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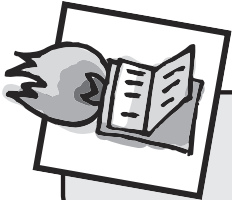
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THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA



WELCOME TO THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA!

Welcome to the United States, the most multicultural nation in the world. Although relatively young in comparison to many other countries, the United States is powerful. It has one of the world's biggest economies and the largest military force. Thousands of people from all over the globe make the United States their home each year. The country was founded by people seeking freedom, with a Constitution that guarantees basic rights to all of its citizens. Freedom continues to be its core value.



FAST FACTS

Official Name:	United States of America
Location:	North America, between Canada and Mexico; the east coast borders the North Atlantic Ocean; the west coast borders the North Pacific Ocean.
Population:	310,232,863 (2010 estimate) The United States is the world's third-largest country by population (after China and India).
Capital City:	Washington, DC (District of Columbia)
Area:	3,794,066 square miles The United States is the world's third-largest country by size (after Russia and Canada). It is about half the size of Russia, about three-tenths the size of Africa, and about half the size of South America. It is slightly larger than China and more than twice the size of the European Union.
Major Languages:	English: 82.1% Spanish: 10.7%
Major Religion:	Christianity
Currency:	The dollar; 100 cents = 1 dollar
Climate:	Mostly temperate; the climate is tropical in Hawaii and Florida, arctic in Alaska, semi-arid in the Great Plains west of the Mississippi River, and arid in the Great Basin of the Southwest.
The Land:	The United States feature a vast central plain with mountains in the west and hills and low mountains in the east. There are rugged mountains and broad river valleys in Alaska and rugged volcanic land in Hawaii.
Type of Government:	Constitution-based federal republic with a strong democracy The 50 states have a degree of self-government – voters choose their representatives.
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Flag:

The U.S. flag is called *Old Glory*. It has 13 equal horizontal stripes of red and white, representing the 13 original colonies. There is a blue rectangle in the upper hoist-side corner (the side closest to the flag pole) with 50 white, five-pointed stars. The stars represent the 50 states.

National Bird: Bald Eagle

National Flower: Rose

Motto: "In God We Trust"

Natural Environment

The United States is made up of 48 states on the North American continent. It also includes Alaska, which is separated from the U.S., mostly by Canada, and Hawaii, which is on an archipelago (a chain of islands) in the central Pacific, southwest of North America. The United States encompasses many natural environments and habitats found all over the world: mountains, forests, deserts, plains, tropics, coastal land, and the arctic.

Climate and Extreme Weather

The climate is:

- tropical in Hawaii and Florida
- hot and dry in the Southwest
- rainy and temperate in the Pacific Northwest
- temperate to hot and humid in the South and Southeast
- hot to temperate to cold with four defined seasons in the Midwest and East
- temperate to polar in Alaska

Each part of the United States has its own extreme weather. The entire Pacific Basin is subject to tsunamis, volcanoes, and earthquakes. The dry and hot southern part of the West Coast is subject to wild fires and mud slides. Hurricanes are a threat along the Atlantic and Gulf of Mexico coasts. The Midwest and Southeast have tornadoes and flooding. The permafrost in northern Alaska prevents major development there.

Plants and Animals

The United States is one of the world's most biodiverse countries. It would take several pages to list the 18,800 species of plants, 400 species of mammals, 750 species of birds, 500 species of reptiles and amphibians, and 91,000 species of insects that live there! Here are some highlights of the abundant flora you'll find in the United States:

- Complex forests in the East
- Everglades in the subtropical wilderness in Florida—a vast habitat of marshes and prairies that supports tropical trees, plants, and wildlife
- Grasslands on the Great Plains
- Southwestern deserts of sage brush, cacti, and wildflowers
- Ancient evergreens in the Pacific Northwest
- Giant sequoia trees in California

Grizzly bears are one of the largest land mammals in the United States. Most are found in Alaska, though some 1,200 still populate the lower 48 states. Black bears, smaller than grizzlies, exist all across the continent. They frequently raid campsites and garbage cans looking for food. The coyote is about half the size of a wolf and is also found all over the country, although it's usually associated with the Southwest. America has one species of large cat, called the mountain lion, cougar, puma, or panther. Some are in the Florida Everglades National Park, but most live in the West, where it's not uncommon to see them coming down for a drink from a backyard pool or loping along a hiking trail.

One creature always associated with the United States is the mighty and endangered buffalo. There were millions of them on the Great Plains in the 19th century before they were slaughtered for their hides, for sport, and for money. New herds are now being built up. You can see them in places such as Yellowstone National Park (Wyoming) and Badlands National Park (South Dakota).



Buffalo



A HISTORY OF THE UNITED STATES

The Indigenous People

The history of the United States begins with the indigenous people who migrated to North America from Asia 12,000 to 40,000 years ago. Some of these groups spread throughout America. They became the ancestors to the North American Native American tribes as well as the Eskimos (the Yupik and Inuit) of Alaska. They lived peacefully and practiced hunting, fishing, and farming.

Early Explorers

Contrary to what many people believe, Christopher Columbus was *not* the first European to reach North America. The Vikings got to modern-day Canada about 500 years before Columbus reached the continent.

However, Columbus's contact with the indigenous people of the Bahamas in 1492 paved the way for the European settlement that followed. It also opened the door for new animals from Europe, like horses, hogs, and cattle.

British Settlement

The English created their first successful settlements in what are now Virginia and Massachusetts. They established Virginia Colony at Jamestown in 1607 and the Plymouth Colony in 1620. The Puritans (commonly called Pilgrims) who sailed from England on the *Mayflower* and landed at Plymouth were seeking freedom of worship. They suffered incredible hardship during their first winter. They were aided by Native Americans, but only 53 of the 102 voyagers were left to celebrate the first Thanksgiving. The feast, which occurred in 1621, lasted three days (yes, it included turkey)! People in the United States still celebrate Thanksgiving with a harvest feast every fourth Thursday of November—and they still eat turkey!