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A Book of Answers for Kids

Andrea Sutcliffe



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# INTRODUCTION

What is geography, exactly? To begin with, geography is much more than knowing the name of a state capital or the height of the tallest mountain.

Geography helps us understand the world around us. It not only tells us *where* in the world people and places are, it also helps us see *how* and *why* they got there. Geography describes how places on Earth *change* over time and how humans change the places where they live. Geography also explains the *connections* between people and places. With this knowledge, we can use geography to help us look into the future of our Earth.

This book begins by giving you a geographic snapshot of the United States in relation to the world's other 190 countries. It then takes you on a tour of the 50 states, region by region, from east to west. You'll learn how natural features such as mountain ranges, rivers, and fertile plains have shaped the way the United States has grown and prospered. You'll also learn how the American people have changed the land they live on, for better and for worse.

In addition, this book will help you understand where Americans have moved from and moved to, and why. You'll learn which states and cities are growing, and which are slowing down. You'll also see how we've come to depend on different regions of the country for the food we eat and the products we buy, such as fresh vegetables from California, wheat from Kansas, oil and gas from Texas, and furniture from North Carolina.

The questions and answers in this book are meant to spark your curiosity about the geography of the United States. We hope that by reading this book,

you'll soon be asking questions of your own. For the answers, and to learn more about geography in general, we encourage you to visit the New York Public Library or your local library, or perhaps check out the geographic resources on the Internet listed at the back of this book.

**P A R T I**

**THE  
UNITED STATES  
AS A NATION**



## CHAPTER 1

# THE UNITED STATES IN THE WORLD

### **Where in the world is the United States of America?**

The United States is a country on the North American continent in the Western Hemisphere. It is also in the Northern Hemisphere. It is one of 191 independent countries in the world.

### **Where is the northernmost point of the 50 United States?**

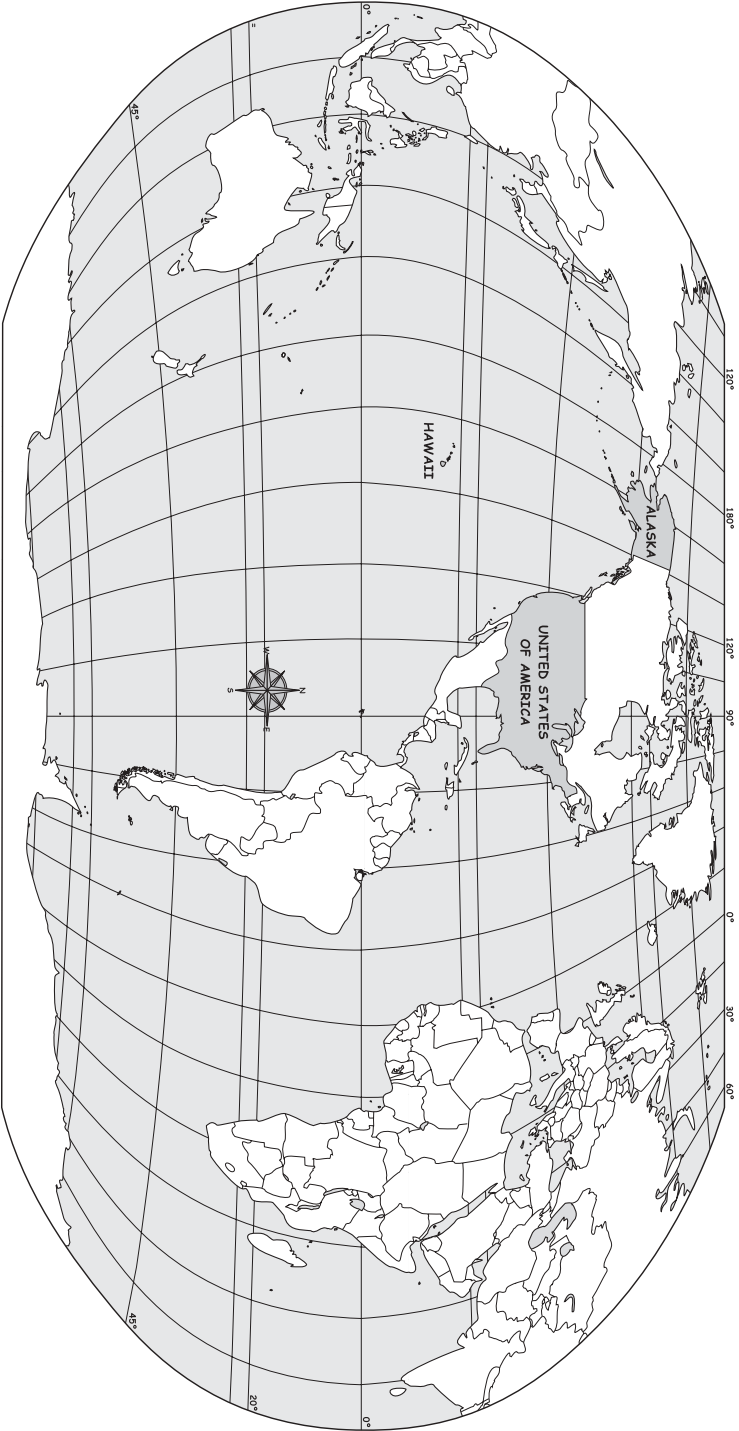
It is Point Barrow, Alaska, which lies at 71°23' north latitude (90° north latitude is at the North Pole) and 156°29' west longitude.

### **Where is the southernmost point of the 50 states?**

It is Ka Lae, Hawaii, at 18°55' north latitude and 155°41' west longitude.

### **How large is the United States in land area compared with other countries in the world?**

The United States is the world's fourth-largest country in land area, with 3,678,900 square miles (9,565,140 sq km). The largest country in the world, with 6,592,812 square miles (17,141,311 sq km), is Russia; it is almost twice



Map of the world. The darker shaded areas indicate the United States.

## Geographic Terms to Know

**Country:** An independent political state or nation and its territories. A country has distinct boundaries, a government, a unique name, and a flag.

**Continent:** One of the seven principal divisions of land on Earth. The continents are North America, South America, Africa, Europe, Asia, Australia, and Antarctica.

**Western Hemisphere:** the area occupied by the continents of North and South America and their surrounding waters that lies between 20° west longitude and 160° east longitude.

**Northern Hemisphere:** the half of the Earth that lies north of the equator, between 0° (the Equator) and 90° north latitude (the North Pole).

**Equator:** The imaginary line of 0° latitude that lies midway between the North and South Poles.

**Prime meridian:** The imaginary line denoting 0° longitude that passes through the Royal Observatory at Greenwich, England.

**Longitude:** The angular distance east or west of the prime meridian, from 0° to 180° east or west.

**Latitude:** The measure of distance north and south of the Equator, from 0° to 90° north or south. Lines of latitude run east–west and are parallel to each other. Together, lines of latitude and longitude form a grid that lets us pinpoint exact locations on the Earth’s surface.

as big as the United States. Canada ranks number two in size (3,831,000 sq mi/9,960,600 sq km), and China is number three (3,691,500 sq mi/9,597,900 sq km). China and the United States are very similar in size.

### How many miles wide is the United States?

The distance depends on whether Alaska or Hawaii is included. Measured from the farthest points west and east in the conterminous United States (meaning the 48 states that have a common boundary)—which are West Quoddy Head, Maine, and Point Arena, California—the United States is 2,892 miles (4,656 km) wide.

Measured between the farthest points between the eastern United States and Alaska—Soldier Key, Florida, and Cape Wrangell, Alaska—the distance is 5,503 miles (8,860 km). From Soldier Key, Florida, to Kure Island, Hawaii, the distance is 5,859 miles (9,433 km).



North America showing the borders of the United States with Hawaii as an insert.

**How far is it from the southern tip of Texas to the Canadian border?**

From southernmost Texas, it is 1,602 miles (2,579 km) due north to the 49th parallel (the 49th degree of latitude that defines part of the U.S.–Canadian border).



### **Why was the 49th parallel chosen as part of the U.S.–Canadian boundary?**

After a great deal of discussion, Great Britain (which governed British Canada until 1931) and the United States finally agreed in 1846 to make the 49th parallel the western part of their boundary. This boundary line starts in Minnesota and extends west to what is now Washington State. There was only one problem: the 49th parallel cuts across the lower half of Vancouver Island. Rather than divide up the island, the United States gave its portion to Canada.

### **How large is the United States in population compared with the rest of the world?**

In 2000, the United States was the world's third-largest nation, with more than 281 million people. China was more than four and a half times larger. Here were the top 10 countries in population at the turn of the century:

1. China	1.3 billion
2. India	1 billion
3. United States	281 million
4. Indonesia	212 million
5. Brazil	170 million
6. Pakistan	150 million
7. Russia	145 million
8. Bangladesh	128 million
9. Japan	126 million
10. Nigeria	123 million

The United States has almost five times as many people as Great Britain, France, or Italy. It has six times as many people as Canada.

### **How many babies are born each year in the United States?**

More than 4 million babies (about 11,000 a day) are born each year in the United States. That seems like a lot,

*The U.S.–Canadian border is 5,527 miles (8,898 km) long. The U.S.–Mexican border is 1,933 miles (3,112 km) long.*

*Only 1 of every 20 people in the world today lives in the United States, even though it is the third-largest country in population. That's because most of the world's 191 countries have relatively small populations. But added together, more than 6 billion people live on Earth.*