What is Geography?

The scientific study of the location of people and activities across Earth and the reasons for their distribution.

Rubenstein, James M. The Cultural Landscape. 2011
What do Geographers do? They . . .

- ask where things are and why they are there.
- organize material by place, because they understand that something happening at one place can result from something that happened elsewhere and can affect conditions at other places.
- use maps as a tool to display and analyze information.

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Understanding Geography

One way to learn about the similarities and differences of the Earth’s places is to study them through themes. Geographers developed five main themes that help us understand the human and physical characteristics of the Earth.

Location
Place
Region
Movement
Human-Environment Interaction
Five Themes of Geography

1. **Location** – absolute and relative

**Wild Waves Theme Park**

**Absolute location**
The exact spot on Earth where something is found
Latitude: 41° 19' 21" North
Longitude: 122° 18' 41" West

**Relative Location**
The position of a place in relation to other places - Wild Waves Water Park is 7 miles north of Tacoma and 25 miles south of Seattle
Five Themes of Geography

1. **Location** – relative and absolute
2. **Place** - human and physical characteristics of a location that distinguish it from another.

**Physical Characteristics**: Include weather, land features, plants and animals. The **San Juan Islands** are distinguished by the 172 island landforms.

**Human Characteristics**: residents, culture, or ideas. The **San Juan Islands** economy is partially based on the tourist industry, known for outdoor adventures such as kayaking, fishing, and whale watching.
Five Themes of Geography

1. **Location** – relative and absolute
2. **Place** - human and physical characteristics of a location
3. **Human-Environment Interaction** how humans adapt to and modify the environment

**Adaptation**

- **Adaptation Example:** Clothing
  - ...wearing clothing that is suitable for summer and winter; rain and shine.

**Modification**

- **Modification Example:** Bridge
  - ...creating bridges to improve transportation.

...building dams to create hydroelectric power and irrigation
Five Themes of Geography

1. **Location** – relative and absolute
2. **Place** - human and physical characteristics of a location
3. **Human-Environment Interaction** how humans adapt to and modify the environment
4. **Movement** – migration of humans and movement of ideas, goods and resources across the planet

**Movement of Ideas Example:**
Fashion clothing

**Movement of Humans Example:**
Settlers moving across the Oregon Trail
Five Themes of Geography

1. **Location** – relative and absolute
2. **Place** - human and physical characteristics of a location
3. **Human-Environment Interaction** how humans adapt to and modify the environment
4. **Movement** – migration of humans and movement of ideas, goods and resources across the planet
5. **Region** - characteristic that unifies the area and defined by humans – the cultural landscape.

**Regional Perception Example: Salmon**

- can be defined by people's perception and what is valued by the community

**Administrative Perception Example: King County**

- ... can be defined by governmental or administrative boundaries
Three types of regions: formal, functional, vernacular

- **Formal** - an area within which everyone shares a common language, economic activity or climate.

- **Functional** – an area that is tied together by a central point such as a transportation system, communication systems or by economic activity.

- **Vernacular** - a place that people believe exists as part of their cultural identity.