

Southwest Asia

Lesson 1: Physical Geography of Southwest Asia

ESSENTIAL QUESTION

How does geography influence the way people live?

Terms to Know

alluvial plain an area built up by rich fertile soil left by river floods

oasis an area in a desert where underground water allows plants to grow year-round

wadi a dry riverbed in a desert that fills with water when rains fall

semiarid somewhat dry

Where in the World: Southwest Asia



Southwest Asia

Lesson 1: Physical Geography of Southwest Asia, *continued*

? Explaining

- Where is the Khyber Pass, and why is it important?



Marking the Text

- Read the text on the right. Highlight the bodies of water that border Southwest Asia.



Drawing Conclusions

- Why do you think the Strait of Hormuz is strategically important?



Describing

- What makes the Dead Sea distinct?

Southwest Asia's Physical Features

Guiding Question *What are the main landforms and resources in Southwest Asia?*

Mountains and plateaus dominate the landscape of Southwest Asia. They have been created over the past 100 million years by collisions between four tectonic plates. This has also caused earthquakes in the region.

The region's highest mountains are the Hindu Kush range. It stretches across much of Afghanistan and along that country's border with Pakistan in South Asia. Mountain ranges form natural barriers to travel and trade. As a result, mountain passes are important in this area. One of the most famous is the Khyber Pass, between Afghanistan and Pakistan. It has served as a route for trade and invading armies for thousands of years.

Plateaus cover much of Iran. Mountains in western Iran merge with those of eastern Turkey. The Anatolian Plateau spreads across central and western Turkey. The Arabian Peninsula is a single, vast plateau. Long mountain ranges that lie parallel to the peninsula's coasts are actually the deeply eroded edges of the plateau.

Southwest Asia takes its physical shape mainly from the bodies of water that surround it. Turkey has coasts on the Mediterranean and Black Seas. Syria, Lebanon, Jordan, and Israel have coasts on the Mediterranean Sea. Jordan, Saudi Arabia, and Yemen border the Red Sea. The Red Sea has been one of the world's busiest waterways since the opening of Egypt's Suez Canal in 1869. In the southeastern Arabian Peninsula, Yemen and Oman have coasts on a part of the Indian Ocean called the Arabian Sea.

In the northeast, the Arabian Peninsula is shaped by the Persian Gulf. It is connected to the ocean by a strategic waterway called the Strait of Hormuz. The Persian Gulf has become very important in world affairs since the middle of the 1900s. Eight of the region's 15 countries border the Persian Gulf.

Persian Gulf Countries		
• Oman	• Iraq	• Iran
• Bahrain	• Kuwait	• Qatar
• Saudi Arabia	• United Arab Emirates	

In the north, Iran also borders the landlocked Caspian Sea. The Dead Sea, between Israel and Jordan, is also landlocked. At 1,300 feet (395 m) below sea level, it is the world's lowest body of water. Its shore represents the world's lowest land elevation.

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Southwest Asia's two longest and most important rivers are the Tigris and the Euphrates. They are often considered part of the same river system. They begin in the mountains of eastern Turkey. In their lower courses, they flow parallel to each other through an **alluvial plain**. This is a plain created by sediment deposited during floods. The plain covers most of Iraq as well as eastern Syria and southeastern Turkey. This area has been known since ancient times as Mesopotamia, which is Greek for "land between the rivers."

Deserts spread across much of Southwest Asia. The Arabian Desert covers nearly the entire Arabian Peninsula. It is the largest desert in the region, and includes many landscapes, including sand seas, which are unbroken expanses of sand. The largest sand sea in the world is the Rub' al-Khali, or Empty Quarter, in the southern part of the peninsula. The climate is so dry that there are no permanent human settlements. In some areas, nomadic people known as the Bedouin keep herds of camels, horses, and sheep. There are **oases** in the Arabian Desert. These are areas where underground water allows plants to grow.

Southwest Asia's Climates

Guiding Question *What are some ways that mountains, seas, or other physical features affect climate in Southwest Asia?*

Most of Southwest Asia has an arid, or very dry, climate. Deserts cover nearly the entire Arabian Peninsula as well as large parts of Iran. Temperatures can rise to 129°F (54°C). When rains come, torrents of water race through **wadis**, or streambeds that are dry much of the year. Seeds sprout within hours, turning the plains green. Areas along the edges of the dry zones are **semiarid**, or somewhat dry. These are found in highlands and mountain ranges.

Along the region's Mediterranean and Aegean coasts and across much of western Turkey, the climate is Mediterranean. There are mild temperatures and moderate rainfall in the winter. Summers are warm and dry. The mountains of eastern Turkey, western Iran, and central Afghanistan have continental climates. Temperatures vary greatly between summer and winter. The mountains of the Hindu Kush have a highland climate. Glaciers are found among their high peaks.

Natural Resources

Guiding Question *How do natural resources influence the lives of people in Southwest Asia?*

Scarcity of water has shaped Southwest Asia's human history and settlement patterns. The region's most important resources are oil and natural gas.

? Identifying

5. What is the Rub' al-Khali?

✓ Reading Progress Check

6. How has tectonic activity helped shape landforms in Southwest Asia?

AbC Defining

7. Describe the difference between an *oasis* and a *wadi*.

✓ Reading Progress Check

8. In what parts of Southwest Asia can farmers probably grow crops without irrigation?

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Lesson 1: Physical Geography of Southwest Asia, *continued*



Marking the Text

9. Read the text on the right. Highlight recent discoveries in Afghanistan that may help it rise out of poverty.



Reading Progress Check

10. Five countries that border the Persian Gulf hold more than half the oil that has been discovered in the world. Name three of the countries.

Natural Gas

- Gaseous form of petroleum

Crude Oil

- Liquid form of petroleum
- Gasoline; diesel, heating, and industrial oil; plastics, cloth fibers

The world's largest known deposits of petroleum are in Southwest Asia. Most of them are concentrated around and under the Persian Gulf. Five countries that border the gulf—Saudi Arabia, Iran, Iraq, Kuwait, and United Arab Emirates—hold more than half the world's known oil. These countries export most of their oil to industrialized countries. Petroleum revenues have brought tremendous wealth to a few people in the exporting countries. Only in a few areas, however, has the wealth been used to improve the lives of the people or to bring about modernization.

The region boasts a great variety of mineral resources. Turkey and Iran have significant deposits of coal. Phosphates, which are used in fertilizers, are mined in Iraq, Israel, and Syria. Between 2006 and 2010, American geologists in Afghanistan discovered enormous deposits of many minerals. Among them were iron, copper, gold, cobalt, lithium, and rare earth elements used to make electronic devices.

Writing

Check for Understanding

1. **Informative/Explanatory** What are the major physical features of Southwest Asia?

2. **Informative/Explanatory** How has petroleum affected the countries that export it?
