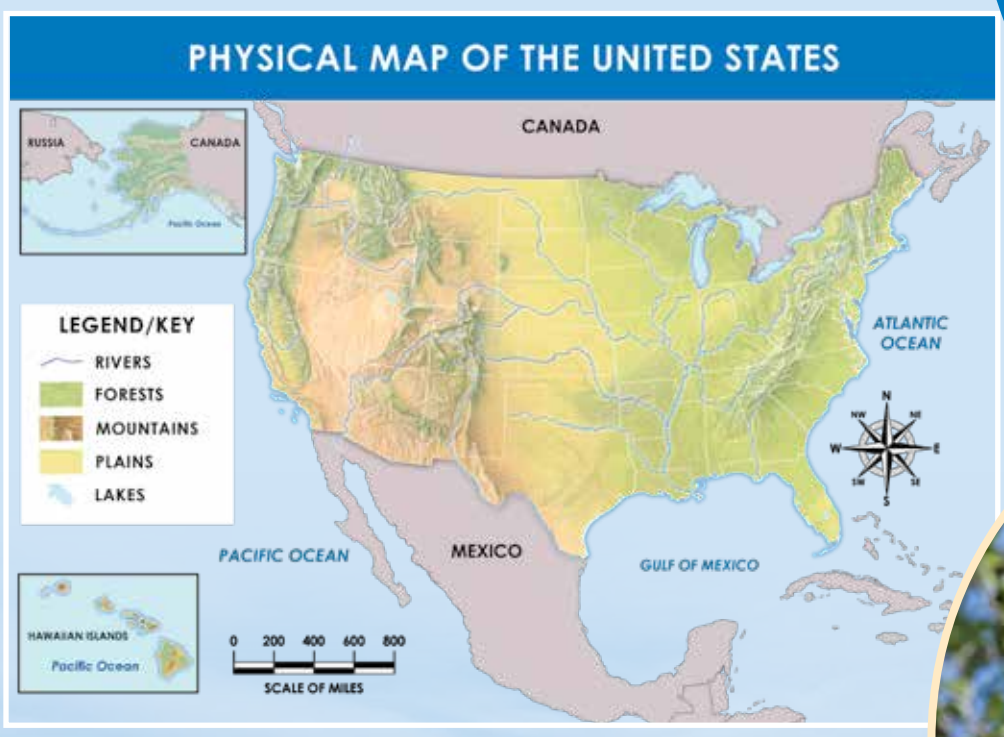
Florida

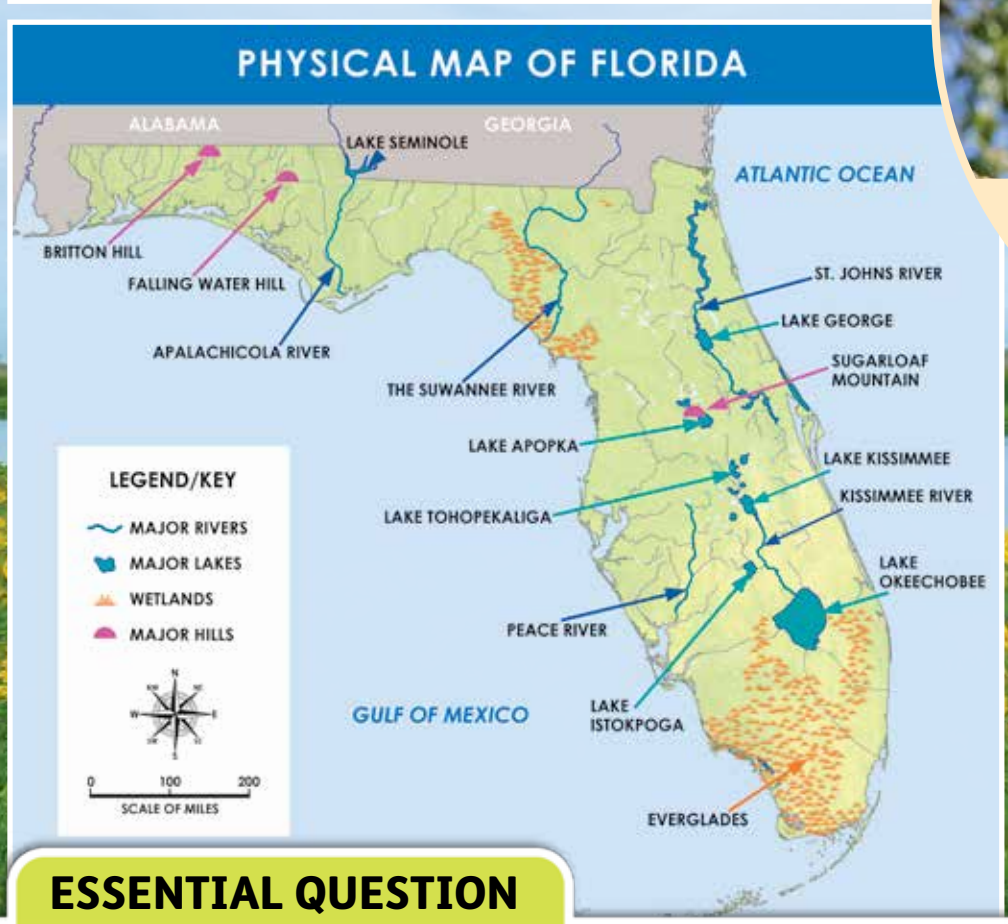
4 Studies Weekly

OUR CHANGING STATE

PHYSICAL CHARACTERISTICS

Physical characteristics describe the natural environment of an area. Landscapes, plants, climate, and animals are physical characteristics. Bodies of water, including rivers, streams, lakes, and oceans, are also physical characteristics. Landforms are also a physical characteristic of an area. Some examples of landforms are mountains, plains, valleys, and deserts. These characteristics are all connected and help geographers describe different areas on the Earth's surface. Physical characteristics are what make the Earth interesting and unique! A physical map shows the world's major physical features. Look at the physical map of the United States. Can you locate the rivers? Can you identify the surrounding oceans?





Everglades at sunset

Tallahassee Cypress Swamp

Roseate SpoonbilL, St. Augustine, Florida

wildflowers at Lake Apopka

ESSENTIAL QUESTION

How do geography and climate vary throughout Florida?

Physical Features of Florida

Landforms are natural shapes that make up the Earth's surface. There are many types of landforms. They come in different shapes and sizes. Landforms are on the Earth's outer layer. This layer is called the **crust**. Most landforms take hundreds or thousands of years to form. The most common type of landforms located in Florida are hills, wetlands, rivers, lakes, bays, plains, and islands.

Hills

Hills are landforms that rise slightly above the land around them. Hills are smaller than mountains. The tallest point in Florida is Britton Hill, located in Defuniak Springs. It stands at 345 feet above sea level.

Wetlands

Wetlands are areas of land where water covers the soil at varying levels all year round. There are different types of wetlands in Florida. Swamps and marshes are common types of wetlands in Florida. **Swamps** are forested wetlands that include many different types of trees and vegetation. **Marshes** are wetlands that are dominated by grasses and reeds. There are freshwater and saltwater wetlands in Florida. The largest wetland in the state is the Florida Everglades, which is the largest marsh system in the United States.

Loxahatchee River, Jupiter, FL

Rivers

Rivers are large, flowing bodies of water that move across the land. Rivers often flow into other rivers or a larger body of water, such as a pond, lake, ocean, bay, gulf, or sea. Florida is home to over 1,700 rivers, which cover an area of 25,949 miles. The Apalachicola River is the longest river that flows through Florida, while the St. Johns River is the longest river contained within the borders of the state.

Lakes

A **lake** is a body of water with land on all sides. Lakes can be natural or human-made. Florida is home to over 30,000 lakes. The largest of the state's lakes is Lake Okeechobee, covering 448,000 acres. Lake Okeechobee is the fourth-largest lake in the United States. It is a popular destination for tourists and Floridians alike.

Bays

A **bay** is a coastal body of water partially surrounded by land that feeds into a large body of water. Because it is surrounded on three sides by water, Florida is home to over 900 bays.

Tampa Bay is the largest of Florida's bays, encompassing 400 square miles.

Tampa Bay

Limestone Arch, Coral Cove Park, FL

Aquifers

Aquifers are a major physical feature of Florida. An **aquifer** is an underground reservoir of fresh water. Water is pumped from Florida's many aquifers and supplies fresh water to millions of people throughout the state. There are two major aquifers in Florida. The Floridan Aquifer is the largest aquifer in the state, covering about 82,000 square miles, and extends into parts of Georgia, Alabama, and South Carolina.

The Biscayne Aquifer is much smaller than the Floridan Aquifer and only covers an area of 4,000 square miles. This aquifer supplies water to many major cities in south Florida, including Miami, Boca Raton, and Fort Lauderdale.

Wacissa River

Florida plains

Plains

A **plain** is a large area of flat land with few to no trees. The plains of Florida are different from plains in other areas of the country. Unlike other plains in the United States, Florida's plains have wet soil and are often marshy. Florida's plains are located in the coastal and low-lying areas of the state.

Key West

Islands

An **island** is land that is surrounded on all sides by water. The state of Florida includes many different islands. Florida is primarily made up of the mainland areas, including the panhandle and peninsula. However, Florida also includes over 4,000 islands. The largest of Florida's island chains are the Florida Keys. The Florida Keys are made up of 1,700 islands, including Key West and Key Largo.

Limestone

Limestone is found throughout Florida. Thousands of years ago, following the last ice age, sea levels rose. Much of present-day Florida was underwater. As sea levels fell, the shells, coral, and sand that were left behind hardened into limestone. Limestone is usually white, but if it becomes polluted with other minerals, it will change color. If iron oxide mixes with limestone, it becomes brown, yellow, or red. If limestone and carbon mix together, the limestone becomes blue, black, or gray.

Limestone is used to make fertilizers and glass. It is also frequently used as a building material in items such as flooring, interior and exterior facings, and monuments. Limestone is soft when it is underground, but once it is exposed to the air, it hardens.

Regions of Florida

Geographers organize the Earth into regions to help us learn about our world. A **region** is an area of land that has similar characteristics. Regions are often defined by their physical characteristics. Physical characteristics describe the natural environment of an area. Geographers divide Florida into six physical regions. These include the Western Uplands, Marianna Lowlands, Tallahassee Hills, Central Ridge Highlands, the Coastal Lowlands, and the Everglades. Each region has its own distinct and unique physical characteristics.

Western Uplands

Florida's Western Uplands region includes the northern part of the Florida Panhandle, extending from the Perdido River in the western part of the state to the Apalachicola River in the central part of the panhandle. This region has the highest elevation of all of Florida's physical regions. Because of this, the area has many hills and plateaus. A **plateau** is an area of high, flat land. The Western Uplands are home to Florida's highest point. Britton Hill stands at 345 feet above sea level.

The soil and climate of the Western Uplands are ideal for growing crops and forest products. Pine forests cover much of the region, but large oak, magnolia, palm, and cypress trees also grow throughout the area. The soil of the Western Uplands region is ideal for growing many crops, including peanuts, corn, soybeans, wheat, and cotton. Farmers of the region also raise cattle and produce many dairy products, such as cheese, milk, and ice cream. Farmers of the Western Uplands region raise thousands of pigs, chickens, sheep, and goats.

Marianna Lowlands

The Marianna Lowlands are located east of the Western Uplands. The physical environment of the Marianna Lowlands is made up of low hills, small lakes, and sinkholes. **Sinkholes** form when excessive amounts of rain and groundwater move through the soil quickly. This causes open spaces and caverns to form underground. Eventually, the surface above these spaces collapses, causing a large hole to form in the ground.

One of the primary physical features of the Marianna Lowlands is the Florida Caverns, located in Marianna, Florida. These limestone caverns were formed millions of years ago. These large caverns are a popular tourist destination in the region. They are also home to many unique and rare species of plants and animals, including bats, cave salamanders, and blind cave crayfish.

Tallahassee Hills

The Tallahassee Hills region is located between the Apalachicola River and the Withlacoochee River. It stretches north from Tallahassee to the Georgia border. This region is the smallest of Florida's six physical regions at 25 miles wide and 100 miles long. This area is characterized by low, rolling hills.

The Tallahassee Hills region is often called the Red Hills region. The Red Hills region extends north from Tallahassee to Thomasville, Georgia, encompassing 436,000 acres of pine forests and red clay fields. This area was once the center of cotton production in Florida due to its rich soil and moist red clay fields. Many of these former plantations have been converted into poultry farms that raise chickens, turkeys, and quail. Other parts of this region have been transformed into conservation areas for native plants and animals. Local conservation groups of the region are working hard to protect more than 60 threatened and endangered plant and animal species, including the endangered red-cockaded woodpecker and the gopher tortoise.

Central Ridge Highlands

The Central Ridge Highlands are located to the east of the Tallahassee Hills. This region encompasses much of the land in the central part of the state. It extends from the Okefenokee Swamp in the northern part of the state to Lake Okeechobee in the south. The geography of this area varies greatly throughout the region. The northern part of the region is only 150 feet above sea level, and the land is relatively flat. Areas of the western part of the region are very hilly, like the neighboring Tallahassee Hills region. The southern part of the region is characterized by grassy plains. It is also referred to as the Lake Region because of the number of lakes and sources of fresh water in the area.

The Central Ridge Highlands are home to many unique physical features. The Okefenokee Swamp is located in the northern part of the region. The Okefenokee Swamp is one of the largest swamps in the world and is the source of Florida's Suwannee River. The Central Ridge Highlands region is also home to two national forests. The Osceola National Forest is located in the northern part of the region near the Georgia border. It is filled with thousands of acres of wetlands and pine forests. The Ocala National Forest is located in central Florida. It was the first of Florida's national forests to be recognized by the federal government. This forest was designated a national forest in 1908 to protect Florida's sand pine scrub forests.

Coastal Lowlands

The Coastal Lowlands are the largest of Florida's physical regions. This region includes the coastal areas of the panhandle and the peninsula of the state. It runs along the Gulf of Mexico and the Atlantic Ocean. This region extends inland from 10 to 60 miles in various areas of the state. The Coastal Lowlands also include the Florida Keys. This region consists of low-lying land with sandy soil.

The Coastal Lowlands region is home to Florida's largest lake. Lake Okeechobee covers 730 square miles, making it the 10th-largest freshwater lake in the United States. It is home to hundreds of plant and animal species. Because of its abundant supply of fish, Lake Okeechobee is one of the state's premier fishing destinations.

The economy of the Coastal Lowlands relies heavily on the region's natural beauty and abundant resources. The natural wonders of this region, including its many beaches, islands, lakes, rivers, and coral reefs, attract thousands of tourists to the state each year. Fishing is also a major economic activity in this region. Commercial fishing boats and visitors catch thousands of pounds of fish, shrimp, oysters, and crabs in the waters of this region each year.

The Everglades

The Everglades is one of, if not the most, unique physical regions of Florida. The Everglades is made up of over one million acres of wetland. It is the largest mangrove ecosystem in the Western Hemisphere. This region is divided into different habitats, which include hardwood hammocks, pinelands, mangroves, ponds, sloughs (deep channels of fresh water), grassy wetlands, and forested wetlands. The abundant sources of fresh water in the region provide drinking water to one-third of Florida's population.

These unique habitats are home to thousands of plant and animal species. Over 700 species of plants can be found in the Everglades, many of which are endangered or threatened. The Everglades is also home to 360 species of birds, 50 species of reptiles, 17 species of amphibians, about 300 species of fish, more than 40 species of mammals, and 5,000 different insect species. It is the only place in the world where alligators and crocodiles live side by side. It is also the home of the elusive Florida panther and the West Indian manatee, both of which are endangered species.

Thousands of tourists visit the Everglades each year to take in its natural wonders, hike, fish, enjoy water sports, and learn about the environment of the region.

Name _____

Climate of Florida

The climate of Florida varies depending on location. Most of the state has a humid, subtropical climate. Areas with a humid, subtropical climate have long, humid, hot summers and mild, wet winters. Humid climates have a high level of water vapor in the atmosphere.

The southern part of the state is divided into three different climate zones. Areas along the Atlantic Ocean have a tropical rainforest climate. Tropical rainforest climates are hot, humid, and wet all year long. The temperature does not vary much between the winter and summer months. Inland areas in the southern part of the state have a tropical savanna climate. Areas with a tropical savanna climate are often characterized by tall, grassy areas and hot, humid, wet weather conditions. The rest of south Florida has a tropical monsoon climate. This type of climate is similar to tropical rainforest and savanna climates. Areas in this climate zone are hot and humid year-round but receive less precipitation than other areas of the state.

Because of its hot, humid, and mostly sunny climate, Florida is known as the "Sunshine State." Despite this nickname, Florida receives an average of 53 inches of rainfall each year. Florida's climate makes the state a unique place to live in and visit. Average temperatures across the state range from the mid-50s to the mid-60s in the winter and the mid-80s in the summer. Because of the high levels of humidity, high temperatures in Florida often feel warmer than they actually are.

Comparing Regions

Directions: Choose two of the physical regions you studied in this week's publication.
Use the Venn diagram to compare and contrast the physical characteristics of each region.

REGION _____ **REGION** _____