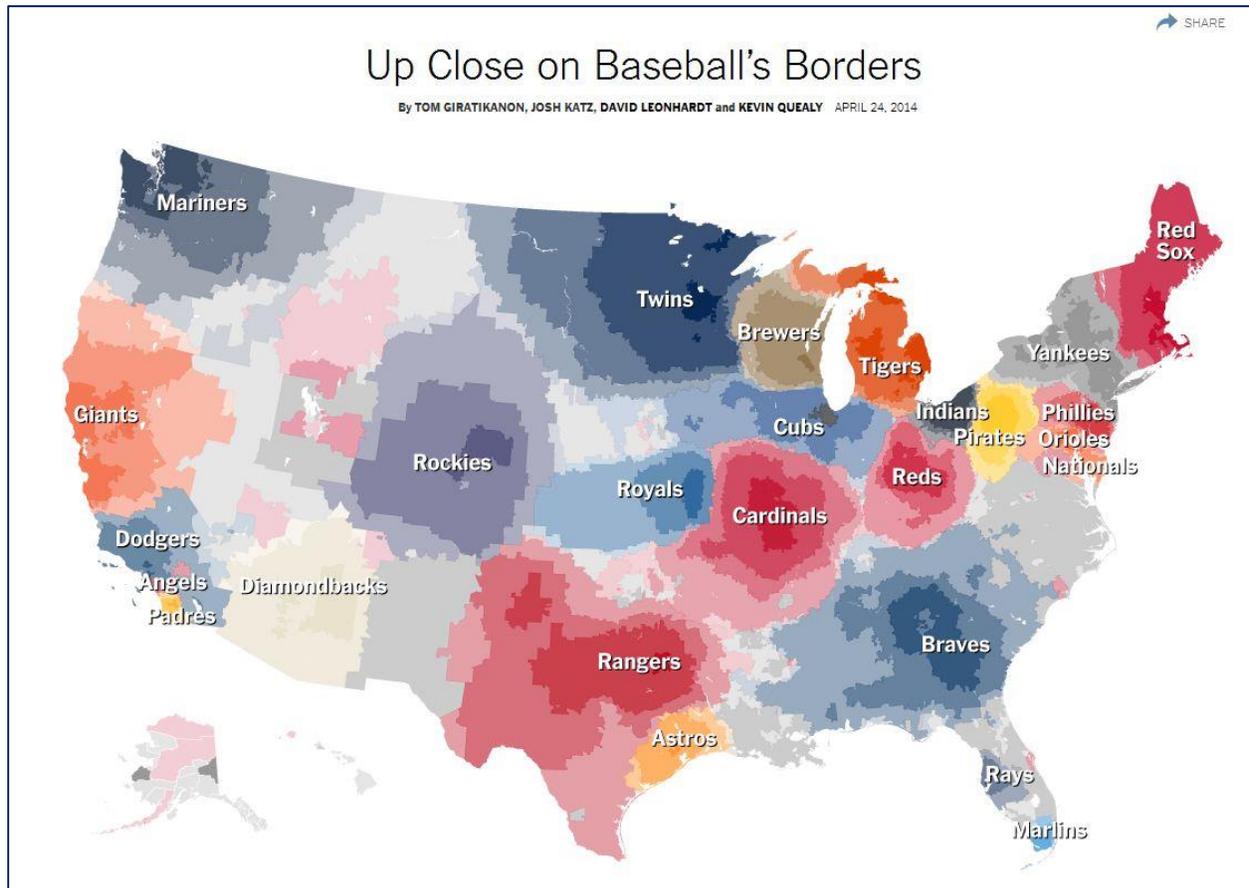


# Places and Regions



*Are you a baseball fan? If so, in Texas you are more than likely either a Rangers or Astros fan. Why? This maps shows the geography of baseball. You can easily see not only place-based identities but also the regions those identities create. <http://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2014/04/23/upshot/24-upshot-baseball.html>*

## Introduction

Understanding place is essential to understanding a geographic perspective. Places are locations on Earth with distinct characteristics - both human and physical - that give them meaning and distinguish them from other locations. Places are created on a variety of scales, from local to global, and often influence how people identify themselves. A person may introduce themselves as an Austinite, a Texan, an American, and/or an Asian American. Physical characteristics of place include landforms and climate while cultural characteristics include language, economic systems, and population. Mecca is a well-known place, serving as the city with the [Ka'bah](#) or "The physical axis of the Muslim world a focal point toward which Muslims all over the world pray five times a day...". The photo below gives many clues about the characteristics of the place. It attracts thousands of people; it's in an urban area; with a distinct architecture. These, and many other characteristics, define and give meaning and significance to Mecca as a place.



Places are spaces that imbue feeling and are often intertwined with a person's identity. A place is space that is different from other spaces. Regions are areas defined by unifying physical and/or human characteristics. A region is a space that shares one or more qualities or characteristics. A region is a basic unit of study in geography. There are three types of regions:

- Formal, defined by related, measurable characteristics such as climate, vegetation, or religion (ex. North America, Sahara desert)
- Functional, organized around a central place and its connections (ex. Dallas/Fort Worth Metroplex, Alamo Area Council of Governments, Texas Education Agency Education Service Center regions)
- Perceptual, defined by people's perceptions or attitudes (ex. the baseball map above)

Each person may look at different sets of characteristics, such as mountain chains or types of government, to define a region. As seen in the case study, defining regions can be tricky. Something that may seem as monolithic as the Appalachian Mountains is actually a collection of several smaller mountain chains with unique characteristics. Region is dependent on scale and helps people express complex relationships. ASEAN, the Association of Southeast Asian Nations, is an economic region organized around ten nations to promote economic growth in the region. North America includes Canada, Central America, the United States, and Mexico. There are other regions within this large unit, defined by various characteristics; for example, Latin America includes Mexico and Central America because they share similar religious, economic, and political traits. Even the instructional materials reflect the Texas social studies curriculum focus on political states, nation, and world regions.

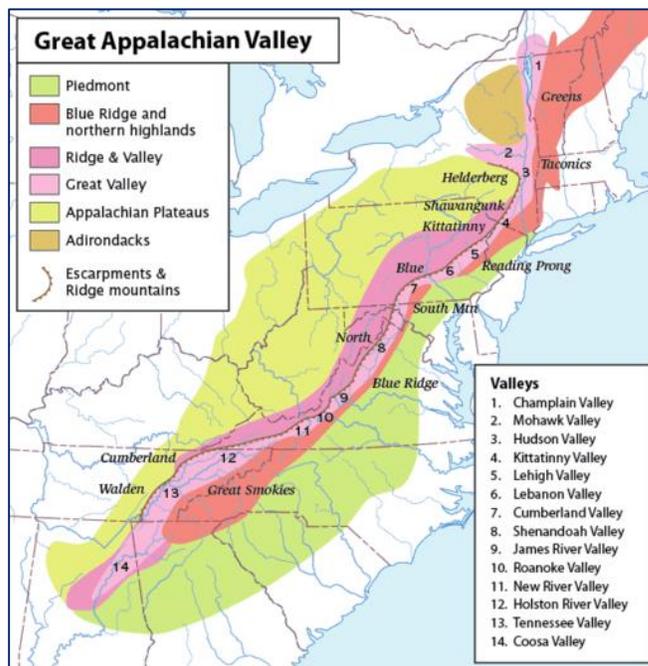
## Case Study: Appalachia, A Place Apart



Appalachia stretches along the eastern United States. This region is defined by physical characteristics stretching from Alabama into Canada with the Appalachia Mountains. Appalachia is also a cultural region with more fluid definitions. This case study looks at both perspectives of the region, highlighting the various types of place and region within Appalachia.

### Physical Characteristics

The Appalachia Mountains, made of some of the oldest rocks on earth, consist of several mountain chains including the Catskills, the Alleghenies, the Blue Ridge, and the Smokies. The Appalachia's are also home to one of the most diverse temperate rain forests on earth. The physical region stretches from Alabama northwest into Canada.



## Human Characteristics

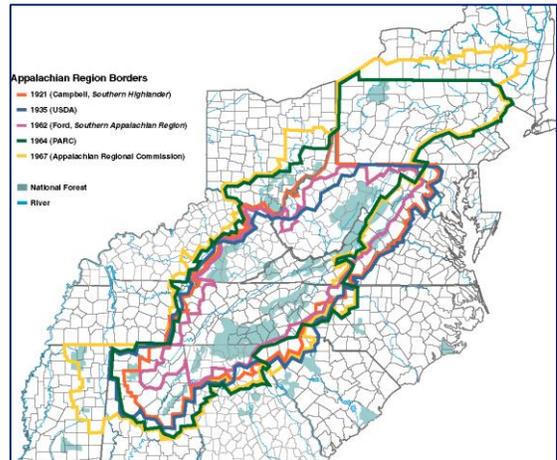
The Appalachia cultural region, typically defined as the central and southern areas, is home to approximately 25 million residents. Ulster Scots, Lowland Scots, and inhabitants of northern England, primarily settled here; the predominant faith is Protestant Christian. The mountain culture, often viewed as something independent of mainstream American culture, suffers stereotypes such as illiteracy, feuding, poverty, and moonshining activities that plague the region.

## Formal & Functional Region

The formal region of Appalachia can be defined by:

- A. The physical region distinguished by the mountains, or
- B. The political region designated by the Appalachian Regional Commission.

As a functional region, the Appalachian Regional Commission distributes funds throughout the region, helping to encourage sustainable communities and to promote economic development.



## Perceptual Region

Many people have stereotypical attitudes about this region and its culture. People within the region may define the regional boundaries differently than those outside the region. Cultural similarities may exist with regions outside the typical boundaries – the Ozarks in Arkansas, for example. American media has often promoted the view of the region's culture as a "culture of poverty" as well as a culture that needs to modernize.

Video 3.1: What is Appalachia and Where is it? <http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=5386355>

There are various definitions for Appalachia. In this discussion, NPR discusses from where these definitions came from and the current definition of Appalachia.

Video 3.2: Living in the Appalachians, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vJbiJXNP5zQ&feature=youtu.be>

How does it feel to live in Appalachia? Judy Bonds describes living in Appalachia as being secure and protected by the mountains.

Video 3.3: Pronouncing Appalachia, [https://www.youtube.com/embed/eGCqWrsAZ\\_o?wmode=opaque](https://www.youtube.com/embed/eGCqWrsAZ_o?wmode=opaque)

How to pronounce Appalachia? Apple-a-cha. One must remember the significance of pronunciation. How you pronounce a place tells the people your identity.

## Appalachia and Texas History

- Several heroes of the Texas Revolution, including Bowie, Crockett, and Houston originally came from Kentucky, Virginia, or Tennessee.
- A brief perusal of the list of the Alamo heroes shows that a large number of them (60 or so) came from the states of Kentucky, Tennessee, or the Carolinas.

### Appalachia in American History

- Appalachia is to the South what the South is to America, so they say. As Crystal Wilkinson stated in “Water Street”, “We were almost Southern, but not northern at all.”
- Appalachia played a critical role in American History, including such events as the Whiskey Rebellion and the Civil War.
- Due to the absence of plantation agriculture in Appalachia, slavery was not wide spread.
- Many Appalachian areas did not favor secession, Tennessee almost did not secede, and of course, West Virginia seceded from Virginia, rather than seceding from the United States.
- Timber from Appalachia was a vital resource to the American economy.
- The creation of the Smoky Mountain National Park sparked a great deal of controversy over property rights – and further perpetuated stereotypes of the region.

### Appalachia and World Cultures

- The area was settled mainly by Ulster Scots (or Scots-Irish), Lowland Scots and inhabitants from northern England.
- The traditional songs and instruments from those areas have heavily influenced many of the musical traditions from the region.
- Musicologists study the folk songs of the region and note the culture preserved many old folk songs from England, Ireland, and Scotland (with less change through time than in the home countries).

## Instructional Strategy: Inquiry Method/Geographic Skills

One of the best ways to get our students to understand geography is to have them actually DO geography. When designing lessons for a geography classroom, teachers should be aware of the main geographic skills. These skills closely follow the inquiry method of learning, where students:

1. Ask questions
2. Collect data
3. Organize their data
4. Analyze their data
5. Act/Answer their questions

For those of you familiar with science pedagogy, you will see that the Inquiry Method very closely resembles the Scientific Method. This form of exploratory learning engages students in performing research, rather than passively studying. When applied to the study of geography, the Inquiry Method becomes the Geographic Inquiry Method, or the Geographic Skill Set:

[Asking geographic questions](#)

[Acquiring geographic information](#)

[Organizing geographic information](#)

[Analyzing geographic information](#)

[Act/Answering geographic questions](#)

For a thorough explanation of the Geographic Skills, and how to use them, visit National Geographic Education's [Geographic Skills Index Webpage](#).

## Instructional Materials

Three lesson plans developed specifically for this module include a 4th grade activity which has students investigating how Texas places got their names. The second, written for 6th grade, is an exploration of the Middle East and how regions are defined – culturally or physically. All lessons are modifiable for different regions and scales. Additional resources includes lesson plans from external sources that support the instruction of places and regions.

[Download Instructional Materials and Resources](#)

