

Lesson

1

The Land and States



WHAT TO KNOW

How do the geography and climate differ as you travel across the 50 states?

- ✓ Identify and describe some of the major landforms and bodies of water in the United States.
- ✓ Learn the location of the 50 states and their capitals.

VOCABULARY

landform region p. 15

climate p. 16

environment p. 18

PEOPLE

Robert Louis Stevenson

PLACES

Coastal Plain

Appalachian Mountains

Interior Plains

Mississippi River

Great Lakes

Rocky Mountains

Great Basin

Sierra Nevada



COMPARE AND CONTRAST



California Standards

HSS 5.1, 5.1.1, 5.9



Imagine that you could live anywhere on Earth. Would you choose to live near the ocean or near mountains? Would you rather live in a region where winters are long and snowy or where most days are sunny and warm?

No matter how you answer these questions, you can find all these different places in the same country. The United States is a large country made up of 50 states. You may know what the land and climate are like in one state, but you may wonder how they differ in other parts of the country.

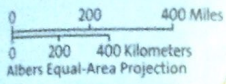
► The San Juan Mountains cover more than 12,000 square miles in southwestern Colorado.



The United States



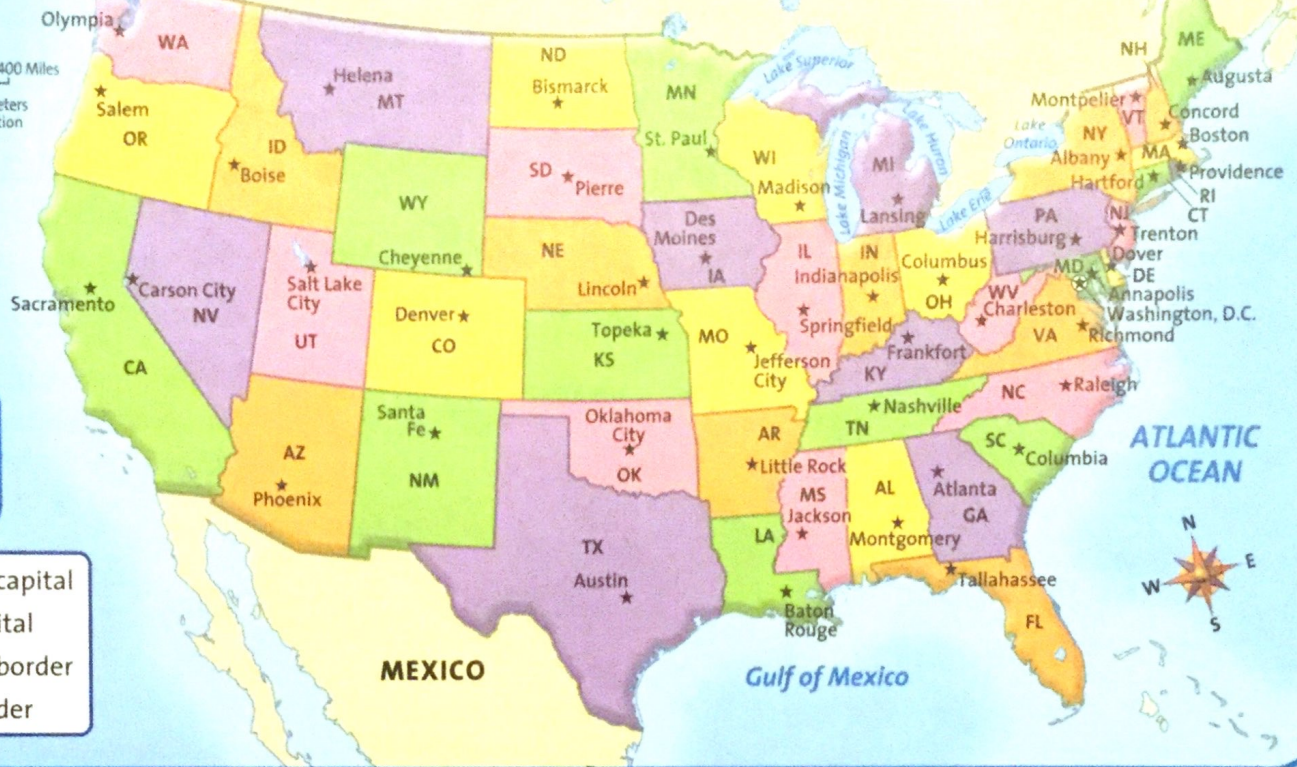
CANADA



PACIFIC OCEAN



- ★ National capital
- ★ State capital
- National border
- State border



MEXICO

Gulf of Mexico

ATLANTIC OCEAN

ANALYZE SKILL Analyze Maps You can use this map to learn the names of all the states and their capitals.

◆ **Location** Which state capital is closest to Sacramento?

A Nation of 50 States

The United States is a nation of incredible beauty that is made up of 50 states, each with its own capital. Of the 50 states, 2 are separated from the others. The island state of Hawaii lies far to the west in the Pacific Ocean. Alaska, the northernmost state, is separated from the states to the south by the country of Canada.

Because the United States is so large, geographers sometimes divide it into

landform regions. A **landform region** has mainly one kind of landform—such as mountains, hills, plateaus, or plains—throughout. Each region is unique, or unlike the others, because of the shape of its landforms and the way they came to be. Dividing the country into landform regions makes it easier to compare and contrast different parts of the country.

READING CHECK **COMPARE AND CONTRAST**

How does the state of Hawaii differ from other states in the nation?

Landforms of North America



	Mountains
	Plateaus
	Hills
	Plains

ANALYZE SKILL Analyze Maps

Regions What mountain region lies to the east of the Mississippi River?

The Coastal Plain

In the late 1800s, a well-known writer named **Robert Louis Stevenson** traveled across the United States. Stevenson was living in Scotland when he received word that Fanny Osbourne, his sweetheart, was ill. Osbourne lived in the United States, and Stevenson decided to go there. He

did not realize how much his trip across the United States would teach him about the nation's geography and climate.

Climate is the kind of weather a place has over a long time.

On August 7, 1879, Stevenson left Scotland. He boarded a ship and spent ten stormy days crossing the Atlantic Ocean. As the ship neared New York City,

Stevenson looked out on a broad, tree-lined plain. This flat, low land along the Atlantic Ocean is part of a much larger region called the **Coastal Plain**.

The Coastal Plain begins along the coast of Massachusetts as a narrow strip of land no more than 10 miles wide. It gets much wider farther south, near Florida. From Florida, the Coastal Plain extends west along the Gulf of Mexico into Texas and the country of Mexico.

READING CHECK 🔥 **COMPARE AND CONTRAST**
What is the difference between the Coastal Plain in Massachusetts and in Florida?

The Appalachians

Stevenson did not stay in New York City long. Osbourne lived on the Pacific Coast of the United States—in San Francisco, California. To reach California, Stevenson boarded a train for the long journey to the western coast.

When the train reached Pennsylvania, the land began to change. Instead of being flat, it was now filled with wide

valleys and hills. This area of valleys and hills on the eastern side of the **Appalachian** (a•puh•LAY•chuhn) **Mountains** is called the Piedmont (PEED•mahnt). *Piedmont* means “at the base of a mountain.” The Piedmont begins in New Jersey and extends as far south as Alabama.

The tree-covered Appalachian Mountains rise above the Piedmont. This 2,000-mile-long mountain range, or group of connected mountains, runs from southeastern Canada to central Alabama.

The Appalachian Mountains are the oldest mountains in North America. Over time, the mountains’ peaks have been eroded, or worn down by rain and wind. The highest peaks in the Appalachians are about 7,000 feet tall.

A large part of the Appalachians is made up of a series of ridges and valleys that run next to each other. Among these ridges are the Great Smoky, Blue Ridge, Catskill, and White Mountains.

READING CHECK 🔥 **COMPARE AND CONTRAST**
How is the Piedmont different from the Coastal Plain?

▶ The Appalachian Mountains are more than 250 million years old.



The Interior Plains

West of the Appalachian Mountains, the land gets flat again. Here, in the center of the United States, Stevenson saw other plains, which we call the Interior Plains.

The **Interior Plains** stretch across the middle of the United States, from the Appalachian Mountains in the east to the Rocky Mountains in the west. Most of the land in the Interior Plains is flat, with many streams and rivers. In the middle of the country, these waters drain into the **Mississippi River**. Here, the mighty Mississippi is fed by large rivers such as the Arkansas, the Illinois, the Ohio, and the Missouri. Also in the Interior Plains are the five **Great Lakes**, which make up the world's largest group of freshwater lakes.

In the eastern part of the Interior Plains, often called the Central Plains, the land is mostly flat with numerous

streams and rivers. During his journey across the Central Plains, Stevenson wrote that "the country was flat . . . but far from being dull. All through Ohio, Indiana, Illinois, and Iowa, . . . it was rich and various."^{*}

When Stevenson's train stopped in the middle of Nebraska, he saw that the **environment**, or the surroundings in which people, plants, and animals live, was yet again different. This western part of the Interior Plains is called the Great Plains, and includes parts of 10 states.

In the Great Plains, the land becomes much flatter and the climate much drier. There are few rivers and almost no trees. To Stevenson, the land seemed to look the same for mile after mile. He wrote that a person "may walk five miles and see nothing; ten, and it is as though he had not moved."^{*}

READING CHECK **COMPARE AND CONTRAST**
How do the Central Plains differ from the Great Plains?

*Robert Louis Stevenson. *From Scotland to Silverado*. Harvard University Press, 1966.



► This field in Nebraska is part of miles and miles of flat land that make up the Great Plains.



The Rocky Mountains and Beyond

As Stevenson's train moved west, the flat Interior Plains gave way to the towering **Rocky Mountains**. The Rockies cover much of the western United States and are our country's largest and longest mountain range. They stretch from Mexico through Canada and into Alaska. Like the Appalachians, the Rockies are made up of smaller ranges.

The Rocky Mountains are much younger than the Appalachians. The peaks of the Rockies appear sharp and jagged because they have not been eroded for as long a time. More than 50 peaks in Colorado alone are higher than 14,000 feet. In the mountains, climate can vary as the land rises up. Because the Rockies are so high, many of the peaks are covered with snow all year long.

Stevenson's train moved slowly, taking two days to cross the Rocky Mountains. Then the environment changed once again. Now Stevenson looked out the window and saw only "desert scenes, fiery hot and deadly weary."*

Between the Rocky Mountains on the east and other mountains farther west is a large area of land that is mostly dry. It is sometimes called the Intermountain Region. *Intermountain* means "between the mountains." Part of this land is the **Great Basin**, which includes Nevada and parts of five neighboring states. A basin is low, bowl-shaped land with higher land all around it. At the southwestern edge of the Great Basin lies Death Valley, California. The lowest point in North America, part of Death Valley lies more than 250 feet below sea level.

READING CHECK 🔗 **COMPARE AND CONTRAST**
How do the Rocky Mountains differ from the Appalachian Mountains?

*Robert Louis Stevenson. *From Scotland to Silverado*. Harvard University Press, 1966.



More Mountains and Valleys

Stevenson's train left the desert and headed west toward more mountains. Lying just inside California is the **Sierra Nevada** (see •AYR•uh nuh•VA•duh). *Sierra Nevada* is Spanish for "snowy mountain range." The eastern slope of the mountains is so steep that riders on Stevenson's train were pinned to their seats as the train climbed the mountains!

Other mountains lie north of the Sierra Nevada, in Washington and Oregon.

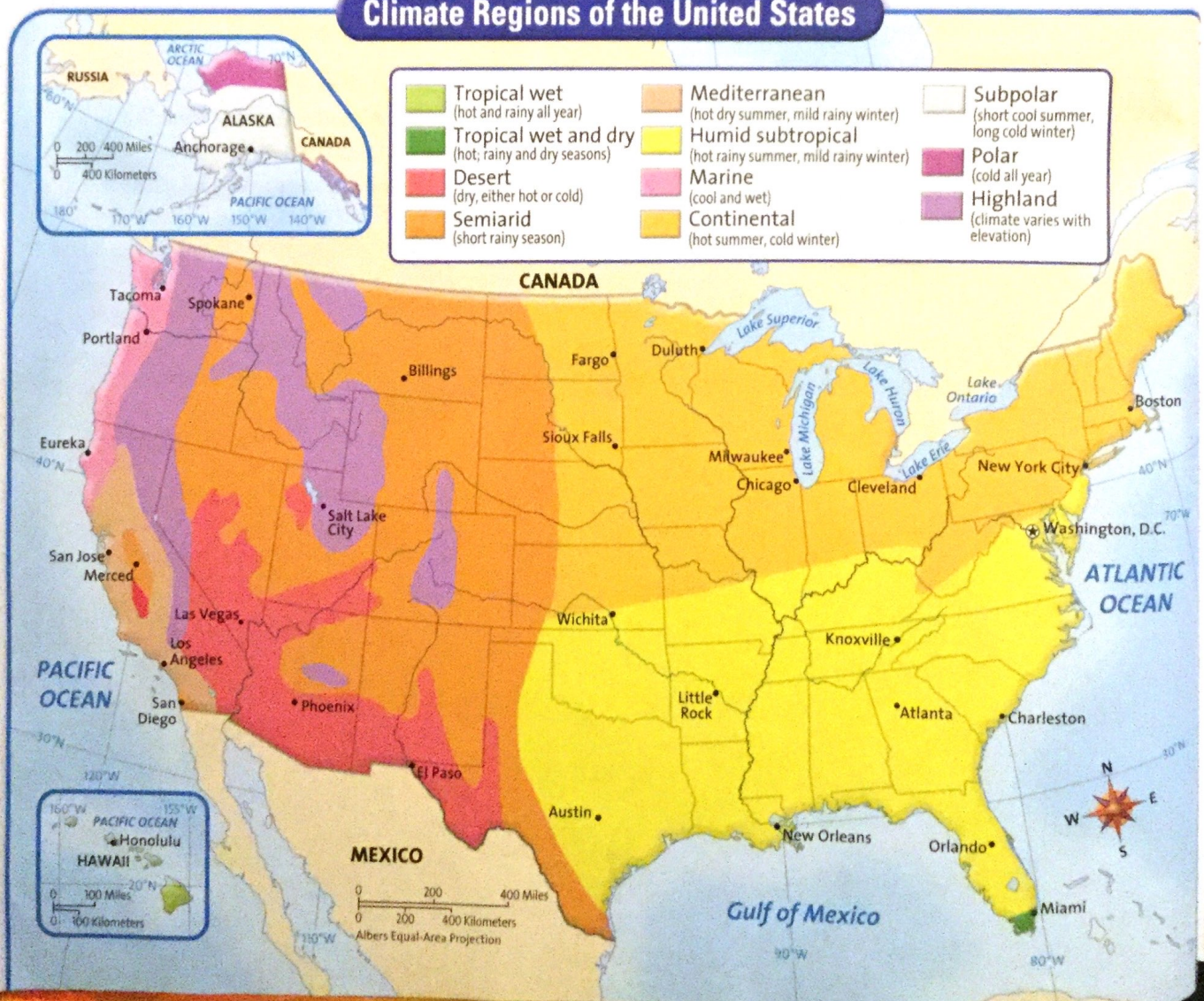
These mountains make up the Cascade Range. West of the Sierra Nevada and the Cascade Range are three large, fertile valleys. The largest is the more than 400-mile-long Central Valley in California. The others are the Puget Sound Lowland in Washington and the Willamette (wuh•LA•muht) Valley in Oregon.

Along the Pacific Ocean in California, Oregon, and Washington are the Coast Ranges. These low mountains give the Pacific a rocky, rugged look. At many places these mountains drop sharply into the ocean. Unlike the Atlantic Coast, the Pacific Coast has very little flat land.

ANALYZE SKILL Analyze Maps Climate influences life in every area of the United States.

◆ **Regions** In which climate region is your community located?

Climate Regions of the United States





► In Big Sur, California, steep cliffs have formed where the Coast Ranges meet the Pacific Ocean.


Stevenson arrived in San Francisco 24 days after he had left home. At long last, he met Osbourne, who had regained her health. He had traveled from one coast of the United States to the other. He had seen much of the country and many of its major landform regions. By taking a train across the United States, Stevenson had learned much about the country's diverse geography and climate.

READING CHECK **COMPARE AND CONTRAST**
How do the Coast Ranges differ from the Sierra Nevada?



Summary


The United States is made up of 50 states, each with its own capital. Because the country is so large, its geography and climate vary from one part of the country to another. Geographers sometimes divide the country into landform regions.

REVIEW

-  How do the geography and climate differ as you travel across the 50 states?
- Write a sentence that includes the terms **landform region** and **environment**.
- What two states are separated from the others?

CRITICAL THINKING

-  **ANALYZE SKILL** Why do you think Robert Louis Stevenson wrote about the geography and climate of the United States during his trip?
-  **Make Flash Cards** Use notecards or take sheets of construction paper and cut them into 50 small cards. On one side of each card write the name of a state and on the other side write the name of its capital. Study the cards and then work with a classmate to quiz each other on state capital names.

-  **FOCUS SKILL** **COMPARE AND CONTRAST**
On a separate sheet of paper, copy and complete the graphic organizer below.

Topic 1

The Appalachians are older.

Similar

Topic 2

The Rockies are younger.



Use Latitude and Longitude

WHY IT MATTERS

The **relative location** of a place is where it is compared to other places on Earth. For example, the Coastal Plain is between the Piedmont and the Atlantic Ocean. But lines of latitude and lines of longitude help you describe the **absolute location**, or exact location, of any place on Earth.

WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW

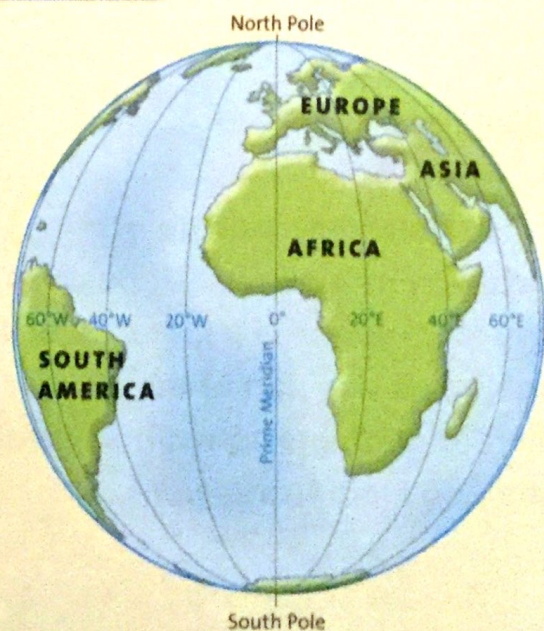
Mapmakers use a system of imaginary lines to form a grid system on maps and globes. The lines that run east and west are the **lines of latitude**. Lines of latitude are also called **parallels** (PAIR•uh•lelz). This is because they are parallel, or always the same distance from each other.

Lines of latitude are measured in degrees north and south of the equator, which is labeled 0° , or zero degrees. The parallels north of the equator are marked *N* for *north latitude*. The parallels south of the equator are marked *S* for *south latitude*.

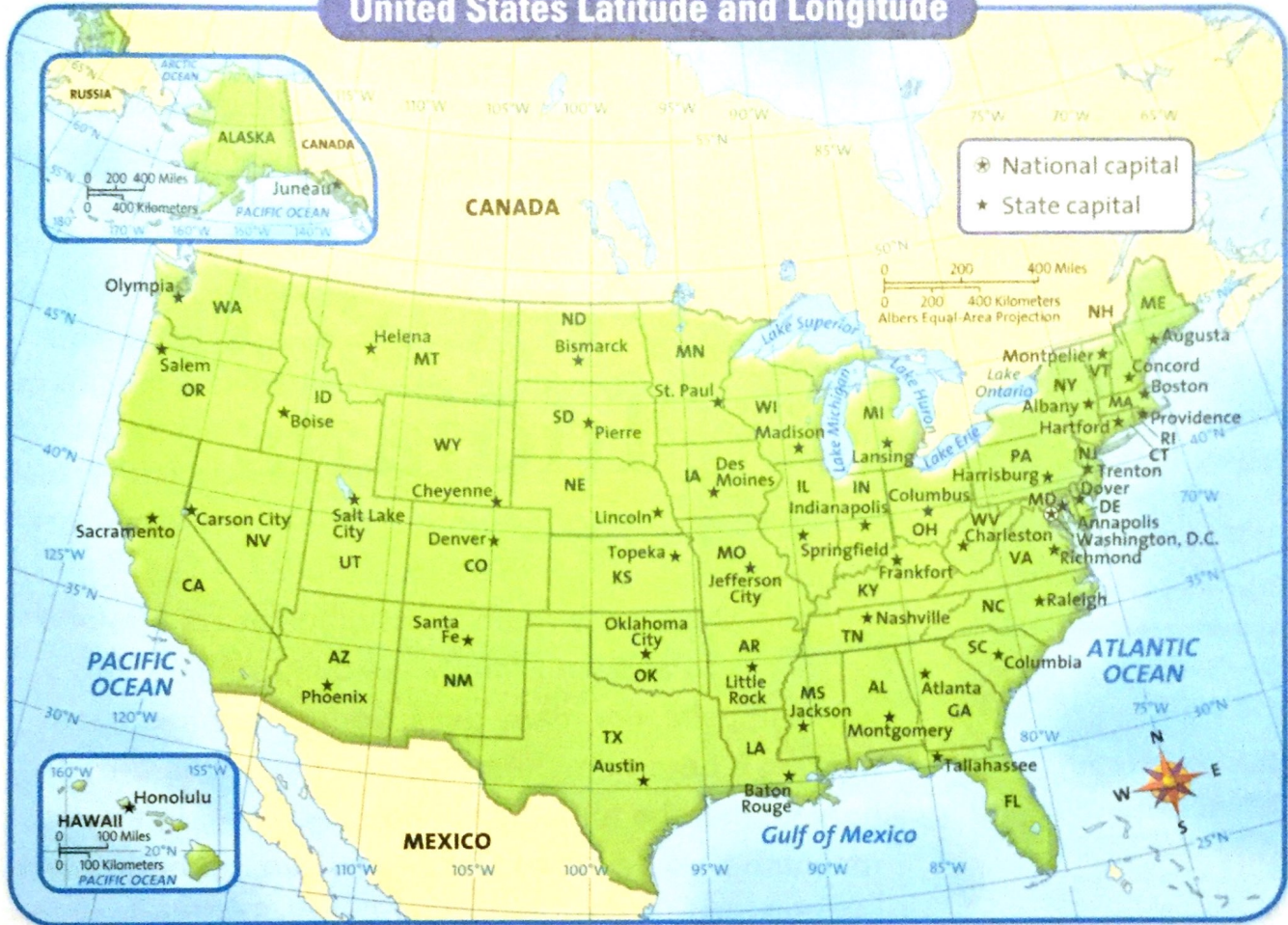
The lines that run north and south on a map or globe are the **lines of longitude**, or **meridians**. Each meridian runs from the North Pole to the South Pole. Meridians meet at the poles.

The meridian marked 0° is called the prime meridian. Lines of longitude to the west of the prime meridian are marked *W* for *west longitude*. They are in the Western Hemisphere. The meridians to the east of the prime meridian are marked *E* for *east longitude*. They are in the Eastern Hemisphere.

Latitude and Longitude



United States Latitude and Longitude



► PRACTICE THE SKILL

The map above shows state capitals in the United States and uses lines of latitude and longitude to give absolute location.

On the left-hand side of the map, find 40°N . At the bottom, find 120°W . Use your fingers to trace these lines to the point where they cross. Carson City, Nevada, near the border of California, is not far from this point. So you can say that Carson City is near 40°N , 120°W .

Use the map to answer these questions.

- 1 Which state capital is nearest to 40°N , 105°W ?

- 2 Which state capital is nearest to 30°N , 85°W ?
- 3 Which state capital is farther north—Salem, Oregon, or Madison, Wisconsin?

► APPLY WHAT YOU LEARNED

ANALYZER SKILL **Make It Relevant** Use latitude and longitude to describe the location of your state's capital city. Write a short paragraph to describe how you found the capital's location.



Practice your map and globe skills with the **GeoSkills CD-ROM**.