said that the Badlands look like they are from another planet. Badlands form in many places on Earth, but none are more famous than the Badlands of South Dakota. Since the wind and rain have taken away all of the soft rocks, the Badlands are an excellent place to look for fossils. Thirty-million-year-old fossils of rhinos and camels have been found here!

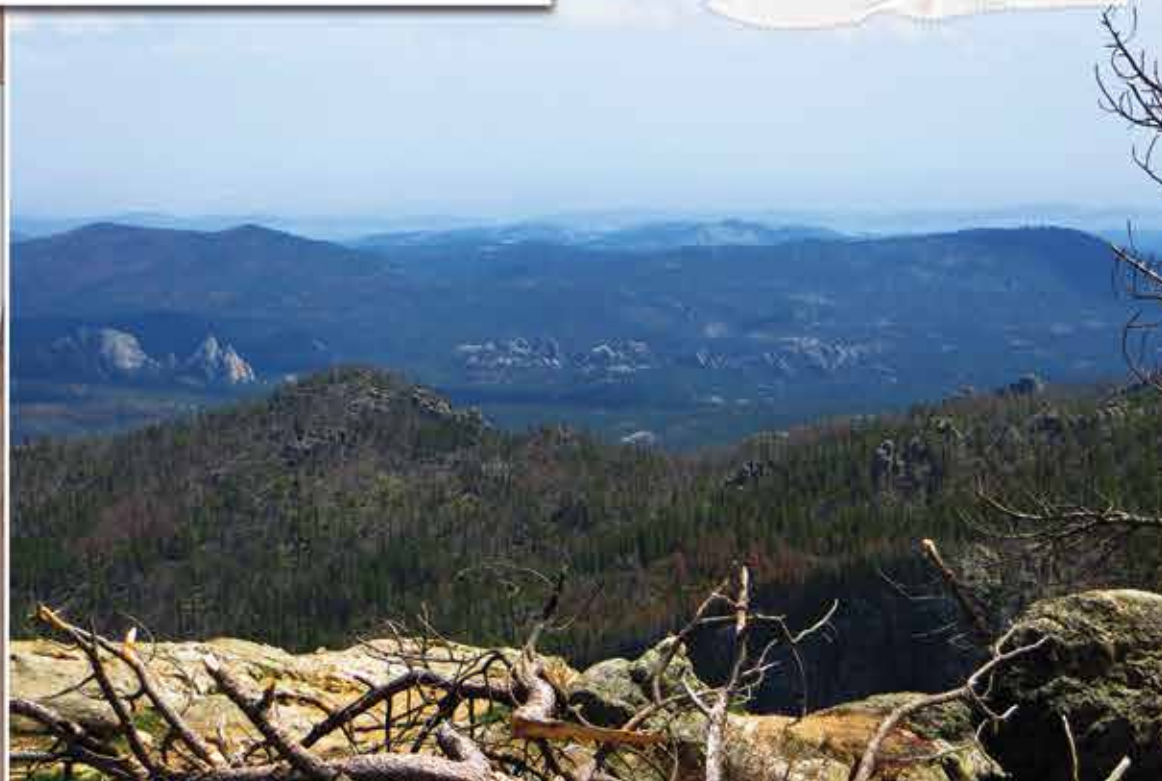


The Badlands

What is something interesting about the Badlands?



Black Elk Peak



The Black Hills

Mapping the Great Lake States

Have you ever seen a map of the United States? If you have then you have already seen the Great Lakes. They are so large that they are almost impossible to miss on the map. You may even know all of their names by now. Take a minute and try to name the Great Lakes. Four of the five Great Lakes border six states in the Midwest region of the United States. These six states are called the Great Lakes states. Only one of the Great Lakes does not border states in the Midwest region. Can you name the Great Lake that is alone in the Northeast region? Lake Ontario is the only lake that is too far east to be part of the Great Lakes in the Midwest.

The states in the Midwest region that border the Great Lakes are Michigan, Illinois, Ohio, Indiana, and Minnesota. Michigan has more coastline on the Great Lakes than any other state. Michigan has more coastline than any other state besides Alaska. Michigan has borders with all four of the Great Lakes that are in the Midwest. The only state that borders Lake Huron is Michigan. Wisconsin has the second longest shoreline along the Great Lakes. Wisconsin borders Lake Michigan to the east and Lake Superior in the north. Illinois and Indiana both share northern borders with Lake Michigan and no other Great Lake. Ohio's only border with a Great Lake is with Lake Erie to the north. The Great Lakes in the Midwest region provide fresh drinking water to millions of people. They also provide fresh water for farmers in the Midwest to water their crops. The Great Lakes are a great place to relax and enjoy fishing, swimming, and boating.

Study the map of the Great Lakes. Use the map scale to measure roughly how large they are. Then, compare that to the size of the states that border the lakes.



Sleeping Bear Dunes

There are massive dunes in Michigan! A dune is an area where sands gather together to form a mound or ridge. They are usually formed by winds or water pushing a lot of sediments to one area. Dunes are often small, but the Sleeping Bear Dunes are massive. The Sleeping Bear Dunes are larger than most dunes because they formed on bluffs on the edge of Lake Michigan. Bluffs are steep cliffs that form over bodies of water or a flat area of land. Since the bluffs on the shores of Lake Michigan were already so high, the sands that were pushed there were able to form

dunes to higher peaks. This is the reason the Sleeping Bear Dunes grew so high. The Sleeping Bear Dunes in Michigan stretch for seven miles along the eastern coast of Lake Michigan. The dunes are over 450 feet high. Visitors can walk all the way to the top of the dunes. Sleeping Bear Dunes were once voted the "most beautiful place in America." They are now part of the Sleeping Bear Dunes National Lakeshore. The dunes are now also included in the Sleeping Bear Dunes Wilderness and they attract millions of tourists each year.



Mount Rushmore

The four faces carved into Mount Rushmore in the Black Hills of South Dakota aren't a natural feature. They are man-made by a famous Dutch sculptor named Gutzon Borglum. Four hundred workers worked on the job every day. After 14 years of working on the monument, Borglum died just a few months before it was completed. Luckily, his son Lincoln was up to the task and finished a few months later. The project was thought up by a local historian named Doane Robinson. He hoped the project would draw tourists from all over the country to his home state. Robinson also helped get the money needed for the huge project. The total cost of building the monument was nearly \$1 million. Once the

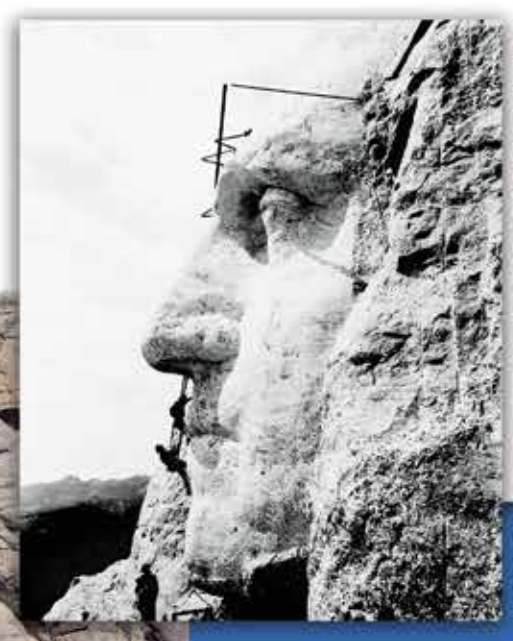
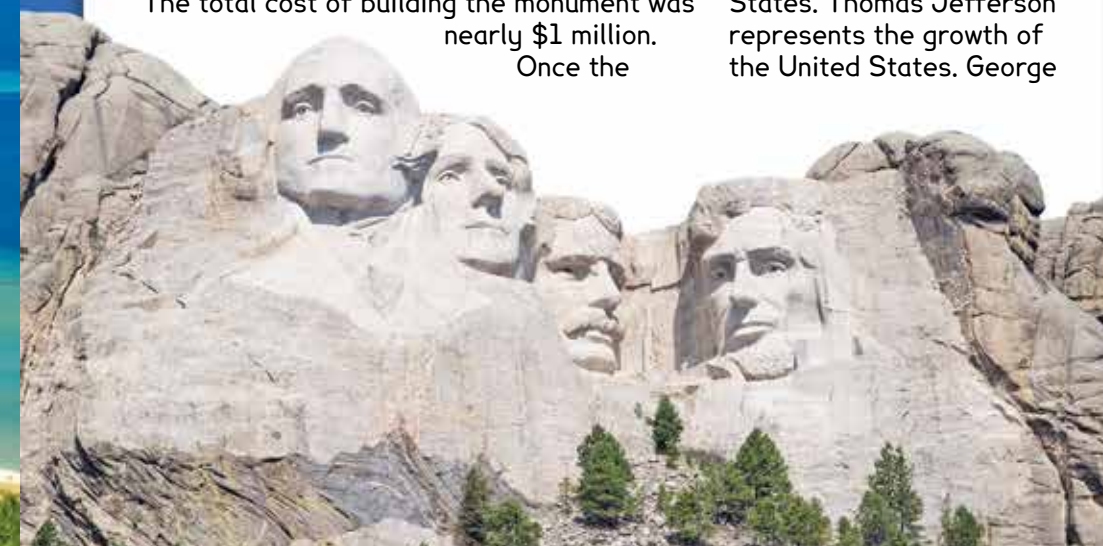
project was started, hundreds of pounds of dynamite were used to blast away at the granite. Over 800 million pounds of stone were removed from the mountain. Mount Rushmore stands at 5,725 feet above sea level. The faces of the presidents are 60 feet high.

The presidents on Mount Rushmore are, from right to left: Abraham Lincoln, Teddy Roosevelt, Thomas Jefferson and George Washington. Abraham Lincoln was chosen because he represents the preservation of the United States. Theodore Roosevelt represents the development of the United States. Thomas Jefferson represents the growth of the United States. George

Washington is the father of the United States. Over three million tourists visit Mount Rushmore each year.

Not everyone supported the creation of the Mount Rushmore sculptures. The Black Hills are sacred land to the Lakota. Many tribal members consider this monument offensive. The U.S. Army forced the Lakota off the land to make the project possible after years of conflict. Mount Rushmore reminds the Lakota of the people who took their homeland from them. Robinson wanted

the monument to include sculptures of important American Indian leaders, but Borglum turned the idea down.



Name _____

The Ozarks

The Ozark Mountains are some of the oldest mountains on the entire planet. They are older than the Rockies on the west coast and the Appalachians on the east coast. The Ozark Mountains are also called The Ozarks. The Ozarks cover all of the southern part of Missouri. The Ozarks stretch into northern Arkansas in the South region of the United States. These mountains cover an area of over 50,000 square miles. That is an area larger than the state of Maine. The Ozarks have the only thick forest between the Rocky and Appalachian Mountains. Many tourists come to the Ozarks for the great outdoors. There are many things to do there, like camping, fishing, swimming and hiking. The Lake of the Ozarks is a man-made lake. It is one of the largest man-made lakes in all of the United States. The Lake has over one thousand miles of shoreline. It was first created to provide electricity to the area around the Ozarks. It has become a popular place for tourists to come to in the summer months. Because of the twisting shape of the Lake, it has become known as the "Magic Dragon" by locals and tourists alike.

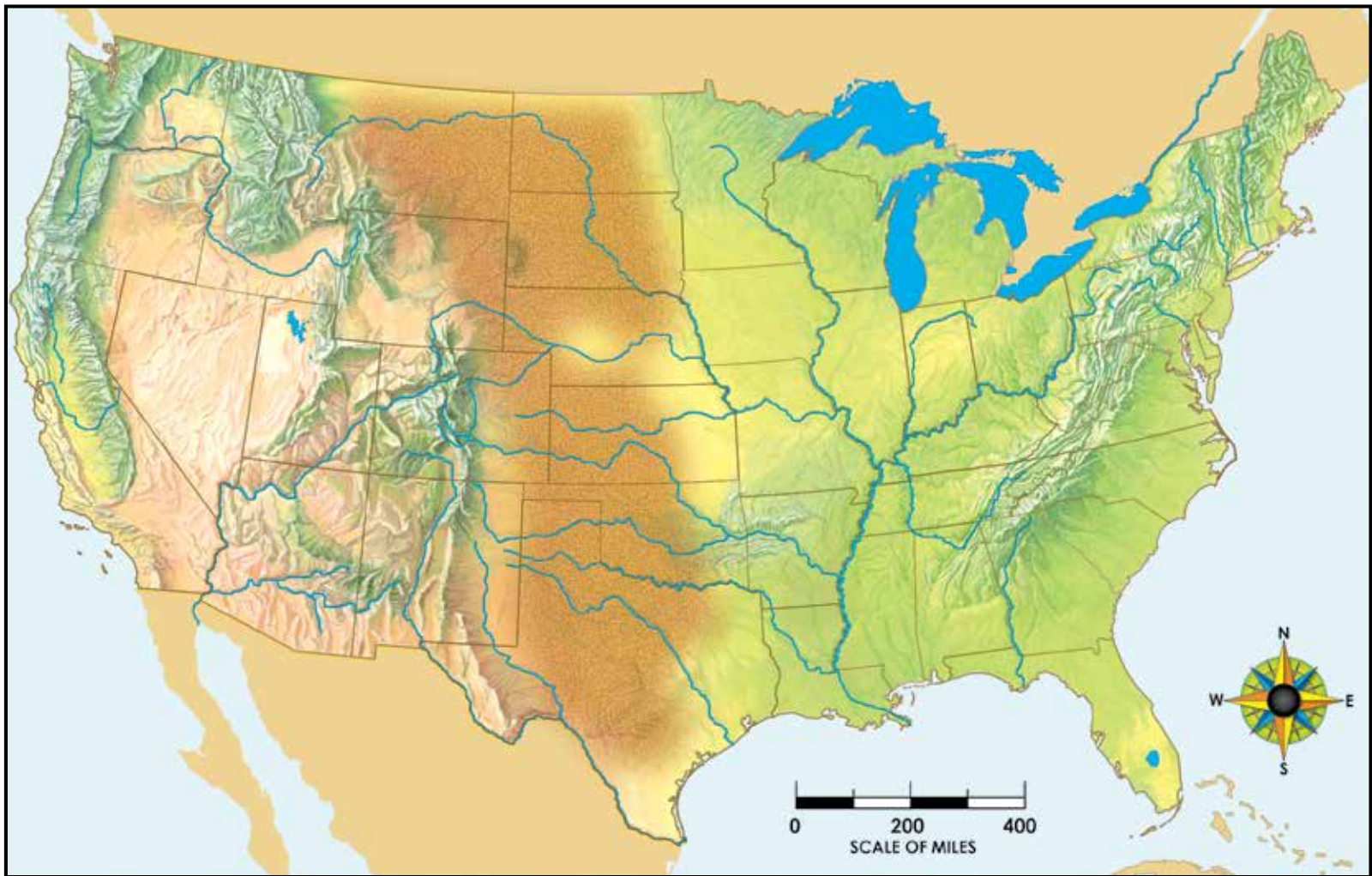
Look at the aerial photo and suggest an alternative name for the Magic Dragon.



Mapping the Midwest

Activity

This is a map of the United States. As you have learned this week, our country is filled with different physical and geographic features. Cut out the pictures and words at the bottom of the page and glue them onto the appropriate area of the map. If an area covers a large amount of land, just paste that feature onto a part of the map that would be considered part of that area.



Missouri River
Ozarks

Black Hills
Great Lakes

Let's Write

Use details from the articles to explain why it is important to understand the various physical features of the United States. Be sure to describe the physical features you learned about.

Think & Review

1. In which state does the Missouri River connect with the Mississippi River?
2. What animals live in the Great Plains?
3. How tall are the Sleeping Dunes?
4. How old are the Ozark Mountains?
5. How long did it take to sculpt the four presidents' faces into Mount Rushmore?
6. How tall is the tallest peak in the Black Hills?