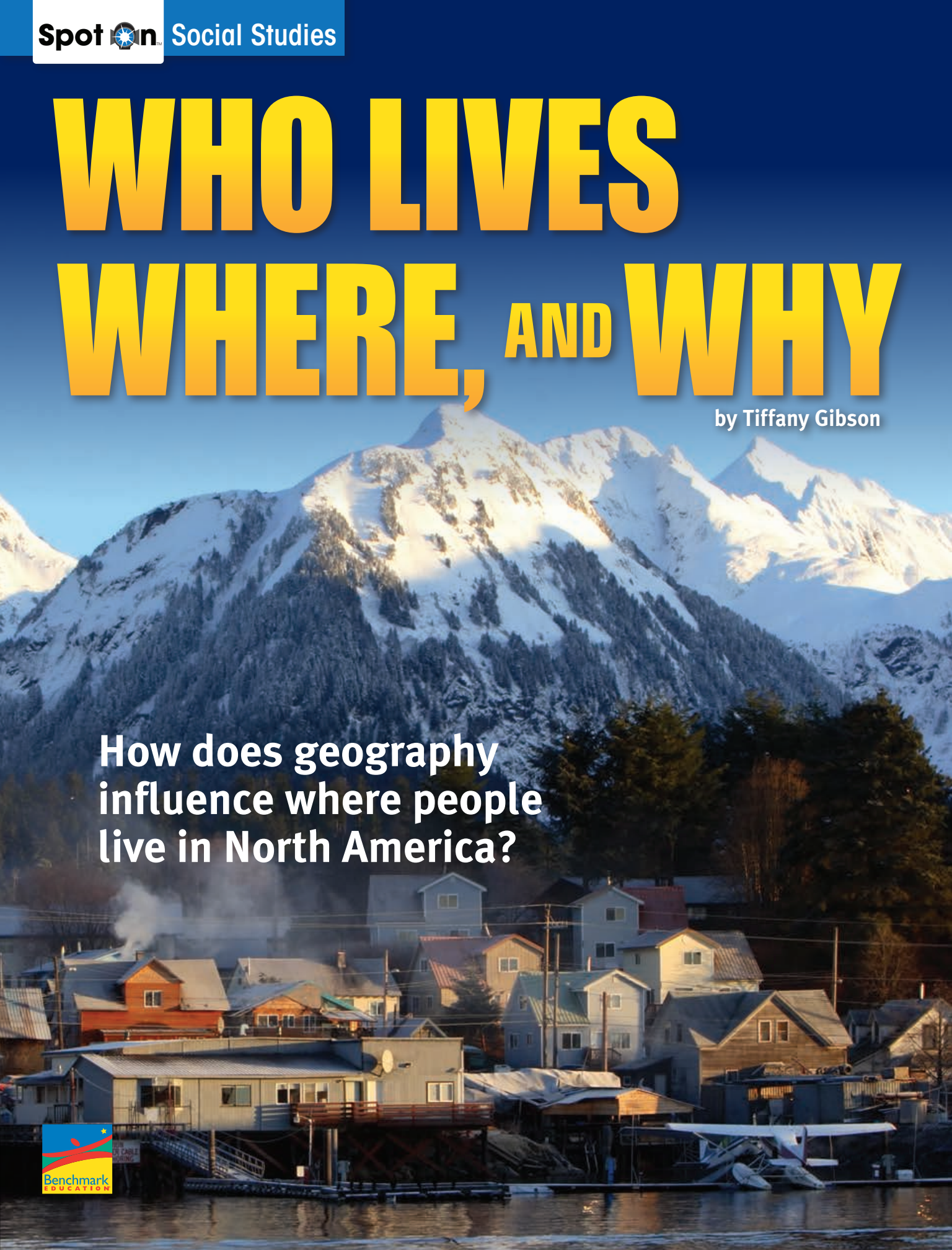
Spot On Social Studies

WHO LIVES WHERE, AND WHY

by Tiffany Gibson



How does geography influence where people live in North America?

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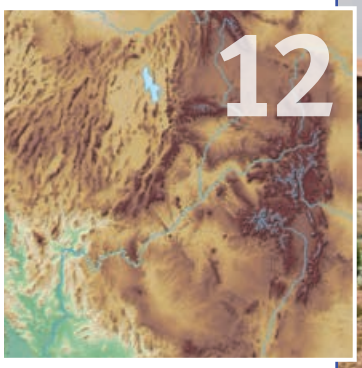
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A View from Above

When flying across the United States, people can look down and see ocean coastlines, river valleys, mountains, and plains. They can see fields of wheat and groves of oranges. And they can see cities and towns where people have made their homes.

Today, people who live in the United States choose to live in a certain place for a wide variety of reasons. Some people live where they were born and grew up. Others move to be closer to family. Or they move to go to college or for a new job. People may also move because of geography—to live in a warmer climate, for example, or to take a job that depends on being in the mountains or near a lake.

Long ago, geography played an even more important role in where people lived. People first settled along bodies of water. Then they traveled inland on rivers. But mountains held them back. Plains seemed uninviting. Climate seemed either welcoming or dangerous. This book explores how water, landforms, and climate have long affected where people live and why they live there.

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coastline


river valley



mountains



plains

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Waterways

The first humans to inhabit North America arrived many thousands of years ago. Some evidence suggests that they came from Asia and then walked over a land bridge that no longer exists. Other evidence suggests that they came from Asia or Australia by boat. There were likely multiple migrations over time. The **descendants** of these early inhabitants became the Native Americans.

For over thousands of years, Native Americans populated the Americas. Different groups settled in different places. But they always settled near a source of fresh water. As each group settled an area, they figured out how to create a successful way of life in that geographical area.

Long before Europeans arrived, Native Americans, like the Ancestral Pueblo peoples, had established communities in every type of geography in North America—coastal areas, mountains, plains, river valleys, deserts, and different climates.

Cliff Dwellings

The Ancestral Pueblo peoples lived in the areas now known as Colorado, Arizona, and New Mexico. They built homes in the sides of cliffs for protection from the heat. This cliff dwelling was built more than 800 years ago.

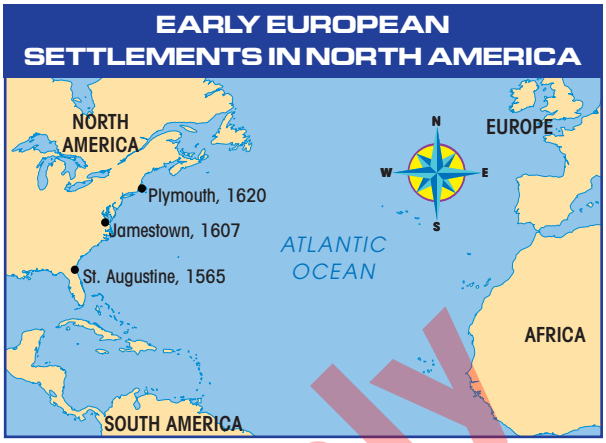


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European Colonists Arrive

About 500 years ago, in the 1500s, colonists from Europe began to settle along the East Coast of the continent. Why there? Because the colonists traveled across the Atlantic Ocean by ship. So the first land they encountered was the East Coast. Settling along the coast allowed colonists to more easily ship and receive goods from other parts of the world. The ocean also provided a source of food in the form of fish and shellfish.

Even if the colonists had wanted to move westward, they would have faced two major obstacles—thick forests and a mountain range, which was later named the Appalachian Mountains. And unlike the Native Americans, who had been living in North America for thousands of years, the first colonists did not know the best routes for **traversing** the continent.



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The land to the left of the water is part of Asia. The land to the right is part of Alaska. Water now separates Alaska from Asia. But long ago, a land bridge connected the two land masses.

Harbors

When nearing the East Coast of North America, the colonists did not land just anywhere along the coast. Instead, they looked for harbors. A natural harbor is a body of water that is protected from rough waters by land masses, such as islands. Harbors allow people to board and exit a ship safely. Goods can also be loaded and unloaded more easily.

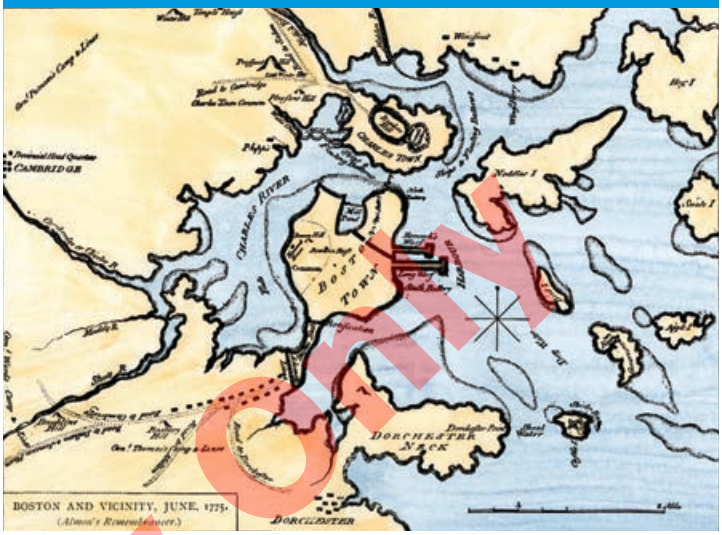
After first landing in a harbor, the colonists then settled nearby. Often, Native Americans had already established communities in the area. Many of these communities traded goods with the colonists.

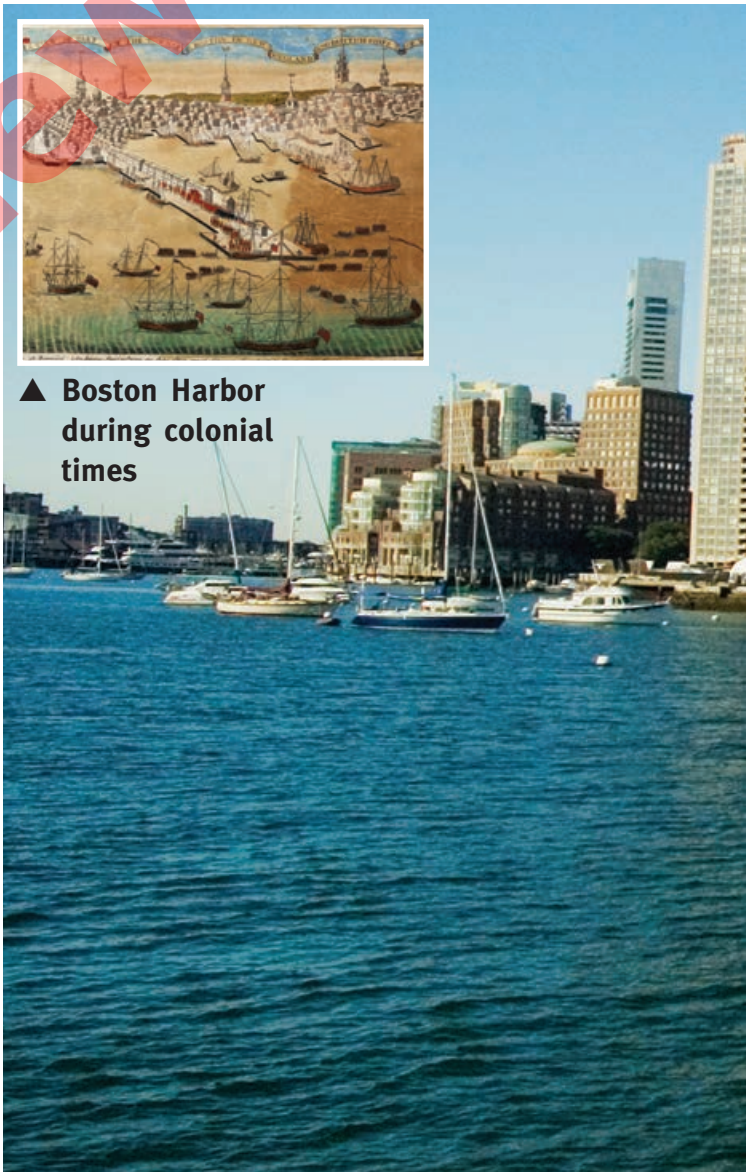
At first, the colonial settlements were small. A settlement might have just a few wooden houses or even just some huts. But as **trade** developed, many of the tiny harbor colonial settlements grew into towns. Some eventually grew into big cities.

Boston began as a tiny harbor settlement founded in 1630. It grew into a city. One of the driving forces behind its growth during colonial times was its shipbuilding industry.

As the colonies grew in size, Native Americans were pushed farther from their original homes.

This map, drawn in 1775, shows how jutting land and islands create and protect Boston Harbor.





▲ Boston Harbor during colonial times

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Today, some harbors are protected by artificial barriers, like this harbor in Michigan.



AMERICAN COLONIES, 1600s



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Boston Harbor today



Rivers

Both Native Americans and, later, the colonists settled along the rivers that emptied into the harbors and the Atlantic. The rivers were useful in allowing trade to develop and thrive before and during colonial times. Timber and other resources could be harvested far up a river and then sent by boat down the river to the harbor. Moving resources by boat was easier and quicker than moving resources on wagons over land.

▼ **Charleston Harbor in colonial times**



Firsthand Account

A Trade Harbor

John Lawson (1674–1711) was an English explorer and writer. He published *A New Voyage to Carolina* in 1709. In his book, he describes the importance of rivers and harbors to trade in the town of Charles-Town (now Charleston), South Carolina.

"arriv'd at Charles-Town, the Metropolis of South Carolina, which ... admits of large Ships to come over their Bar up to the Town, where is a very commodious Harbour, about 5 Miles distant from the Inlet, and stands on a Point very convenient for Trade, being seated between two pleasant and navigable Rivers."

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