

# CALIFORNIA REGIONS STUDENT GUIDE

Name: \_\_\_\_\_



# BACKGROUND SHEET 1

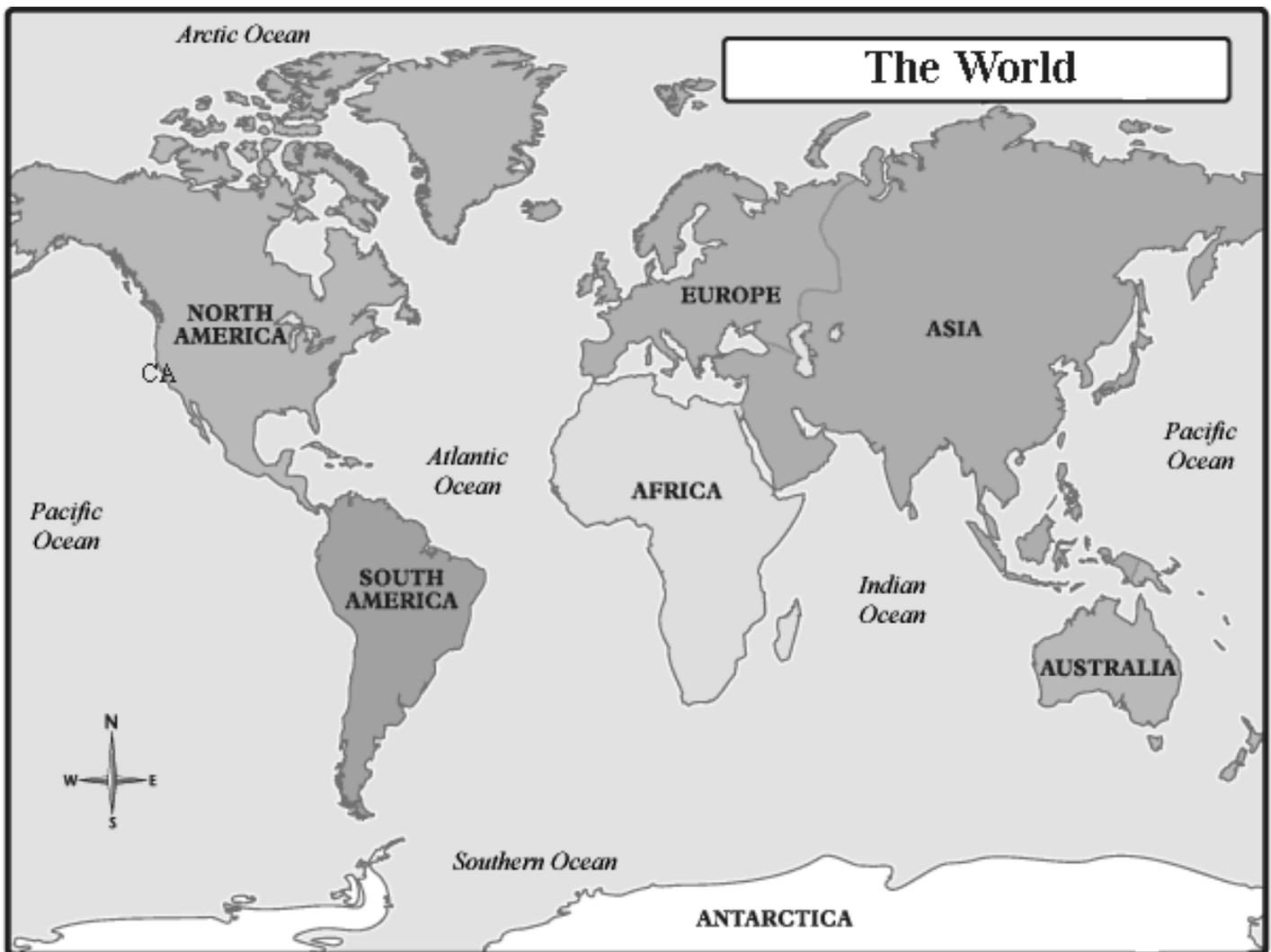
## WHERE IN THE WORLD IS CALIFORNIA?

### WORLD GEOGRAPHY:

**Geography** refers to the study of the earth and all the things on it. Geographers pay attention to what the land looks like and where things are located on the earth.

If you looked at the earth from outer space, you would easily see that the earth is actually a sphere covered with land and ocean. All of the land on the earth can be grouped into seven great big land “chunks.” These chunks are made by nature, not by people and they are called **continents**. The seven continents are: North America, South America, Africa, Europe, Asia, Australia, and Antarctica. The United States of America is located on the continent of North America.

The large bodies of water that divide these chunks of land can be broken into five oceans. The five oceans are the: Pacific Ocean, Atlantic Ocean, Arctic Ocean, Indian Ocean, and Southern Ocean. The USA is bordered by the Pacific Ocean on the west and the Atlantic Ocean on the east.



## FOCUS ON NORTH AMERICA:

North America is divided into many countries. So how is a **country** different from a continent? A continent is made by nature and doesn't really change. People have divided up continents into sections called countries. The shape and place of all countries are decided by people, not nature. Sometimes countries can actually change size or place. Sometimes countries actually change names or even go away completely! All countries have a ruler or a boss (like a queen, king, dictator, president, prime minister) and laws that everyone who live in the country must obey. On the other hand, continents never go away, and they are not ruled by queens or presidents!

Let's think of it like this. You are sitting at a table group. This table is like a continent. But, each person has his/her own desk, which is a space that belongs to that person. The desk is like a country. Desks can move around and can belong to different people.

At the top of North America are the countries of Greenland and Canada. In the center is what is known as the continental United States. South of the USA is the country of Mexico and many other small countries that make up what is known as Central America and the Caribbean Islands. The two countries that are considered neighbors to the United States are Canada and Mexico. This means that these countries border the United States. A **border** is the line where people agree on to separate one place from another. Another way of saying border is **boundary**. A border is decided by people, not by nature. If you travel from one country to another, you will not see an actual line on the ground.



## FOCUS ON THE UNITED STATES & CALIFORNIA:

If you look at a map of the United States, you can see that it is made up of many states. So how is a state different from a country? A **state** is a section of a country that is allowed to make some of its own rules. It even gets to have its own boss, who is called a governor. But, the state still has to obey all the laws of the country. Let's think of it like this. Lincoln School is like a country. Everyone at Lincoln has to obey the principal, who is the boss of the whole school. But each classroom is like a state. Classrooms have their own rules that are decided by the teacher, who is like the governor of a state. But, everyone in the classroom still has to obey school rules, even the teacher!

The state we live in is California. California borders three other states. The states that border California are Oregon, Nevada, and Arizona. California's southern border touches the country of Mexico. On the west, California is bordered by the Pacific Ocean.



### FINDING YOUR WAY:

You may have noticed a symbol on the maps in this background sheet that looks similar to an addition sign. This is called a **compass rose**. A compass rose points in different directions to show direction on a map. A compass rose usually shows north, south, east, and west. Sometimes it may only show north or it may even show northeast, southeast, northwest, and southwest. You can use a compass rose to decide where things are on a map in relation to other things. Some maps may also include a **legend or a key**. A legend/key is a list of symbols on a map or chart that explains what the symbols on the map mean.

# BACKGROUND SHEET 2

## MAPS

### PHYSICAL FEATURES:

A **physical map** tries to show all the parts of the land that are found in nature. For example, physical maps often have shading to show where the mountains are. They also show natural features such as lakes, rivers, forests, bays, harbors, valleys, and deserts. Physical maps are usually colored to look like the land, using shades of greens or browns. In general, even though physical maps may include borders between states or countries and may also include features such as cities, the main point of a physical map is to show what the land looks like.

If you look at a physical map of California, you will see a lot of variety. There are beaches, and mountains, and valleys, and even an enormous desert! California is full of rivers and lakes too. In fact, California probably has more variety than any other state in the USA! If you look carefully at a physical map of California, you can see that it seems to be divided into four different natural regions. A **region** is an area with common features that set it apart from other areas. On the physical map below you can see the high areas (mountains) and low areas (valleys) and other natural features such as lakes.



## POLITICAL FEATURES:

On the other hand, when you look at a **political map** of California you may see lots of bright colors. These bright colors are not the real color of California, of course! Map makers use the colors to help us see the borders more clearly. The point of a political map is to see where man-made places are located. Usually people use political maps to find things like cities and roads and borders between states, counties, and countries. Although objects like rivers, lakes, and mountains show up on political maps, the main reason for them is to find man-made things and places. On the map below you can see major cities and major highways. Even though you can see lakes and rivers too, that is not the main function of this political map.



# BACKGROUND SHEET 3

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## WE ALL NEED RESOURCES

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### WHAT RESOURCES ARE:

Think about all the belongings you have that help your life be more comfortable. Things like your house, your clothes, your computer, and your car. Did they grow on trees? Did your dad go pick a nice, ripe car from the garden? Of course not! All of these things were made from objects that are found in nature. For example, some of your clothes are made from cotton. Cotton is a plant and people have figured out how to make cloth from it, which then becomes clothes to wear. Other examples are electricity, trees, fruits, vegetables, animals, metals, and water. We call these objects **natural resources**. A natural resource is something found in nature that people can use.

To help you keep this straight, remember that natural resources are found in nature - people do not make them. For example, since a car is made by people, it is not a natural resource. Instead it is a **product**. A product is the object that people make, using natural resources. Other examples of products are televisions, stoves, and lamps. On the other hand, people do not build trees - they are found in nature, so they are a natural resource. Remember, natural resources are materials that are found in nature and used by people to make products.

### RENEWABLE RESOURCES:

Some resources are **renewable**. That means that they don't run out or they can be replaced. California is rich in renewable resources.

One example is the soil beneath us. We can use the soil to grow food and we don't have to worry that we will use up all the soil. Soil is very important to California because farmers grow crops in this rich soil and then sell the crops all over the world. When they sell these crops the money adds to California's economy. Water, like soil, is a renewable resource. It is renewed, for example, when rain falls. Having enough water to drink and to water crops is critical for the people of California.

Another example of renewable resources is the wind. In many places in California such as along the Altamonte Pass or near Livermore there are many turbines that harness the energy of the wind. The wind turns the fan blades, which in turn provides energy. You may have seen them when you are traveling in the car with your family. They look like a giant forest of enormous pillars with fans on them.

Other important renewable resources available in California are trees, fish, cattle, fruits, and vegetables.

### NONRENEWABLE RESOURCES:

In contrast, **nonrenewable** resources are natural resources that will run out and they cannot be replaced. Once we use them all up, they are gone forever.

Minerals are one kind of nonrenewable resource. Minerals are metals and rocks found in the earth. We use minerals to make things we use every day. Cement and concrete, for example, come from minerals such as sand and gravel. Cement is the product we use to make highways, buildings, and sidewalks. Gold is another mineral that is very valuable. Some other examples are silver, limestone, and borax.

Petroleum is one of the most important nonrenewable resources. Petroleum is a heavy liquid that formed underground from the remains of dead plants. It is needed to create fuel. Petroleum makes the gas needed to run your family's cars and is burned in power plants to create electricity. Natural gas is another fuel that is found under the earth. Your home might have a gas stove. It burns natural gas to cook your food.

### PEOPLE ARE RESOURCES TOO:

None of our natural resources would be useful without **human resources**. Human resources are the knowledge, skills, and energy of people. Fishermen, for example, must know how to fish and have the energy to do it. Cars, houses and clothes don't just make themselves. It is people who take the raw materials found in nature and put them together to make the products we need and love. Without people, no products would be made.

California is rich in human resources. Our state has the biggest **population** of any state in the United States. Population is the number of people who live in a place. More than 37 million people live in California - they come from all over the world! People actually are California's most important resource!

# BACKGROUND SHEET 4

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## THE COAST REGION

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### THE LAND:

The land that lies along the Pacific Ocean is considered the coastal region. The land of the coast varies from north to south. North of San Luis Obispo, the coast is more rugged and rocky. High hills rise directly from the water's edge. Narrow beaches are tucked between the hills, and big rocks rise out of the waters offshore. However, as you travel south, the coastline changes. The southern coastline is marked by long stretches of flat, sandy beach. Eight islands make up the Channel Islands that lie just offshore. Set back from the beaches are rolling hills. These hills rise to become mountain ranges. A little further inland from the coast is a large mountain range known as the Coast Range. This string of mountains is considered part of the coastal region. When you drive over Highway 17 to Santa Cruz you are crossing part of the Coast Range. Truly the land of the coast region is quite diverse.

### THE CLIMATE:

Climate is not the same as weather. Every day when you go outside you notice what the weather is that day. But climate means what is normal for that region. In the coast, it is normal for it to be usually sunny and not too hot or too cold. For example, even though at rare times it might snow, that is not normal, right? We say that the coast region climate is MILD. The reason for the mild climate is the Pacific Ocean. The ocean does not warm up easily. The coolness from the ocean blows over the coast, keeping the weather from getting too hot or even too cold. In the summer, warm air moving over cold water produces fog, which the wind blows inland. The fog also helps to keep the temperatures mild.

In general, the southern coast has a milder climate than the northern coast. Rain only falls in the winter on the southern coast and when it does it usually just comes in short, heavy bursts. In the north it is generally a bit cooler but it rarely gets bitterly cold, even in the middle of winter.

This mild and pleasant climate has attracted many people to the coast (especially the southern coast). It is the most populated region in California.

### THE RESOURCES:

The coast region offers many important resources. The coast has excellent soil that helps farmers grow many types of vegetables. North of San Francisco many dairy farms produce eggs, milk, and cheese. The richest farms are the vineyards found in Napa Valley and Sonoma Valley. These vineyards grow grapes that are used to make wine.

California also has a rich resource in the sea. The waters of the Pacific Ocean are full of fish and shellfish. Fisherman catch king salmon on the north coast, a fish prized for its sweet meat. Divers also gather abalone, which is a delicious shellfish that is considered a special treat to eat. One of California's biggest moneymakers is the sea urchin. Much of this catch is sold to Japan. There, people like the taste of it in sushi.

The ocean also supplies an important mineral resource - petroleum. Oil was first found on land that is now Los Angeles. Today, oil companies work from platforms out in the ocean. They pump oil from beneath the ocean floor. They also find natural gas, which is used as fuel for things like barbecues and stoves.

### PLACES TO VISIT:

The coast region is full of places that are famous all over the world. People come from all over to visit different places located near the coast and spend money here. Tourism brings in a lot of money to California. Some famous cities are San Francisco, San Diego, Santa Barbara, Los Angeles, and San Jose.

One famous place is the coastline itself. All the beaches up and down California attract thousands of visitors every year. One example is Big Sur near Monterey. People also enjoy visiting the impressive sequoia forests, which contain the largest trees found in the world. San Francisco Bay is also a favorite place to see. Another place tourists like to visit are the kelp forests found near Monterey. People who go see the Monterey Bay Aquarium get to see what a kelp forest looks like close up! And, don't forget that Disneyland and Hollywood are both found in the coast region of California.

# BACKGROUND SHEET 5

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## THE MOUNTAIN REGION

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### THE LAND:

More than 200 years ago, a Spanish traveler saw a range of mountains. He named them “Sierra Nevada” which meant ‘snowy mountains.’ This enormous mountain range makes up the majority of the mountain region of California.

The Sierra Nevada Range is like an enormous wall of mountains that cover 400 miles of the state’s eastern border. The range has more than 500 peaks taller than 12,000 feet. The highest one, Mount Whitney, touches the clouds at 14,495 feet above sea level. The only higher mountain in the United States is Alaska’s Mount McKinley.

The mountains continue north of the Sierra Nevada, but they belong to a different range called the Cascades. The Cascades were formed by hot liquid rock bursting out of the earth and piling up. The Cascades are actually a string of volcanoes that stretch from northern California all the way up to Canada. The biggest ones in California are Mount Shasta and Mount Lassen. Remember that the coast region also contains mountains, The Coast Ranges. Although these smaller mountains are part of the coast, they do share some of the common features of the mountain region.

A famous naturalist named **John Muir** came to California in 1868. John Muir fell in love with the mountains of California and spent the rest of his life exploring the Sierra Nevada. He climbed to the top of Mount Shasta in a snow storm! He held on tight to slippery rocks to look up tall waterfalls. He drew sketches and wrote about the beauty of the mountains. Eventually he founded the Sierra Club. This club works to protect wild land all over our country for the future. In 1890 part of the Sierra Nevada became a park called Yosemite National Park.

### THE CLIMATE:

Moist air from the ocean cools suddenly when it meets the high mountains and slides upwards. The moisture gathers above the mountains in clouds and then drops down as rain or snow, otherwise known as **precipitation**. Precipitation is the amount of water in the air that falls to the ground. On the western slopes of the Sierra, the snow can pile up to 50 feet deep in the winter. The eastern slopes hardly get any rain or snow because the air is dry by the time it gets there. Basically, all that means it rains and snows a lot in the mountains!

Winters are very cold in the mountains. On the other hand, when summer arrives the mountains remain pleasantly cool. Not too many people live in the mountain region but thousands go there for recreation. Downhill skiing, snow boarding, hiking, backpacking, hunting, and camping are all popular outdoor activities.

### THE RESOURCES:

The mountains provide more than just fun in California. They provide life itself in the form of water. California usually gets no rain in the summer. The state depends on the snowpack in the mountains. The melting of this snow year-round creates rushing streams and rivers. The mountain region is the source of many of California’s rivers. **Source** means the starting point of a river. The rivers in the mountains have all been dammed to create reservoirs. Cities all over the state get their drinking water from these reservoirs. Hetch Hetchy, for example, supplies water to San Francisco.

Trees are the most plentiful resource in the mountain region. Trees such as giant redwood trees and Douglas firs cover the northern mountains. These are cut down for timber, which is used to build houses and furniture.

Nonrenewable resources in the mountain range include gold, silver, sand, gravel, and natural gas.

### PLACES TO VISIT:

Lake Tahoe calls itself the “Jewel of the Sierra.” It is a popular vacation place. Attractions include the lake itself, ski areas and numerous shops and restaurants. In the gold country, visitors come to see restored gold mining towns like Sonora. People also love to see and climb Mount Lassen, Mount Shasta, and Mount Whitney. Popular cities in the mountain region include Tahoe City, Quincy, Placerville, and Susanville.

Yosemite National Park is one of the most famous places in California. Half Dome is one of the most famous sites to see in Yosemite.

# BACKGROUND SHEET 6

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## THE VALLEY REGION

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### THE LAND:

California's **valley** region is a great plain that is 400 miles long and 50 miles wide. A valley is an area between two mountain ranges. It is located smack dab in the center of California. On a clear day, from the flat floor of the valley, you can see the mountains on either side. When you drive through the valley region, the main impression you are going to get is farms, farms everywhere!

Two great river systems run through the valley region and act as a drain for water that collects in the valley basin. The Sacramento River comes in from the north. It enters the valley near Mount Shasta and flows south to San Francisco Bay. The San Joaquin River comes up from the south. This river used to flow north and empty into the San Francisco Bay, but today all its water is used by the farms in the valley. In fact, the rivers in the valley are very important because they help to enrich the soil, which in turn, helps the farmers in the valley grow abundant crops each year.

### THE CLIMATE:

The climate in the valley region is very hot and dry in the summer and cool and wet in the winter. The heavy winter rains and hot summer sun make this region perfect for growing crops. The valley is known for a heavy ground mist called "tule fog" that creeps over it. Driving through tule fog is like flying through a cloud because this fog is typically up to 1,000 feet thick. Sometimes this fog actually covers the entire valley from Redding to Bakersfield. The valley region never gets snow even though temperatures in the winter sometimes drop below freezing. Overall, the temperatures are more extreme (both hotter and colder) than the coast region.

### THE RESOURCES:

Agriculture is the biggest business in the valley region. **Agriculture** means the business of raising crops and animals. The valley is the perfect place to grow crops because of the rivers, fertile soil, and good weather. **Fertile** means good for growing crops. Farmers grow cotton, grapes, walnuts, almonds, wheat, potatoes, olives, artichokes, garlic, tomatoes, cherries, apricots, and many other fruits and vegetables. In fact, the valley region farms grow more than half of all the fruits, vegetables, and nuts eaten in the whole United States! The valley region has earned a nickname as the "salad bowl of the world." They also raise dairy cows, chickens, and beef cattle.

Another renewable resource plentiful in the valley is wind. There are many places that are consistently windy so engineers designed special wind turbines and built them in many places in the valley. The wind turns the blades, which in turn creates energy. This energy helps provide electricity for the people of California.

Nonrenewable resources found in the valley region are petroleum and natural gas.

### PLACES TO VISIT:

The valley region has a **rural**, or country, way of life. People can enjoy visiting rodeos and going to the state fair. The state fair is held in Sacramento each year. In fact, the most well-known place to visit in the valley region is Sacramento, our state capital. This city buzzes with the business of the state government. Old Sacramento State Historic Park is home to gold rush-era buildings that still look like they did back in the old days. A famous preserved gold rush town is Columbia. Another tourist site is Sutter Fort, also located in Sacramento.

Some other cities in the valley region are Fresno, Stockton, Bakersfield, and Modesto.

# BACKGROUND SHEET 7

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## THE DESERT REGION

### THE LAND:

The **desert** region, located in the southeastern part of the state, has three major deserts- the Colorado Desert, the Mojave Desert, and the Great Basin. A desert is an area that gets less than 10 inches of rain in an average year. Together, these three deserts are the size of Ohio. Unique plants populate deserts that are adapted to living with less water. One way they adapt is to be able to store water inside their leaves. Cactus and Joshua trees are examples of this. Other plants survive because they don't need a lot of water.

In one way, the desert landscape can seem very much the same, wherever you go. People often imagine miles and miles of sand when they think of a desert. There is sand in the desert region, but there is a lot more variety than that! It is actually filled with rocky ridges, sudden canyons, dry lake beds, miles of cracked, dry mud, and deep basins.

Death Valley, a desert valley that covers part of the Mojave and Great Basin deserts, is actually a deep canyon that is 140 miles long and up to 16 miles wide. It formed when a chunk of the earth's crust broke and sank. During the Gold Rush, some travelers tried to enter California through this desert. Many died of thirst crossing this blazing hot valley so the survivors named it Death Valley.

The Colorado River creates the eastern border of California. The Salton Sea fills its southwestern corner. This sea was actually accidentally created by an engineer named Charles Rockwood while he was building some irrigation canals from the Colorado River. A flood broke the banks and the water poured into an ancient lake bed. The water cannot drain out and so each year it keeps getting saltier and saltier.

### THE CLIMATE:

The climate in the desert is very harsh. In fact, Death Valley was officially deemed the "hottest place in the world" on July 10, 1913 when the temperature was recorded at 134°! In fact, it gets so hot in the summer that Death Valley is closed to visitors. And it's no exaggeration to say that it gets so hot that you can actually fry an egg on a rock! However, this does not mean it never gets cold in the desert region. A matter of fact, at night the temperature in the desert can drop dramatically from the daytime temperature. The main thing that makes it a desert is not because it gets hot, but that it hardly gets any rain.

### THE RESOURCES:

Although the desert region may seem like a wasteland, that is not true at all. In fact, the desert region provides many valuable resources. For example, it has a white, salt-like mineral called borax. Borax is an additive used to make detergents, gasoline, weed killers, insect killers, glass, and fire extinguishers. California mines over one million tons of borax every year - almost all of the world's supply.

Limestone is also found in the Mojave Desert. This white stone formed out of seashells millions of years ago, is a key rock needed to make cement and concrete. Concrete is necessary in almost every structure that is built, from skyscrapers to swimming pools. Sand and gravel are also mined in the desert.

Natural gas is also found in the desert region.

Unlike many deserts, the southern part of the California desert region is able to grow many crops because of the Colorado River that borders it. Thanks to irrigation, farmers are able to grow alfalfa, cotton, fruit, sugar beets, lettuce, and many other crops.

### PLACES TO VISIT:

Palm Springs is the largest city in the California desert. It is a popular city for tourists and the main industry there is recreation such as off-road driving, golf, rock climbing, mountain biking, and hiking. Other cities in this region tend to be rather small. They include Lancaster, El Centro, and Indio.

Other sites to see include the Salton Sea, Mono Lake, and Red Rock Canyon. People visit Death Valley each year to see its spectacular views and go camping. Also, a fascinating place to see is the Joshua Tree National Park. This park is famous for its spectacular rock formations and the oddly shaped Joshua trees that dot the landscape.