Lesson 1  The Birth of Chinese Civilization

Understanding Place: China

China occupies a major part of eastern Asia. The Pacific Ocean forms most of its eastern border. Today, many different countries form China’s northern, western, and southern boundaries. China’s boundaries are now determined by politics. A borderline marks where one country ends and China begins. Long ago, geographical features determined China’s boundaries. Towering mountains and vast, arid deserts were China’s natural boundaries. These geographic features protected China from outside invaders. However, these geographic features also held the Chinese in. Trade with other countries was limited, so China grew, produced, and invented what it needed. Without contact with new ideas or traditions, China developed its own belief systems and unique culture. Limited contact with other cultures led the Chinese to consider China the center of the world. Zhōng guó, the Chinese word for China, means the “Middle Kingdom” or “central country.”

Geography also determined how the people of China moved and settled within the country. Because so much of the land of China was unsuitable for farming, people lived in limited areas along rivers and near coastlines where they could grow enough food. Even today, when technology makes it possible for people to fly over mountains and cross deserts in air-conditioned buses, much of China’s population lives along its coastlines and rivers.

China is home to many different types of geographical features.
Geography and History Activity  *Cont.*

Early China

**Understanding the Concept:** What makes a place special?

**Directions:** Answer the following questions.

**Understanding the Concept**

1. **Locating** Find and circle the following geographical features on the map: Altay Mountains, Tian Shan, Taklimakan Desert, Himalaya, Plateau of Tibet, Gobi, Altun Mountains, Kunlun Shan, Hwang He, Chang Jiang, South China Sea, East China Sea, and Yellow Sea.

2. **Classifying** Put the geographic features you found on the map into groups using this chart. Hint: “shan” means *mountain* in Chinese.

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mountains</th>
<th>Deserts</th>
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3. **Analyzing Visuals** Look at the map. What do the locations of the Gobi, the Altay Mountains, the Kunlun Shan, the Tian Shan, the Taklimakan Desert, and the Himalaya have in common?
Early China

Applying the Concept

4. **Comparing** Although the high mountains and barren deserts that surround China are geographically very different, they both had a similar effect on the development of China’s civilization. What was that effect?

5. **Determining Cause and Effect** How did China’s isolation influence Chinese people’s ideas about their country?

6. **Drawing Conclusions** What patterns of movement of people, goods, and ideas developed in early China?

7. **Formulating Questions** What more would you like to know about in terms of China’s geography? What more would you like to know about the influence of geography on the history of early China?

8. **Synthesizing** What notable geographic features are there in the area in which you live? How do you think these features have affected development?