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Video Page



Geography as Destiny

Teacher's Guide

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Geography as Destiny

Suggested Lesson Plan

These materials may be used in a variety of ways. For maximum benefit, we suggest the following lesson plan:

- As a class, discuss the Preview Questions and Key Terms.
- You may want to use the True-False Extension Activity (see page [19-20](#)) as an introduction to the Aztecs.
- Distribute copies of the Viewing Guide for students to use as a note-taking tool during the video.
- Play the video, pausing if needed to facilitate understanding and note-taking.
- Review and discuss the answers to the Viewing Guide using Answer Key as a guide.
- Use Discussion Questions to spark class discussion, or assign these questions as homework. Feel free to pick and choose among the questions.
- As a class or in small groups, complete the Who Chooses Activity.
- Replay the video as preparation for the Quiz.
- Administer and grade the Quiz using Answer Key as a guide.
- Optional: Assign one or more Enrichment Activities as homework.

Geography as Destiny **Preview Questions**

1. What does *geography* mean to you? What do you think geographers do?
2. How much control do you have over your own life?
3. What, in your opinion, makes a culture successful?
4. What makes some cultures more successful than others?
5. What do you know about the Aztec culture?

Geography as Destiny

Key Terms

Aggregation: the formation of a number of things into a cluster OR a group, body, or mass composed of many distinct parts or individuals.

Catchment Area: the area of land from which water flows into a river, lake, or reservoir; Dr. Pinker's definition is more in line with the area served by a business or other institution. He uses it as an area that draws people from surrounding areas.

Columbian Exchange: also known as the *Columbian* interchange, named for Christopher Columbus, was the widespread transfer of plants, animals, culture, human populations, technology, diseases, and ideas between the Americas, West Africa, and the Old World in the 15th and 16th centuries.

Culture: the customs, arts, social institutions, and achievements of a particular nation, people, or other social group. E.B. Tylor (the founder of cultural anthropology) defines culture as "that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society."

Geography: the study of the physical features of the earth and its atmosphere, and of human activity as it affects and is affected by these, including the distribution of populations and resources, land use, and industries

Human Capital: the skills, knowledge, and experience possessed by an individual or population, viewed in terms of their value or cost to an organization or country.

Indigenous peoples: also known as First peoples, Aboriginal peoples or Native peoples, are ethnic groups who are the original settlers of a given region, in contrast to groups that have settled, occupied or colonized the area more recently. Groups are usually described as indigenous when they maintain traditions or other aspects of an early culture that is associated with a given region.

Innovations: new methods, ideas, products, etc.

Provincial: *n.* an inhabitant of the regions outside the capital city of a country, especially when regarded as unsophisticated or narrow-minded. *adj.* Narrow-minded, limited in view.

Wonkish: nerdy, bookish; implies a devotion to study to the exclusion of other pursuits

Name: _____

Date: _____

Geography as Destiny **Viewing Guide**

1. According to Dr. Sheppard, geography is not just about _____ and naming _____ . Geographers are interested in how humans _____ .

2. What is the dictionary's definition of "destiny?"

3. Dr. Thomas Sowell believes the _____ plays a huge role in a society's success or failure.

4. Dr. Steven Pinker and Dr. Sowell share a belief that the ability to _____ is critical for a civilization's success.

5. Dr. Pinker says that geography that allows _____ with rivers, highways, port cities, etc., tend to become more _____ .

6. Dr. Sheppard believes in an additional factor. What is that factor?

7. What seemed to lead to the success of the Mejica (Aztecs)?
8. The Aztecs, however, were not connected to a global _____.
As a result, they did not have advancements like _____ or _____.
Without these advancements, the narrator says they were _____ for the Spanish conquistadores.
9. In contrast, what advances did the Spaniards borrow/gain from other cultures? Name at least three.
10. Dr. Pinker notes that one factor that seems to consistently contribute to the success of societies is _____.

Geography as Destiny

Viewing Guide Answer Key

1. maps; memorizing state capitals; how humans and societies organize themselves
2. Destiny is a hidden power that controls what happens in the future.
3. physical environment
4. connect with other cultures
5. movement of people and ideas...culturally sophisticated
6. inventiveness; not being restricted by physical environment but being willing to overcome those challenges
7. military power; natural resources ('rich in birds and fish' and 'fertile land'); religious beliefs
8. global trade hub; steel or advanced weapons; 'easy prey'
9. rudders invented in China; navigation instruments with trigonometry invented in Egypt; numbers invented in India; alphabet invented by Romans; steel, gunpowder, advanced weapons
10. education

Geography as Destiny

Discussion Questions

1. Do you agree with the video that cultures which incorporate new ideas and ways of doing things from other cultures are stronger? Why or why not?
2. How many people lived in Tenochtitlan in 1519? How many Spaniards did Cortez bring? What enabled the much smaller group to prevail?
3. Why would the ability to learn from and about other cultures be a potential cultural advantage?
4. How would the following possessions or understandings of the Spaniards give them an advantage over the Aztecs?
 - a. Steel breastplates
 - b. Horses (America had no native pack animals of this size)
 - c. Gunpowder
5. It is easy sometimes to see what benefits the more primitive society can receive. However, as the Columbian exchange (see key terms) makes clear, all groups benefit to some extent. What resources did the New World provide to the Old in this interchange?
6. Historians also point out that the Aztecs were often cruel to surrounding/ conquered people groups, and so many of those groups assisted the Spaniards. There was also a civil war for Aztec leadership. In other words, a lack of unity hurt the Aztecs. How can nations promote unity? Why is that so important?
7. What do you see as your destiny? To what extent can you control your own destiny?

8. The video says that you can only control what you can control. What can you do to increase your chances of success? What is beyond your control in your own life?
9. At various times in history, and to some extent today, people have wanted the U.S. to be isolationist—to focus on itself and not be involved in the world. Given the argument in this video, how might that impact our nation? What might be the costs of such a choice?
10. Can the idea that cultures can grow by interaction with others be applied to individuals as well? Explain how this might apply to your own classroom or school.
11. What is "cultural appropriation?" Given what you've learned from this video, what do you think about accusations of cultural appropriation? Is it possible to use only items/foods/activities/ideas from your own culture? Why or why not?

Geography as Destiny

Who chooses? Who benefits? Who pays? What's fair?

The four questions above can be a useful tool for evaluating any policy or system. Posing the questions is a great way to stimulate critical thinking. As a class, or in small groups, discuss the following:

(For each question, think broadly about all the possible people or groups of people who may be affected, and remember there may be non-monetary costs and benefits.)

The premise of this video is that trade (both material and ideas) can benefit all groups. Let's look at some various forms of trade through these key questions:

A. Free Trade

Both parties (groups, cultures) offer products and services, with the other party free to accept or reject the cost. Consider:

WHO CHOOSES?

What happens when both parties are "free to choose" to engage in a trade? What happens if one party chooses NOT to trade?

WHO BENEFITS?

Why do both parties often say "Thank you" when you buy something at a store?

WHO PAYS?

Does "payment" always equal "loss?" Explain.

WHAT'S FAIR?

If we both voluntarily agree to engage in a transaction, a trade, then is it fair? Who should decide (who chooses?) if it's fair or not?

Note: Free trade often leads to what is called 'Win-Win.' For more on this situation, see izzit's video [Free Trade](#) as well as the [Win-Win Trading Game](#).

B. Restricted Trade

While both parties offer products and services, one group sets restrictions, such as QUOTAS, TARIFFS, or EXCESSIVE REQUIREMENTS.

Take this example: Country A and Country B both produce sugar. Country B is able to produce sugar at a cheaper rate, and so Country A's producers go to the government and ask for help. Government officials, wanting to protect domestic jobs, set a tax on imported sugar.

The officials defend the practice by pointing out that customers are only paying about 10 cents more per pound of sugar. Meanwhile, the sugar producers are now able to sell more sugar. Because there is only a limited group of suppliers, each sugar producer gains about \$25,000 per year with this policy.

WHO CHOOSES?

In what ways are choices limited here? Who chooses which industries to support? Who chooses if a deal is allowed?

WHO BENEFITS?

Who benefits from special arrangements? Another question, perhaps, is who SHOULD benefit?

WHO PAYS?

Who pays when tariffs are imposed? Who would pay if the tariff were NOT imposed?

WHAT'S FAIR?

Is it fair that two parties must get permission from someone else before entering into an agreement?

When you have a choice between a large group paying a small amount each, or a small group paying a large amount, what is right/fair? Why?

What are the dangers of protecting a small economic group at the expense of all consumers? How can political contributions and lobbying play a role in this?

Political corruption can often follow these sorts of practices. izzit's video [Too Big to Fail?](#) provides some examples.

Name: _____

Date: _____

Geography as Destiny **COMPREHENSION QUIZ**

1. According to the video, how big was Tenochtitlan in the 16th century?
 - a. 50,000 people
 - b. 100,000 people
 - c. 200,000 people
 - d. One million people

2. Which of the following is the best purpose of geography, according to Dr. Sheppard?
 - a. Understanding maps
 - b. Understanding how humans organize themselves.
 - c. Being able to identify cities, states, nations, and physical features
 - d. Answering trivia questions

3. What important factor do both Dr. Sowell and Dr. Pinker believe is critical for cultural success?
 - a. Physical environment—where it is
 - b. Military power
 - c. Steel
 - d. Inventiveness

4. What did the name *Tenochtitlan* mean?
 - a. Mighty god
 - b. Many waters
 - c. The place of Tenoch
 - d. Fertile area

5. What did the urban elites expect from the surrounding people (according to the narrator)?
 - a. Grow their food
 - b. Serve in their armies
 - c. Provide wives for their warriors
 - d. Buy their products

6. Which of the following nations or empires did NOT contribute to the Spanish ability to sail to the Americas?
 - a. Egypt
 - b. India
 - c. China
 - d. Babylon

7. According to Dr. Sowell, how does geography play into the success of cultures?
 - a. Living near the water means they can catch more fish.
 - b. Cultures that interact more with other cultures can benefit from their knowledge to improve their own lives.
 - c. Living in isolation keeps a culture on its own path.
 - d. Cultures that can harness the local geography can grow more food.

8. Dr. Pinker says that when geographers compare the relative success of two cultures over time, one of the primary contributors to the more successful culture is _____.
 - a. A commitment to empire
 - b. Purity of race
 - c. A commitment to education
 - d. Harbors and waterways

9. What military advantage did the Spaniards NOT have in confronting the Aztecs?
 - a. cannons
 - b. horses
 - c. armor
 - d. numbers (more men than the Aztec)

10. Which of the following did the Spaniards gain by international trade?
 - a. steel
 - b. gunpowder
 - c. advanced weapons
 - d. all of the above

Geography as Destiny **Quiz Answer Key**

1. c
2. b
3. a
4. c
5. a
6. d
7. b
8. c
9. d
10. d

Geography as Destiny

Enrichment and Integration Activities:

1. GEOGRAPHY

Select three nations from this list: Bolivia, Egypt, Estonia, Guatemala, Haiti, Iceland, Luxembourg, Kazakhstan, North Korea, Pakistan, Somalia

Using what you've learned from the video as well as your own knowledge, make a list of economic advantages and disadvantages each nation has. Then predict which nations have the highest, middle, and lowest GDP (Gross Domestic Product) per capita for your group.

After you've made your predictions, look up the GDP per capita. (One source is here: <http://statisticstimes.com/economy/projected-world-gdp-capita-ranking.php>). How close did you get? Discuss what extra information might have helped you make accurate decisions.

2. LITERATURE:

Henri Crevecoeur, "What is an American?"
<http://americainclass.org/sources/makingrevolution/independence/text6/crevecoeuramerican.pdf>
(Pull excerpts from this longer version)

WRITING PROMPT: Crevecoeur finds several benefits for the settlers of America who interacted with people from many other places. Identify at least three and explain his insights; then discuss to what extent you agree with his argument. Are the same ideas true today? Why or why not?

3. HISTORY

Students often perceive history as boring because they believe it is just about names, dates, and events. The activity on p. 17 ([How well do you know the Aztecs?](#)) focuses more on the daily life of Aztecs; students will find the information compelling, and possibly a bit gross!

4. WRITING/JOURNAL PROMPTS

- A. What is true of countries, or cultures, may be true of individuals as well. The Chinese, believing they were superior to other cultures, refused to learn from them. Isolated cultures, like the Aztecs, were unprepared to meet new challenges when they came. How might this apply to your life? What does it suggest about interactions with other people? *(Notice that the Aztecs interacted with primitive peoples close around them; the Spanish traded with a variety of cultures, including more advanced ones. Why should you be willing to engage with people who are smarter, or more talented, than you are?)*
- B. The Aztecs dominated the people groups around them. When the Spanish conquistadors came, those groups quickly became allies in fighting the Aztecs. What is the value of gentleness in dealing with other cultures? When is war, or control, necessary when dealing with surrounding cultures or peoples?
- C. The Aztec religion seems unbelievably brutal to us now. What parts of your religion (or lack of religion-- some people note that atheism is a belief system of its own) are hardest for you to accept? How have you/should you address those questions?

GEOGRAPHY AS DESTINY LESSON PLAN

How well do you know the Aztecs?

Name: _____

Date: _____

Instructor: _____

Time to complete:	30-50 minutes, depending on which options you select
Materials/ Technology/ Resources:	* The Geography as Destiny video (can be streamed from izzit.org with no login required.) * True-False quiz projected on board or copies made for each student.

Standards:	Use our free and easy-to-use Standard Alignment tool to align this lesson with the standards in your school district.
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Learning Objective(s):	<i>Students will identify elements of the social history of the Aztec culture. They will compare to their own.</i>
Topics:	social history, culture, Aztecs, Central America

Absorb: (15 minutes)	<u>Watch:</u> Geography as Destiny video streamed from izzit.org with no login required.
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Overall guiding question(s):	How did the Aztec culture differ from ours? What might our culture look like to someone from outside studying it?
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Lesson Procedures: (10-20 minutes)	1. Watch video: Geography as Destiny . Optional: Have students complete the viewing guide as they watch.
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	<p>2. PROCEDURES:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">a. Provide a copy of the true-false quiz to each student. (You may want to read it aloud, or show it on the board.) Have students record their answers.b. Optional (Think-Pair-Share). If you like, you can pair students to discuss their answers and determine how to reconcile any differences. (This step addresses learning objectives of discussion and working together.)c. Provide the correct answers.d. Consider the various parts of the Aztec culture that are addressed: diet, religion and religious ceremonies, parenting. What other parts of culture might people study?e. OPTIONAL: Have students brainstorm what practices in their own culture might look strange to an anthropologist or historian many years in the future. How will people learn about our culture?
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Summary & Assessment: (5 minutes)	Have each student write a brief paragraph (or a list of 3-5 sentences) of what he or she learned. Use as an exit ticket to leave class.
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Reflection: (10 minutes)	If your class keeps journals, ask them to reflect on what cultural belief or practice they have that is most likely to surprise someone from another time or place.
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How well do you know the Aztecs?

Name: _____

Date: _____

Instructor: _____

Identify each statement as TRUE or FALSE by circling the best answer. Remember, if something is noted as absolute (with words like ALWAYS), and you can think of any exceptions, the answer is FALSE. Also remember that if any PART of the statement is false, the answer is FALSE. If a statement has qualifiers like 'many' or 'some,' the answer is much more likely to be TRUE (but not always!).

Note: These questions are taken from Terry Deary's [The Angry Aztecs](#), part of his Horrible Histories series. If you are not familiar with this series, he takes a humorous look at many eras and people groups. As he describes it, it's 'history with the nasty bits left in!' There is also a BBC series, available on Hulu, based on these books.

1. TRUE or FALSE The Aztecs had two calendars—one for planting and another for religious ceremonies.
2. TRUE or FALSE Only prisoners and slaves were sacrificed to the Aztec god of war.
3. TRUE or FALSE The Aztecs built stone pyramids as high as 500 feet.
4. TRUE or FALSE Aztec priests sacrificed approximately 50,000 people per year.
5. TRUE or FALSE Only men were sacrificed.
6. TRUE or FALSE The Mexican national symbol of the eagle, the snake, and the cactus came from an Aztec legend.
7. TRUE or FALSE Some sacrifices ended with parts of the victim being cooked and eaten.
8. TRUE or FALSE Priests would flay the skin from victims and wear it as part of a ceremonial robe.

9. TRUE or FALSE Most Aztecs enjoyed chocolate, made from the cacao bean.
10. TRUE or FALSE The Aztecs ate monkeys, dogs, and lake scum.
11. TRUE or FALSE Children and adults were buried differently.
12. TRUE or FALSE Disobedient children could be poked with the spikes of a cactus.
13. TRUE or FALSE Aztec garbage was dumped in the lake surrounding the island of Tenochtitlan.
14. TRUE or FALSE The drinking age for Aztecs was 15 years old.
15. TRUE or FALSE The punishment for underage drinking was death.
16. TRUE or FALSE Boys needed their teacher's permission to marry.
17. TRUE or FALSE As part of the wedding ceremony, the bride and groom would grip a snake with their teeth—the man held the head and the woman the tail.
18. TRUE or FALSE Aztec warriors didn't get their hair cut until they had killed someone in battle.
19. TRUE or FALSE Aztec warriors believed that attaching to their shields a finger from a woman who had died giving birth gave them extra protection.
20. TRUE or FALSE The Aztecs played a game called pok-a-tok, in which the winners earned the honor of being sacrificed to the gods.

ANSWERS to “How well do you know the Aztecs?”

1. TRUE. The planting calendar was like ours, with 365 days. The religious calendar had 260 days—18 months of 20 days each.
2. FALSE. While these were the primary source of sacrifices, and brave enemy warriors were perhaps the favorite source, citizens could also be selected. It was considered a great honor.
3. FALSE. Aztec pyramids were 200 feet high—still impressive!
4. TRUE. That’s about 1,000 per week, or 6 an hour, or one every 10 minutes! A Spanish history book once indicated that as many as 80,000 sacrifices occurred to celebrate the opening of the Great Temple in 1487, but many people today believe that must be an exaggeration.
5. FALSE. The form of sacrifice was often different, however. Men were laid on an altar and cut open with an obsidian knife; priests then removed the heart from the victim. Women often played the role of a goddess for a short time before being decapitated at the pyramid!
6. TRUE.
7. TRUE.
8. TRUE. Priests might wear these macabre robes as long as 20 days.
9. FALSE. Cacao beans were very rare, and thus they could serve as money. The very wealthy, however, could engage in conspicuous consumption by drinking chocolate.
10. TRUE. They also ate snakes, lizards, ants, and larvae. The pond scum they would gather and collect into cakes. Yum!
11. TRUE. While adults would be buried in coffins, children would be put into jars and buried.
12. TRUE. An even worse punishment was being held over a fire of roasting chili peppers; inhaling the spicy smoke would sting terribly!

13. FALSE. Prisoners would gather the garbage and move it to barges, which then carried the garbage away from the island.
14. FALSE. It was actually double that—30! Of course, their primary alcohol was made from cactus, so maybe that wasn't so bad.
15. TRUE—although this was for a second offense. For the first offense, the culprit would be beaten.
16. TRUE!
17. Thankfully, FALSE. Instead, their two cloaks would be tied together.
18. TRUE.
19. TRUE. According to some accounts, such women's funerals could be raided by warrior mobs seeking the extra protection.
20. Trick question. We aren't sure; the evidence is too sketchy to be certain.

GEOGRAPHY AS DESTINY LESSON PLAN

Settling a New World: Maximizing Potential

Name: _____

Date: _____

Instructor: _____

Time to complete:	50 minutes
Materials/Technology/Resources:	<ul style="list-style-type: none">* The <i>Geography as Destiny</i> video (can be streamed from izzit.org with no login required.)* Instruction sheet* Maps * Optional: access to internet resources to research possible answers to the problem

Standards:	Use our free and easy-to-use Standard Alignment tool to align this lesson with the standards in your school district.
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Learning Objective(s):	<i>Students will identify the physical geography of different locations. They will determine how those features might affect trade, and thus the potential success (defined as technological advance) of a culture.</i>
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Topics:	geography, topography, map skills, settlements, trade
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Absorb: (14:41 minutes)	<u>Watch:</u> <i>Geography as Destiny</i> video streamed from izzit.org with no login required.
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Overall guiding question(s):	How do physical geography features affect the people who live there?
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**Lesson
Procedures:
(30 minutes)**

1. Show the video.
2. Explain that the class will now do a simulation activity to test their understanding of the concepts.
3. Divide the students into groups of 3-5. Provide each group with the instructions and the three locations (maps).
4. OPTIONAL: Before having the students look at the settlement sites, you may want to give them an extra challenge—in order to maximize space for people, the space for cargo was very limited. Challenge the students to identify what tools and technology they are bringing with them. Remind them that there does not appear to be any evidence of an electric grid on this planet, so if they want it, they'll have to build it.
5. Ask students to consider each settlement site. Which site provides the best chance for success? Why?
6. Bring the students back together; have each group present an argument for one site.
7. After the groups have explained what choices they made, ask if they would have made a different choice if the new world had advanced transportation, like flight.

**Summary &
Assessment:
(15 minutes)**

Class discussion should reveal if the class understands that access to trade routes is perhaps the most critical resource. The teacher may also have individuals write a brief explanation (3-5 sentences) of what they learned from the simulation.

Students should recognize the following:

1. *Access to trade routes is very important. As sea travel is the most common form of transport, Site A is at a significant disadvantage.*
2. *While iron ore can be useful, it will only be so if they have carried the ability to mine it and to create steel.*
3. *Their success in trade will involve knowing what the other people want and need.*
4. *Students should recognize the value in seeking to peacefully coexist with neighbors.*

	<p><i>5. Students should identify the desire to learn from other cultures on the planet, and they should also identify EDUCATION as a primary early goal.</i></p>

<p>Reflection: (5 minutes)</p>	
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GEOGRAPHY AS DESTINY LESSON PLAN
Settling a New World: Maximizing Potential

Names: _____

Date: _____

Instructor: _____

Doomsday has finally come. Earth has been deemed uninhabitable. You are one of a small group of humans selected to carry on with life as a new colony on another planet. Fortunately, such a planet has been located; although the journey will be very long, the new planet is proven inhabitable, as humanoid life has been observed.

As your group approaches the new planet, and life begins again, you must decide WHERE you will locate. Initial interactions with the most advanced civilizations indicate that you are welcome on their planet, but not among the advanced people themselves. Instead, you will need to select a site that is more thinly inhabited with more primitive people groups.

As a geographer, your skills are needed to determine the best site. You have learned that the people on your new planet have mastered sea travel, but not air travel. While they have a network of roads and aqueducts, they do not seem to have electricity or the internal combustion engine. Still, there seems to be a great deal of trade between areas. You believe it is roughly equivalent to the 1600s in Earth's history.

Your research team has identified THREE potential sites for your colony. Your team is to look closely at the strengths and weaknesses of each team and to make a recommendation to the leadership team of the colony.

Make notes on each page, then write your recommendation below. Decide on a presenter (or group of presenters). Be sure to explain why this site is superior to the others.

SITE A:



Satellite images indicate plenty of water and fertile soil. There is evidence that gold may be available in the area. Local tribes are numerous, but they appear to have very primitive weapons.

This site is relatively near the advanced continent; estimates are that 500 nautical miles separate this area from the southern border of the 'modern world.'

Closer evaluation reveals that the rivers are shallow, with numerous waterfalls. Natural harbors are few, and the ocean depth for several hundred yards away from the land's edge is relatively shallow as well.

Notes:

Site B:



This area has a great deal of woodlands and wildlife. While the land is not as fertile as Site A, it appears to be able to sustain agriculture. An ocean separates this area from the advanced civilizations. Native groups appear to be sparse.

The area is replete with natural harbors, and the rivers (not all marked on this satellite image) seem to be fairly deep and wide. Some mining engineers believe that iron ore is within a few hundred miles of the ocean.

Notes:

Site C:



This site is the closest to advanced civilization by land, although the water route is more circuitous. Iron ore and petroleum reserves appear to be relatively close together (less than 50 miles), but a small mountain range separates the primary sites of these resources. This appears to be the least agriculturally promising of the three sites, as winters are long and cold, and the soil seems stony.

Notes:

Questions for your group to consider:

What technology have you brought with you?

How will you interact with the primitive people groups around you?

What do you have/will you have to trade?

What else will you need to do in the early years of your colony to maximize success?

What questions do you need to ask?

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