

## North America The Continent of North America



The Continent of North America is one of the largest and most diverse continents on our planet. There are many different countries on our continent. One country is ours, The United States of America or the U.S.A. You probably know two of the other countries, too. They are our neighbors to the north and south. Canada stretches all the way along our northern **border**<sup>1</sup>. It borders our country from Maine in the east all the way to the state of Washington in the far northwest. Mexico is our southwestern neighbor. It touches only four states along the border it shares with the United States from Texas to California.

Since we are all part of the same continent, you would think that we would all speak the same language. Not true. In fact, the main languages are each one of the languages of the European explorers who sailed to the continent hundreds of years ago. If you can remember the main language in each country, you can know a lot about what European countries first explored that part of the continent.

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<sup>1</sup> **border**: an imaginary line separating two places; a boundary.

In the U.S.A., you can hear almost every language spoken on earth. But the first people who fought the War for Independence and formed our government were mostly from England and spoke English. Although the United States does not have an official language, English has always been its main language. In Canada, it is a little more complicated. The French and the English both sent explorers to the northeast sections of North America, in what is now Eastern Canada. Both France and England had colonies of people settle down there. Later, the English beat the French in a war and won control of all of Canada. But the French speaking Canadians were very proud of their French **roots**,<sup>2</sup> and insisted that French be one of the official languages. So Canada is officially **bilingual**.<sup>3</sup> It has two official languages. Finally, in Mexico, the official language is Spanish. All schoolchildren are taught to read and write in Spanish, and the government does its work in Spanish.

If you look at a map or globe, you can see that Mexico is connected by an **isthmus**<sup>4</sup> or thin strip of land to South America. This isthmus contains seven small countries and is called Central America. Central America is part of the continent of North America. So are Greenland and the islands of the Caribbean. In total, North America contains over a dozen countries, and “America” contains even more. (When you use the word “America” – though you may be talking about the U.S.A. – that includes all of the countries in North, South *and* Central America, and that’s a lot!)

With the exception of South America, North America is isolated from the rest of the continents. This was even truer before there were airplanes and jets to make the world seem smaller. In fact, foreign enemies have rarely attacked the United States. This has made many people in our country feel safe. Sometimes we even feel like the rest of the world’s troubles are not our problem or even our

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<sup>2</sup> **roots**: heritage, ancestry.

<sup>3</sup> **bilingual**: using or able to speak two languages.

<sup>4</sup> **isthmus**: a narrow strip of land that connects two larger pieces of land.

business. Other people feel that we are very lucky, and should use our good luck to help people in other places. What do you think?

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

1. Which country is on the United States' northern border?
  - a. North America
  - b. Mexico
  - c. Canada
  - d. Texas
  
2. What does it mean to "share a border"?
  - a. To let people live in your apartment and pay you rent.
  - b. To feel a connection with people who speak the same language as you.
  - c. To share resources with other people that live close to you.
  - d. To have a common dividing line between two places.
  
3. You should think before using the word "America" because
  - a. it means only the countries of South America, not North America.
  - b. some people find it to be offensive.
  - c. that word could refer to any of the countries in North, South, or Central America, not just the United States.
  - d. it's hard to pronounce, so you should sound it out in your head first.
  
4. The main reason many North Americans might feel safe is
  - a. they live on the richest continent in the world.
  - b. they have not been invaded very frequently in the last few hundred years.
  - c. there are only three countries on the continent.
  - d. North America is the oldest settled continent in the world.
  
5. The passage is mostly about
  - a. the history, languages, and geography of North America.
  - b. the differences between Mexico and Canada.
  - c. the many reasons people speak Spanish in Mexico.
  - d. what makes a language an official language.

6. Name one similarity and one difference between Mexico and Canada.

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7. Why are both French and English official languages of Canada?

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8. The question below is an incomplete sentence. Choose the word that best completes the sentence.

English is an official language of Canada \_\_\_\_\_ not of the United States and Mexico.

- a. but
- b. and
- c. during
- d. except

9. Answer the following questions based on the sentence below.

When the official languages of Canada were being decided, French-speaking people insisted that French be one of Canada’s official languages.

Who? French-speaking people

(did) What? \_\_\_\_\_

When? \_\_\_\_\_

10. **Vocabulary Word:** bilingual: using or able to speak two languages.

Use the vocabulary word in a sentence: \_\_\_\_\_

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## Teacher Guide and Answers

**Passage Reading Level:** Lexile 910

**Featured Text Structure:** Descriptive – the writer explains, defines, or illustrates a concept or topic

**Passage Summary:** North America, where the United States is located, is one of the largest and most diverse continents. For example, there are many different languages spoken across the continent, which can tell you something about the history of its countries.

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  - c. Canada**
  - d. Texas
  
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6. Name one similarity and one difference between Mexico and Canada.

**Suggested answer:** Answers will vary. Possible similarities are that both countries border the United States and are part of America. One possible difference is that the official language of Mexico is Spanish, while Canada has two official languages, French and English. Another difference is that Mexico is south of the United States, while Canada is north of the United States.

7. Why are both French and English official languages of Canada?

**Suggested answer:** Both French and English are official languages of Canada because both France and England sent explorers there centuries ago, and people are proud of their heritage.

8. The question below is an incomplete sentence. Choose the word that best completes the sentence.

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- b. and
- c. during
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9. Answer the following questions based on the sentence below.

When the official languages of Canada were being decided, French-speaking people insisted that French be one of Canada's official languages.

Who? French-speaking people

(did) What? **insisted that French be one of Canada's official languages**

When? **when the official languages of Canada were being decided**

10. **Vocabulary Word:** bilingual: using or able to speak two languages.

Use the vocabulary word in a sentence: answers may vary.