

SETON PRESS

# **GEOGRAPHY SKILLS**

## **FOR YOUNG CATHOLICS**

# **6**



**NORTH AMERICA, SOUTH AMERICA, AND EUROPE**



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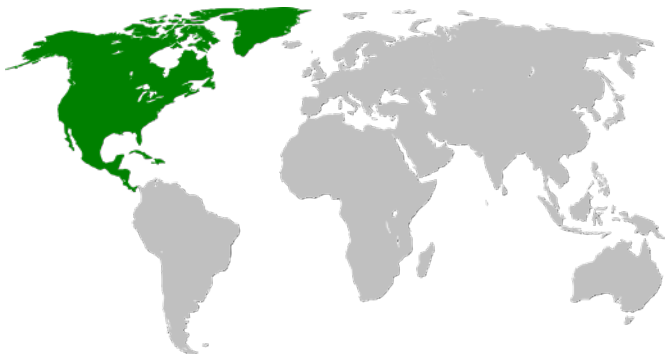
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# Geography of North America

*North American Martyrs, pray for us.*



## North America Key Facts

**Continental Landmass:** 9.54 million square miles

**Number of Countries:** 23

**Population:** (2024) 590,000,000

**Primary Religion:** Christianity

## Words to Know

**Archipelago** – group of islands.

**Bay** – water surrounded by land on three sides.

**Cordillera** – group of mountain ranges.

**Gulf** – body of water surrounded by land on three sides, but larger than a bay.

**Isthmus** – a narrow strip of land between two seas, connecting two larger bodies of land.

**Latitude** – measures the distance north or south of the equator.

**Sea** – generally, a section of the ocean that is partially bounded by land.

**Tundra** – cold snow-covered region close to the North Pole with few tall-growing plants.

## North America

The next page shows a **reference map** of North America. It mostly shows water and landforms, but also displays political boundaries so that people can see in which country these geographic features are located. Smaller than Asia and Africa, North America is the Earth's third largest continent. It is located almost entirely in the Western and completely in the Northern Hemisphere. The largest island in the world, Greenland, is considered part of North America, as are the hundreds of islands in the Caribbean Sea.

## Greenland

Northeast of Canada, 80% of Greenland is covered by ice. Parts of this ice are almost 10,000 feet thick. The remainder of this immense island is rocky coastline and tundra.

## Eastern Region

The eastern part of the continental landmass is the Atlantic Coastal Plain. Wetlands, such as marshes and swamps, can be found in this area. The coastal plain extends from the ocean's beaches westward toward the Appalachian Mountains. The Appalachian Mountains run through twelve U.S. states from New York in the north to Mississippi and Alabama in the south. These mountains contain rich coal deposits.

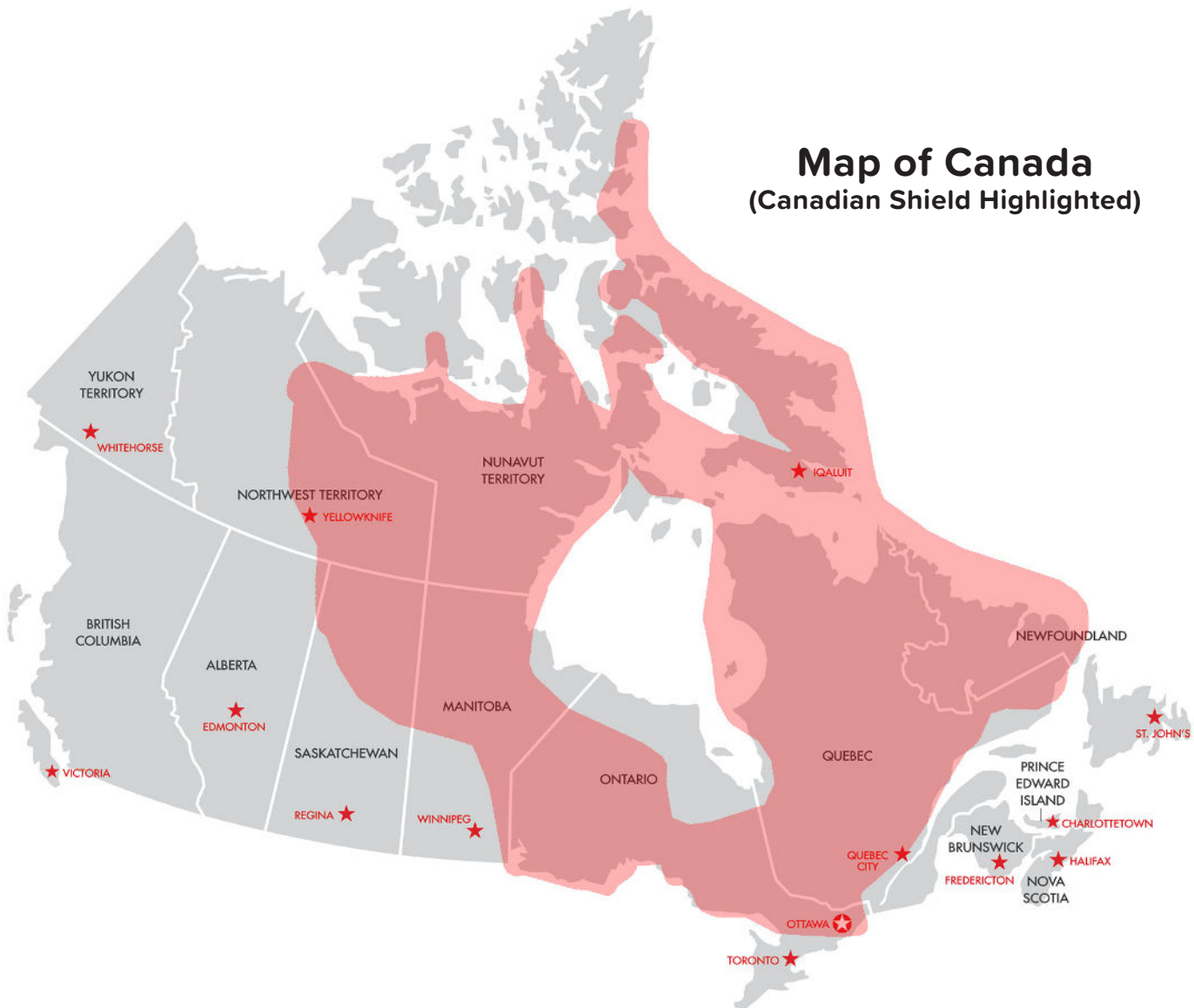
## Reference Map of North America





## The Canadian Shield

The Canadian Shield is a region where part of Earth's hard crust is exposed. The Canadian Shield wraps around Hudson Bay, from the Labrador Sea, south to the Great Lakes, and then north to Baffin Bay. It is an immense area, measuring 3 million square miles. The region is home to thousands of lakes, including two Great Lakes, Superior and Huron, on its southern border.



### Did You Know?

A small part of the Aleutian Islands, the **archipelago** that extends westward from the state of Alaska, crosses into the Eastern Hemisphere. These islands are the only part of North America to be in both the Eastern and Western Hemispheres.

## Central Region

South of the Canadian Shield, extending to the southern border of the United States, are the interior lowlands and Great Plains. These are mostly flat, natural grasslands. Much of this land is covered by a deep layer of fertile soil and used for farming. There are also large deposits of oil and natural gas.

## Western Region

The western half of the continent is dominated by a cordillera, a group of mountain ranges. Various mountain ranges are known by different names. The Rocky Mountains stretch from western Canada to the state of New Mexico. The Sierra Madre Mountains begin in Mexico and continue southeast into Central America.

## Central America

South of Mexico, connecting North America to South America, is the region known as Central America. It is an **isthmus** which separates the Caribbean Sea in the east from the Pacific Ocean in the west. Though dominated by mountains, Central America has swamps and lowlands on its coasts.

## Climate of North America

A region's climate depends on different factors, such as its **latitude**, proximity to a major body of water, and **elevation**. Most of North America has a moderate climate, with warm summers, cold winters, and moderate rainfall. Northern Canada, Alaska, and Greenland have short cool summers and long cold winters. Central America has hot, wet weather. Parts of the U.S. southwest and northern Mexico are hot, dry deserts.

## Bodies of Water in North America

North America is surrounded by oceans on three sides. The Atlantic is east of the continent, the Pacific is west, and the Arctic Ocean is north. A **sea** is a part of the ocean that is close to land and usually partially enclosed by land. The Beaufort Sea is close to Canada and Alaska. The Labrador Sea is off the northeast coast of Canada. The Caribbean Sea is off the eastern coast of Central America.

A **gulf** is a large body of water, usually surrounded by land on three sides. The Gulf of Mexico, with coastlines on the southern United States, Mexico, and Cuba, is one of the largest and deepest gulfs in the world. Because gulfs are protected from very bad weather, they often make excellent harbors. New Orleans and Galveston are examples of large harbors on the Gulf Coast. A **bay** is also water that is surrounded by land on three sides. While bays are large, they are normally smaller than gulfs. Canada's Hudson Bay is the second largest bay in the world. Baffin Bay separates the northern regions of Canada from Greenland.

The largest lakes in North America are the five Great Lakes. The Great Lakes are a chain of freshwater lakes, four of which lie along the border of the United States and Canada. From the east to west, they are Lake Ontario, Lake Erie, Lake Huron, Lake Michigan (entirely within the United States), and Lake Superior. Lake Superior is one of the largest lakes in the world.

North America's Mississippi River System is one of the four major river systems in the world. The Mississippi River is 2,350 miles long. Over 250 tributaries pour into the Mississippi. It is, however, not the longest river in North America. The Missouri River holds the record at 2,639 miles.



Map of the Great Lakes



Map of the Gulf of Mexico

## Working with Maps

Write the letter next to each place where it can be found on the blank map.

- A. Greenland
- B. Canadian Shield
- C. Great Plains
- D. Rocky Mountains
- E. Appalachian Mountains





## Working with Maps

Write the letter next to each place where it can be found on the blank map.

A. Gulf of Mexico

B. Caribbean Sea

C. Lake Superior

D. Lake Erie

E. Lake Ontario

F. Lake Huron

G. Lake Michigan

H. Mississippi River

I. Missouri River

J. Hudson Bay



# Brazil

*Saint Jose de Anchieta, pray for us.*

## Brazil Key Facts

**Official Name:** Federal Republic of Brazil

**Type of Government:** Democratic federal republic

**Capital:** Brasilia

**Official Language:** Portuguese

**Currency:** Real

**Population:** (2024) 217,600,000

**Primary Religion:** Roman Catholic



## Words to Know

**Secular** – not religious.

**Tributary** – a freshwater stream or river that flows into a larger stream, river, or lake, known as the main stem.

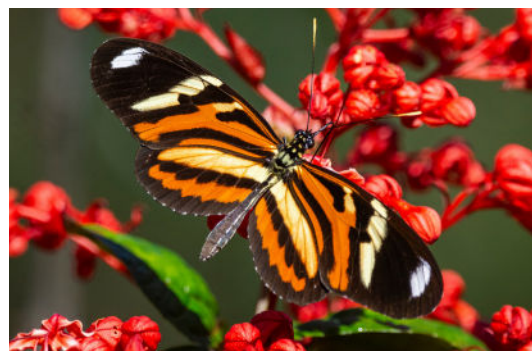
## Geography and Climate of Brazil

Brazil is an immense country, the largest in South America, occupying just under half of the continental landmass. It is the fifth largest nation in the world, after Russia, Canada, the United States and China. Located on the eastern half of the continent, Brazil has a 4,500-mile coastline along the Atlantic Ocean. It shares a border with every South American country except Chile and Ecuador.

Brazil is also home to the Amazon River, one of the world's four major river systems. The main stem river is 4,250 miles long. It has over 1,100 **tributaries**, including seventeen that are over 930 miles long. The area surrounding the river system is known as the Amazon River Basin. South and east of the Amazon River Basin are the Brazilian Highlands. The central part of the highlands is mostly grassland.

Brazil is the largest tropical country in the world. In the Amazon rainforest, rainfall is heavy, and temperatures are high all year long. Temperatures average 80° F. Along the Atlantic coast, south of the Amazon River Basin, temperatures are still warm, but experience more seasonal changes. Near the coast, winter temperatures can go down into the fifties. Sometimes, during winter, the southern highlands get a light freeze. (Remember that in the Southern Hemisphere, lands farther south are closer to the South Pole.)

The Amazon rainforest has an estimated 50,000 different plant species. Many of the trees grow quite tall, not allowing sunlight to reach the ground. As a result, many animals live in the trees to get food and sunlight. In addition to monkeys, tree frogs and salamanders, there are hundreds of different bird species, including parrots and macaws. Brazil has more butterflies than anywhere else on Earth.



**Ethilia Longwing Butterfly,**  
Native to Brazil

# Physical Map of Brazil



## History of Brazil

Most historians believe that people indigenous to North and South America were Asians who crossed a land bridge from present-day Russia into Alaska. Through centuries, they migrated south and east looking for a better climate and more food. Other evidence suggests that some indigenous Brazilian people may be descendants of Pacific Islanders who arrived in South America thousands of years ago. Archaeologists believe there were millions of native people in Brazil when Europeans arrived. Today, there are around 900,000 indigenous people in Brazil. They live in remote areas of the Amazon jungle.

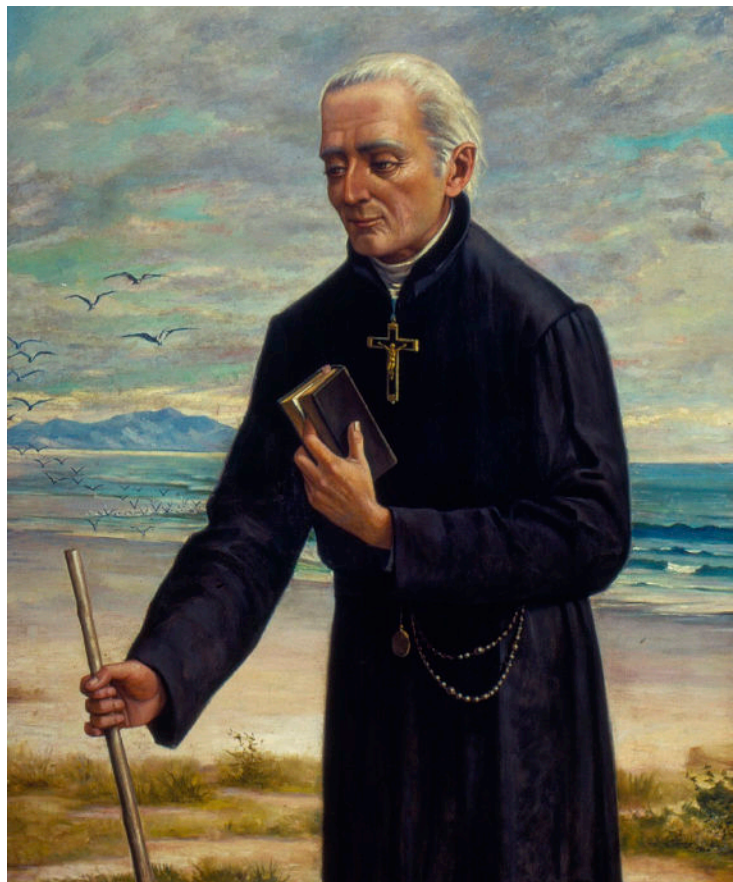
Navigator Pedro Cabral claimed Brazil for Portugal in 1500. In March 1549, the first Jesuits arrived in Brazil and began evangelizing the native people. In July 1553, **Jose de Anchieta**, a Jesuit priest, reached Brazil. A youthful injury had curved his spine so severely that he was nearly hunchbacked. Despite his frailties, Anchieta set out to convert the natives. In January 1554, Anchieta and several other Jesuits climbed up a steep mountain trail to a native village. They established a small mission where they said Mass on January 25, the feast of the conversion of St. Paul. To honor the great saint, they named their tiny mission **São Paulo**. São Paulo eventually became one of the largest cities in the world.



Jose de Anchieta was also involved in founding **Rio de Janeiro**, Brazil's second great city. Portuguese explorers first sighted Guanabara Bay, the future Rio de Janeiro, on January 1, 1502, so they dubbed it "River of January." In November 1555, French Protestants established a colony and built a fort at the site. In March 1560, the Portuguese attacked and captured the fort. Anchieta accompanied the military expedition to act as interpreter, medic, and priest. He was later among those who founded Rio de Janeiro on March 1, 1565.

During the last three decades of his life, Jose de Anchieta continued his evangelization work. He constantly spoke against slavery, rightly believing it was the greatest obstacle to conversions. The last decades of the 16th century were a tragic development for Brazil as African slaves were imported into the country. Deplorably, Brazil did not abolish slavery until May 13, 1888—one of the last Christian nations to do so. Jose de Anchieta died on June 9, 1597. Pope Francis canonized him in 2014. St. Jose de Anchieta is rightly regarded as the "Apostle of Brazil."

Beginning in 1789, Brazilians sought independence from Portugal, but their rebellion was put down. In 1808, the Portuguese royal family lived in Brazil and declared it to be equal with Portugal. The king returned to Europe in 1821, leaving his son to rule Brazil. He declared the nation to be totally independent from Portugal and declared himself emperor. In 1889, Brazil was declared a federal republic.



St. Jose de Anchieta



Rio de Janeiro, Brazil





São Paulo, Brazil

### True or False?

Using the reference map and text, indicate whether the statement is true or false.

1. \_\_\_\_\_ Brasilia is situated along the Amazon River.
2. \_\_\_\_\_ Brazil shares its southernmost border with Uruguay.
3. \_\_\_\_\_ Brazil is the fifth largest country in the world.
4. \_\_\_\_\_ Jose de Anchieta helped found São Paulo.
5. \_\_\_\_\_ Spanish is the official language of Brazil.
6. \_\_\_\_\_ Pedro Cabral is rightly known as “the Apostle of Brazil.”

## Government of Brazil

After achieving independence, the people of Brazil lived under military dictatorships for many years. The military government was removed in 1985, and civilian governments have ruled the country since. In 1988, Brazil adopted a constitution which created a representative democracy, where voters elect leaders to represent their interests.

The Brazilian government has three branches: executive, legislative, and judicial. The executive branch consists of a president who is advised by his or her cabinet. The law-making legislative branch is called the National Congress. It is made up of two houses, the Federal Senate and the Chamber of Deputies. The judicial branch contains the court system.



## Economy of Brazil

Services make up the largest part of the Brazilian economy. These services include government, military, banking, and medical care. The nation is rich in energy reserves, including petroleum, natural gas, and coal. Brazil's massive jungles produce timber, and its mines yield iron, gold, quartz, and silicon. Because of these natural resources, manufacturing plays a large part in the nation's economy. Brazil's factories produce motor vehicles, electronic equipment, steel, chemicals, and food products. They export aircraft and aircraft parts, as well as wood and steel products.

Agriculture plays a smaller role in the Brazilian economy. Less than 10% of the land is used to raise crops and animals. Nevertheless, Brazil is a top exporter of sugar, soybeans, and coffee. The country also exports citrus products, such as oranges, lemons, and limes, as well as melons.

## The Catholic Church in Brazil

The Catholic Church has always played a central role in Brazil. On April 26, 1500, Brazil's first Catholic Mass was celebrated by a priest who accompanied Portuguese explorers. Through decades of colonization, missionaries spread the Catholic Faith among native peoples and African slaves. At times, the Church deliberately interfered with government policies that exploited natives.

When Brazil achieved independence from Portugal, religious freedom was allowed, but Catholicism was declared the official state religion. At the end of the 19th century, Brazil became officially secular. In 1972, 92% of Brazilians were Catholic. Today, Catholics are only about 68% of the population. Nevertheless, the Church still exercises considerable influence in Brazilian society. For example, unlike many Western countries, abortion is legal only in very limited circumstances, due to pressure from the National Council of Brazilian Bishops.



Cathedral Basilica of the National Shrine of Our Lady Aparecida, Brazil

### Did You Know?

The second largest Catholic church in the world is in Brazil. Only St. Peter's in the Vatican is larger than the Cathedral Basilica of the National Shrine of Our Lady Aparecida in Brazil. Aparecida, located in Brazil's southeastern region, is a tiny town with a massive church. In fact, the town is so small and the cathedral so large that nearly all the townspeople could fit inside.