

Geography Inquiries

Using

California, A Changing State: An Atlas for California Students

These short inquiries will challenge students to understand and interpret the content of the atlas using geographic thinking. You can work through them together as a class or have students work in teams, with each studying one map and then coming together with other team members to discuss insights and develop an answer to the inquiry.

You can use this [note-taking guide](#) for any of the inquiries.

This [Map Reading and Interpretation Guide](#) provides useful guidance for understanding the maps.



1. Earthquake Hazards

California experiences earthquakes as a result of plate tectonics. To better understand and plan for the risks created by earthquakes, we need to know:

Do earthquakes happen in areas where a lot of people live or are earthquakes most likely to happen in places where very few people live?

Consult these pages in the atlas: [9](#), [42](#), and [44](#)

2. Temperature Extremes

California is known for having good weather, but there are some places in the state that get very, very hot in the summer and others that get very, very cold in the winter.

Where are the hottest and coldest parts of California? What areas experience the largest difference between July (summer) and January (winter) temperatures?

Consult these pages in the atlas: First [16](#), then [14](#) & [15](#)

3. Explorers, Adventurers, and Settlers

The history of Europeans in California began in the 1500's with explorers coming to claim new colonial territory for Spain. Those explorers were followed by missionaries, miners, and settlers looking for a better life for themselves.

Which explorers used the routes that were later used by both miners and settlers headed to California?

Consult these pages in the atlas: [22](#), [23](#), [24](#)

4. Competition for Space

Throughout the state of California, both cities and farms take up a lot of space. There is a natural competition for space for good reasons. Both farming and building are best done on level land where water is available. Farms are also most profitable close to cities, where there is a high demand for food.

Is it possible for a county that has more urban land than agricultural land to also lead the state in one of its top agricultural products?

Consult these pages in the atlas: [36](#), [37](#), [35](#)



5. Indigenous California

Native Californians have been living on their lands for thousands of years, with Europeans only coming to claim and occupy the very territories on which these people depended during the last 350 years. To better understand how European and indigenous cultures came into contact in California, we can ask:

5a. How did the development of the Spanish missions, gold mines, and 1870s/80s railroads create contact between newly arriving people and indigenous populations of California?

Consult these pages in the atlas: [18](#) in relation to [20](#), [25](#), and [28](#)

5b. How did the transportation systems developed by California's new residents impact the trade routes used by Native Americans?

Consult these pages in the atlas: [30](#), [31](#), and [28](#)

6. Water Resources

Fresh water is a very important and valuable resource in California. Cities, farms, and wild plants and animals all depend on a limited amount of water available from rivers, streams, and in the ground. We need to be sure that we can manage and protect our water, much of which comes in the form of winter rains and snows that accumulate in the mountains and then drain to lower ground.

How can the government protect our important rivers and streams in California?

Consult these pages in the atlas: [33](#), [29](#), and either [11](#) or [34](#)

7. Historic California

The state of California has been shaped by powerful natural forces, and many different people have also left their mark on the state. In places all over the state, indigenous, colonial, and modern histories come together to create fascinating places that will continue to change over time.

How was (fill in name of one of California's 10 fastest growing cities) impacted by specific historical developments in California?

Consult these pages in the atlas: [44](#) to select city and then any three of [20](#), [23](#), [25](#), and [28](#)

