World Geography Vocabulary List
(Use with assignments as needed)

A
Abdicate
To relinquish power or responsibility formally; to surrender one's office, throne, or authority.

Aborigine
An original inhabitant; one of the original inhabitants of Australia.

Absolute Location
The exact position on the earth in which a place can be found.

Acculturation
The process of accepting, borrowing and exchanging traits and ideas between cultures.

Acid Deposition
wet or dry airborne acids that fall to the earth.

Acid Rain
precipitation carrying large amounts of dissolved acids, especially sulfuric acid and nitric acid, which damages buildings, forests, and crops and kills wildlife.

Alluvian Plain
A broad expanse of land along riverbanks, consisting of rich, fertile soil left by floods.

Amendment
In U.S. government, official changes made to the Constitution.

Anarchy
Political disorder and violence; lawlessness.

Ancestor Worship
The belief that respecting and honoring one's ancestors will cause them to live in the spirit world after death.

Animism
The religious belief that such things as the sky, rivers, and trees contain a spirit, or soul.
Apartheid
The policy of strict separation of races adopted in South Africa.

Aquaculture
farming of plants and fish under water.

Aqueduct
A large pipe or channel designed to transport water from a remote location over a long distance.

Aquifer
Underground water-bearing layers of porous rock, sand, or gravel.

Arable Land
land suitable for growing crops.

Archipelago
A chain of islands.

Artesian Water
underground water supply that is under enough pressure to rise into wells without being pumped.

Atmosphere
The air that surrounds the earth.

Atoll
A ring-shaped coral island surrounding a lagoon.

Authoritarian
Descriptive of a system of government in which one person, a dictator, holds all political power.

Avalanche
mass of ice, snow, or rock that slides down a mountainside.

Axis
Referring to the earth, an imaginary line that runs through the center between the North Pole and the South Pole.
Barbarian
A person without manners or civilized customs.

Barter
The exchange of goods for goods, or services without the use of money.

Basin
An area drained by a river and its tributaries.

Batik
Method of dyeing cloth to produce beautiful patterns, developed in Indonesia and Malaysia.

Bayou
A marshy inlet or outlet of a lake or river.

Bazaar
An open-air market; a street lined with shops and stalls.

Bedouin
Member of a nomadic desert peoples of North Africa and Southwest Asia.

Bedrock
Solid rock underlying all soil, gravel, clay, sand, and loose material on the earth's surface.

Bilingual
The ability to speak two or more languages.

Biologist
Scientist who studies plant and animal life.

Biosphere
The part of the earth where life—people, plants, and animal life—exists.

Birthrate
The number of live births each year per 1,000 people.

Black Market
Any illegal market where scarce or illegal goods are sold, usually at high prices.
Blizzard
a heavy snowstorm with winds of more than 35 miles per hour.

Boycott
To refuse to purchase, sell, or use a product or service as an expression of disapproval.

Buffer State
A country that separates two or more hostile countries.

Calligraphy
The art of beautiful and decorative handwriting.

Canopy
top layer of a rain forest, where the tops of tall trees come together.

Capital
Wealth in the form of money or property owned or used in business; used to produce more wealth.

Capitalist
Descriptive of an economic system in which the means of production are controlled by individuals, or corporations.

Cardinal Direction
One of the four points of the compass: north, south, east, and west.

Cartographer
A person who makes maps or charts.

Cash Crop
A farm crop that is grown for sale and profit.

Caste System
A social hierarchy in which a person possesses a distinct rank in society that is determined by birth.
Cataract
A large waterfall; any strong flood or down-pour of water.

Cay
A small, low island or coral reef.

Census
The systematic counting of a population.

Chaparral
type of vegetation made up of dense forests of shrubs and short trees, common in Mediterranean climates.

Chinook
Seasonal warm wind that blows down the Rocky Mountains in late winter and early spring.

Chlorofluorocarbon
Chemical substance, found mainly in liquid coolants, that damages the earth's protective ozone layer.

City-State
In Ancient Greece, independent community consisting of a city and the surrounding lands.

Climate
The term used for the typical weather pattern in an region over a long period of time.

Cold War
Refers to the power struggle between the Soviet Union and the United States.

Collective Farm
A state-owned farm in the former Soviet Union managed by the workers who shared the profits.

Command Economy
An economic system in which the government dictates what goods will be manufactured.
Commune
in China, a collective farming community whose members were supposed to share work and products.

Communism
A system of government in which the government controls the means of production, determines what goods will be produced, and how much items will cost.

Compass Rose
The directional marker on a map, indicating north, south, east and west.

Confederation
A system of government in which the individual political units keep their sovereignty but give limited power to a central government.

Consumer Goods
Household goods, shoes, and clothing that an individual buys.

Continent
Any one of the seven large land masses on the earth's surface: Africa, Asia, Europe, North America, South America, Australia, Antarctica.

Continental Divide
a line or ridge that separates rivers flowing toward opposite sides of a continent.

Continental Drift
The idea that the continents are continually moving their positions due to the movement to the tectonic plates on which they ride.

Continental Shelf
shallow ocean area near the coast of a continent.

Contour Lines
On a map, lines that connect points of land at the same elevation.

Coral
tiny marine animals and the rock-like structures (islands, reefs) formed by the skeletons of coral colonies.

Cordillera
a related set of separate mountain ranges.
Cottage Industry
A small-scale manufacturing operation in which people produce goods in their own home.

Coup d'etat
The sudden overthrow of a ruler or government, often by violence or the threat of violent force.

Crop Rotation
Farming method in which different crops are alternated in the same field, preserving soil nutrients.

Crusades
A series of religious wars (1100-1300) in which European Christians tried to retake control of Palestine from Muslim rule.

Culture
The way of life that distinguishes a group of people from other groups of people.

Culture region
division of the earth based on a variety of factors, including government, social groups, economic systems, language, or religion.

Cuneiform
Sumerian writing system using wedge-shaped symbols pressed into clay tablets.

Current
cold or warm "river" of seawater that flows in the oceans, generally in a circular pattern.

Czar
An Emperor of Russia: Russian for Caesar.

Death Rate
The number of deaths each year per 1,000 people.

Decentralization
To transfer governmental power to smaller regions.
Deforestation
the loss or destruction of forests, due mainly to trees being cleared for logging or farming.

Delta
Triangular section of land built up by silt deposited at the mouth of a river.

Demilitarized Zone
A strip of land where there are no troops or weapons allowed.

Democracy
A system of government where the people choose their leaders and elected representatives, and determine government policy based on the will of the majority of the population.

Demography
The study of human populations, including their size, growth, density, distribution, and rates of births, marriages, and deaths.

Developing Country
A country with a relatively low industrial production rate, often lacking modern technology.

Dharma
in Hinduism, a person's moral duty, based on class distinctions, which guides his or her life.

Dialect
A variation of a spoken language that has its own distinct pronunciation or vocabulary and is unique to a region or area.

Dictatorship
A system of government in which one person holds absolute power.

Diffusion
The process of spreading cultural traits from one person or society to another.

Directional Arrow
The arrow on a map that always points to the north.

Doldrums
A frequently windless area near the Equator.
Dry Farming
A farming method used in dry regions in which the land is plowed and planted deeply to hold water in the soil.

Dynasty
A ruling house or continuing family of rulers.

Economic system
The way in which the people of a country produce and distribute goods and services.

Embargo
A severe restriction of trade with other countries.

Emigrant
A person who leaves their home country to live elsewhere.

Enclave
A country completely surrounded by another country.

Environment
The physical conditions of the natural surroundings.

Environmental interactions
Interaction between humans and the environment, or between the environment and humans. How each adapts to the other.

Equator
An imaginary line that circles the earth at its widest point dividing the earth into two halves called hemispheres; used as a starting point from which north and south latitude lines are measured in degrees.

Equinox
Either of the two times each year (spring and fall) when day and night are of nearly equal in length.

Erosion
Wearing away of the earth's surface, by wind, flowing water, or glaciers.
Ethnic Minority
A cultural subgroup, not of the dominant culture.

Ethnocracy
A system of government in which one ethnic group rules others.

Evaporation
The changing of liquid water into water vapor, a gas.

Exports
Resources or goods sent from one country to another.

F
Farm cooperative
Organization in which farmers share in growing and selling farm products.

Fault
A fracture in the earth's crust.

Fauna
The animal life of a region.

Fertile
Able to produce abundantly, rich in resources.

Feudalism
In medieval Europe and Japan, system of government in which powerful lords gave land to nobles in return for pledges of loyalty.

Five Themes of Geography
- 1) Location: Exact/Relative,
- 2) Place,
- 3) Interaction Between People and Their Environment,
- 4) Movement, and
- 5) Regions.

Fjord
Long, steep-sided glacial valley now filled with sea water, example: coast of Norway.
**Flora**
The plant life of a region.

**Foehn**
warm dry wind that blows from the leeward side of mountains, sometimes melting snow and causing an avalanche; used mainly in Europe.

**Fold**
A bend or buckle in the earth's crust.

**Foothills**
Low hills at the base of a mountain range.

**Formal Regions**
Places that have similar attributes; example, political regions.

**Fossil Fuel**
A nonrenewable mineral resource: coal, oil, natural, gas that is formed from the remains of ancient plants and animals and is used for fuel.

**Free Enterprise**
An economic system based on capitalism that allows private individuals to own, operate, and benefit from their own business.

**General purpose map**
map showing a wide range of general physical and/or political information about an area.

**Genocide**
The intentional destruction of a people.

**Geography**
the study of the earth and the ways people live and work on it.

**Geology**
The study of the earth's physical surface and history.
**Geothermal Energy**
An energy source derived from the intense interior heat, which transforms underground water into steam that can be used to create electricity.

**Glacier**
large bodies of ice that move across the surface of the earth.

**Glasnost**
Russian term for a "new opening," part of Gorbachev's reform plans.

**Global warming**
gradual warming of the earth and its atmosphere that may be caused in part by pollution and an increase in the greenhouse effect.

**Great circle**
shortest distance between any two places on the earth's surface.

**Grid system**
pattern formed as the lines of latitude and longitude cross one another.

**Gross National Product (GNP)**
The total value of goods and services produced by a country in a year.

**Groundwater**
water that lies beneath the surface of the earth, supplied mainly by rain filtering through the soil.

**Growing Season**
In farming, the average number of days between the last frost of spring and the first frost of fall.

**Gulf**
Arm of an ocean or sea that is partly enclosed by land, usually larger than a bay.
Habitat
Area with conditions suitable for certain plants or animals to live.

Hajj
In Islam, a pilgrimage or religious journey to the holy city of Mecca, birthplace of Muhammad.

Headwaters
the sources of river waters

Heavy Industry
The production of goods such as steel and machinery used by other industries.

Hemisphere
A half of the earth; the equator divides the world into the Northern and the Southern hemispheres. The Prime Meridian divides the world into the Eastern and Western hemispheres.

Hierarchy
Rank according to function; a group of persons or things arranged in order of rank, grade, or class.

Hieroglyphics
an Egyptian writing system using pictures and symbols to represent words and sounds.

Holocaust
The execution of 6 million Jews in Nazi Concentration camps during World War II.

Homogeneous
Having a similar nature; uniform in structure or quality; identical.

Hurricane
A large, powerful windstorm that forms over warm ocean waters.

Hydroelectric Power
Electricity that is generated by moving water.

Hydrosphere
the watery areas of the earth, including oceans, lakes, rivers, and other bodies of water.
Hypothesis
One step in the scientific method, suggesting a scientific explanation for observed events.

Ice Shelf
A massive extension of a glacial ice over the sea, often protruding hundreds of miles.

Ideogram
A pictorial character or symbol that has a specific meaning or stands for something.

Immigrant
A person who has left their home country and settled permanently in another country.

Imports
resources or goods brought into one country from another.

Impressionism
artistic style that developed in Europe in the late 1800's and tried to show the natural appearance of objects with dabs or strokes of color.

Indigenous
Native to or living naturally in an area or environment.

Indigo
a plant that yields a blue dye; a dark blue dye obtained from this plant or an artificially made dye of the same color.

Inflation
A sharp, widespread rise in prices.

Infrastructure
An underlying foundation; the basic support facilities of a country, such as roads, power plants, and bridges.
**Inhabitable**
An area that is able to support permanent settlement.

**Interaction Between People and Their Environment**
Throughout history, people have adapted to and altered different environments. How do humans affect the environment and how does the environment affect humans?

**Interdependent**
Relying on one another for goods, services, and ideas.

**Irrigation**
The artificial watering of farmland, often by means of canals that draw water from reservoirs or rivers.

**Island**
Land area that is surrounded by water.

**Isthmus**
A narrow strip of land with water on each side that is joining two larger bodies of land.

**J K**
**Jati**
in traditional Hindu society, a social group that defines a family's occupation and social standing.

**Joint Family System**
The custom of housing all members of an extended family together.

**Jute**
Plant fiber used to make string and cloth.

**K**
**Karma**
The Hindu belief, that the sum of good and bad actions in one's present and past lives, leads to rewards and punishments.

**Karst**
A landform made of soft limestone that is easily dissolved by wind and water.
Key
part of a map that explains the symbols used. A legend.

Kums
regional term for the sandy deserts in the Turan Lowland, as in Kara Kum.

Labor Intensive
Effort requiring a large human work force.

Lagoon
shallow pool of water at the center of an atoll.

Land Redistribution
A policy by which land is expropriated from those who own large amounts and given to those who have little or no land.

Language family
group of related languages that have all developed from one earlier language.

Latitude
One of the series of imaginary lines that circle the earth parallel to the equator; used to measure in degrees distance north and south from the equator.

Leach
to wash nutrients out of the soil.

Leeward
Situated on the side facing away from the direction the wind is blowing.

Light Industry
The production of small consumer goods such as clothes and appliances.

Literacy
The ability to read and write.
Lithosphere
surface land areas of the earth's crust (about 30 percent), including continents and ocean basins.

Llanos
fertile plains along the Caribbean coast of South America, in Colombia and Venezuela.

Location
Where is it located. Can be described with either relative location or absolute (exact) location.

Loess
Fine, yellowish-brown soil made up of small silt and clay particles, usually carried by the wind.

Longitude
One of the series of imaginary lines that run north and south from one pole to the other; used to measure in degrees the distance east and west from the Prime Meridian.

Malnutrition
Disease caused by the lack of proper food; inadequate nutrition resulting from an unbalanced diet or insufficient food.

Mantle
A thick layer of mostly solid rock beneath the earth's crust that surrounds the earth's core.

Mantra
In Hinduism, a sacred word or phrase repeated in prayers and chants.

Manufacturing
The process of turning raw materials into finished products.

Map Projection
The way of drawing a map showing the rounded earth on a flat surface.
**Maritime**
Bordering on or near the sea; relating to navigation or shipping.

**Martial Law**
The law administration during a period of strict military control.

**Mass culture**
Popular culture spread by media such as radio and television.

**Megalopolis**
a "super-city" that is made up of several large cities and the smaller cities near them, such as the area between Boston and Washington, D.C., or around Tokyo-Yokohama, Japan.

**Meltwater**
Water formed by melting snow and ice.

**Mesa**
Flat-topped, elevated landform.

**Mestizo**
A person of mixed European and Native American heritage.

**Metropolitan area**
Region that includes a central city and its surrounding suburbs.

**Middle Passage**
The name given to the route of slave ships that traveled between Africa and the Americas.

**Militarism**
The glorification of the military and a readiness for war.

**Minaret**
A tall, slender tower attached to a mosque.

**Mistral**
Strong northerly wind from the Alps that can bring cold air to southern France.

**Mixed farming**
Raising several kinds of crops and livestock on the same farm.
**Mixed forest**
forestland with both evergreen and deciduous trees.

**Monarchy**
A system of authoritarian government headed by a monarch---a king, queen, shah, or sultan---whose position is inherited.

**Monotheism**
The belief in one God.

**Monsoon**
A seasonal shift in the prevailing winds that influences large climate regions.

**Mosaic**
A picture or design made up of small pieces of colored glass, stone, or tile.

**Mosque**
An Islamic house of worship.

**Mouth of a river**
The place where a river or stream empties into a large body of water.

**Movement**
The movement of people, goods, information, and ideas around the globe.

**Mulato**
A person of mixed ancestry.

**Multicultural**
having elements that come from more than one culture.

**Muslim**
A follower of Islam.

**Nationalism**
Devotion to the interests or culture of a nation; the desire for national independence to promote a common culture.
**Nationalities**
large, distinct ethnic groups within a country, used especially in Russia and the Eurasian republics.

**Natural Resources**
A material that humans take from the environment to survive and to satisfy their needs.

**Natural vegetation**
plant life that grows in a certain area if people have not changed the natural environment.

**Nirvana**
In Buddhism, the ultimate state of peace and insight toward which people are striving to reach.

**Nomadic**
Describing a way of life in which a group of people travel from place to place in search of food, instead of establishing a permanent settlement.

**Nonrenewable Resource**
A natural resource that cannot be replaced once it is used.

**Nonviolent Resistance**
The policy of opposing an enemy or oppressor by means other than violence.

**Oasis**
A place where a supply of fresh water makes it possible to support life in a dry region.

**Oral History**
Stories or legends passed on by word of mouth from generation to generation.

**Ore**
A rocky material containing a valuable mineral.

**Organic farming**
the use of natural substances to enrich the soil and grow crops rather than chemical fertilizers and pesticides.
Paddy
Irrigated or flooded land on which rice is grown.

Pampas
grassy, treeless plains of southern South America, used for growing grain and grazing animals.

Pastoralism
The raising and grazing of livestock.

Peat
vegetable matter, mainly mosses, usually found in swamps; sometimes cut and burned as fuel in parts of western Europe.

Peninsula
A strip of land that juts out into a large body of water.

Per Capita Income
The total income of a country divided by the number of people; income per person.

Precipitation
The moisture that falls to the earth in the form of rain, sleet, hail, or snow.

Perestroika
A Russian word meaning "a turning about"; in the former Soviet Union, a policy of economic restructuring.

Permafrost
A layer of soil just below the earth's surface that stays permanently frozen.

Pesticide
chemical used to kill insects, rodents, and other pests.

Pharaoh
A ruler of ancient Egypt.

Pidgin English
A dialect mixing English and local languages.
**Place**
Described in terms of both physical and human characteristics. What's it like there. Should be described with both human and physical characteristics.

**Plate Tectonics**
The theory that the earth's outer shell is composed of a number of large, unanchored plates, or slabs of rock, whose constant movement explains earthquakes and volcanic activity.

**Plateau**
A flat landmass that is higher than the surrounding land, with at least one side being very steep, or a cliff.

**Polder**
Low-lying area of the Netherlands from which seawater has been drained to create new farmland.

**Polluted**
Contaminated by harmful or impure substances.

**Pollution**
The existence of impure, unclean, or poisonous substances in the air, water, and land environment.

**Population Density**
The average number of people living in a given area.

**Population Distribution**
The pattern of population—where people live—in a country, continent, or the world.

**Prairie**
an inland grassland area.

**Precipitation**
Moisture that falls to the earth as rain, sleet, hail, or snow.

**Prevailing wind**
Wind in a region that blows in a fairly constant directional pattern, such as the trade winds that blow toward the Equator in low latitudes.
Prime Meridian
An imaginary line that runs from the North Pole to the South Pole through Greenwich, England; it is used as a reference point from which east and west lines of longitude are measured.

Prophet
A person whose teachings are believed to be inspired by God.

Provisional
Temporary; pending permanent arrangements.

Purdah
The practice among Hindu and Muslim women to cover their faces when in public.

Quota
A fixed quantity; the number of immigrants allowed to enter a country in a given time period.

Rain shadow
dry area found on the leeward side of a mountain range.

Realism
artistic style portraying everyday life that developed in Europe during the mid-1800s.

Recession
An extended decline in general business activity.
**Reforestation**
replanting young trees or seeds on lands where trees have been cut or destroyed.

**Reformation**
The religious movement that began in Germany in the 1400's, that lead to the establishment of Protestant churches.

**Refugee**
A person who flees his or her country to escape invasion, oppression, or persecution.

**Region**
A region is an area of the world that has similar, unifying characteristics. Example: Bible Belt names a region of the Southern United States that have similar religious beliefs. The United States is a region of areas that belong to the same country and have similar ideas, languages, etc. Smaller regions can be in larger regions. Regions within regions and worlds within worlds.

**Reincarnation**
The belief that the soul of a human being or animal goes through a series of births, deaths, and rebirths.

**Relative Location**
The position of a place in relation to another place.

**Relief**
The difference in elevation, or height, of the landforms in any particular area.

**Renaissance**
The revival of art, literature, and learning that took place in Europe during the 14th, 15th, and 16th centuries.

**Renewable Resource**
A natural resource that the environment continues to supply or replace after it has been used.

**Reparations**
Money paid for war damages.

**Republic**
A form of government in which the people elect their political officials.
Revolution
in astronomy, the earth's yearly trip around the sun, taking 365 1/4 days.

Rift Valley
A large split along the crest of an underwater mountain system where small earthquakes and volcanic eruptions frequently occur.

Ring of Fire
A ring of volcanic mountains surrounding the rim of the Pacific Ocean.

Romanticism
artistic style emphasizing individual emotions that developed in Europe in the late 1700s and early 1800s as a reaction to industrialization.

Rural
Of, or characteristic of, the country side.

Russification
in 19th-century Russia, a government program that required everyone in the empire to speak Russian and to become a Christian.

Savanna
A tropical grassland with scattered trees, located in the warm lands nearest the equator.

Scale
on a map, the relationship of measures on the map to actual measurements in feet, miles, meters, or kilometers on the earth's surface.

Secede
To withdraw formally from membership in a political or religious organization.

Sediment
Small particles of soil, sand, and gravel carried and deposited by water.
Segregation
The act of imposing social separation of races.

Seismic
Descriptive of earthquakes or earth vibrations.

Seismograph
an instrument that detects and records motions of the ground, as in earthquakes.

Self-Determination
The right to decide one's political future.

Serf
A laborer owned by a noble and must remain on the land in which he or she works.

Service industry
business that provides a service- such as banking, insurance, or transport- instead of making goods.

Shah
The ruler of Iran.

Shifting farming
method in which farmers move every few years to find better soil.

Shinto
the traditional religion of the Japanese, marked by worship of nature, spirits and ancestors.

Sirocco
hot desert wind that can blow air and dust from North Africa to western Europe's Mediterranean coast.

Slash-and-burn farming
traditional farming method in which all trees and plants in an area are cut and burned to add nutrients to the soil.

Smog
irritating haze caused by the interaction of ultraviolet solar radiation with chemical fumes from automobile exhausts and other pollution sources.
**Socialism**
A system in which the government owns, manages, or controls the production, distribution, and exchange of goods.

**Solstice**
one of the two times a year (about June 21 and December 22) when the sun appears directly overhead at noon to observers at the Tropic of Cancer, 23 1/2 degrees N., and the Tropic of Capricorn, 23 1/2 degrees S.

**Source of a river**
The place where a river begins.

**Sovereignty**
A country’s freedom and power to decide on policies and actions.

**Soviet**
In the former Soviet Union, any one of the various governing councils that made decisions at various levels.

**Special purpose map**
map emphasizing a special subject matter, such as resources or population.

**Sphere of Influence**
An area or country that is political and economically dominated by another country.

**Standard of Living**
A measure of people's quality of life, based on access to material goods such as income, food, and housing.

**State farm**
under communism, a state-owned farm managed by government officials; also called sovkhoz.

**Steppe**
A temperate grassland, often lightly wooded, found in Europe and Asia, also semi-arid climate regions elsewhere.

**Strait**
Narrow channel that connects two larger bodies of water.

**Subcontinent**
A large landmass; a major subdivision of a continent.
Subsistence Farming
Farming that provides only enough for the needs of a family or a village.

Suburbs
outlying communities around a central city.

Sunbelt
southern part of the United States, so named because of its mild climate.

Taiga
a Russian term for the vast subarctic forest, mainly evergreens, that begins where the tundra ends; also used for subarctic climate regions in general.

Taoism
Ancient religion or tradition of China.

Tariff
A duty or tax imposed by a government on imported goods.

Temperature
a measure of how hot or cold something is, generally measured in degrees on a set scale, such as Fahrenheit or Celsius.

Terrace
In farming, a flat, narrow ledge of land, supported by walls of stone and mud parallel to the natural slope of the land, used to increase the amount of arable land.

Terra Firma
Latin for solid or firm ground.

Timberline
The elevation above where it is too cold for trees to grow.

Topography
The physical features of the earth's surface.
Tornado
a violent windstorm with rotating winds and a funnel-shaped cloud.

Totalitarianism
A system of government in which a central authority controls all aspects of society, subordinating individual freedom to state interests.

Trading partner
a country that buys from or sells to another country.

Tributary
A river or stream that flows into a main river.

Tropical Storm
A storm with winds of at least 39 miles per hour.

Tsunami
A huge wave caused by a disturbance beneath the ocean, such as an earthquake or volcanic eruption.

Tundra
A vast region of treeless plains in the cold northern climates, characterized by permafrost and small plants such as shrubs and mosses.

Typhoon
A destructive tropical storm occurring in the western Pacific Ocean; similar to a hurricane.

Universal suffrage
equal voting rights for all adult residents of a nation.

Urbanization
The growth of city populations; the change from a rural society to one that is urban, or city-like in character.
Valley
Land that lies between hills or mountains.

Velvet Revolution
A revolution without bloodshed.

Wadi
in the desert, a streambed that is dry except during a heavy rain.

Warlord
A local leader with a military following.

Water Cycle
The regular movement of water from ocean to air to ground and back to the ocean.

Watershed
A dividing ridge between two basins.

Weather
The condition of the atmosphere at any given point in time and place; for example: a "cold, windy, wet day".

Weathering
The chemical or mechanical process by which rock is gradually broken down and eventually becomes soil.

Welfare state
a nation, such as Great Britain, Norway, or Sweden, in which the government assumes major responsibility for people's welfare in areas such as health and education.

Windward
facing toward the direction from which the wind is blowing.

World Bank
An agency of the United Nations that provides loans to countries for development projects.
Y
Yurt
A round tent made of wooden framework and covered with felt or skins.

Z
Zen
a Japanese and Chinese form of Buddhism teaching that enlightenment can be reached through meditation and intuition rather than through religious scriptures.

Ziggurat
A large step-like temple built in ancient Mesopotamia.

Zionist
A member of a movement known as Zionism, founded to promote the establishment of an independent Jewish state.