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UNIT NARRATIVE



Asia, the world’s largest and most populous continent, serves as a powerful example of how geography, history, and culture intersect to shape human experience. This unit introduces students to the immense diversity of Asia by examining its major regions—South, East, and Southeast Asia—through the lenses of geography, environment, culture, and global interdependence. Students explore how physical features such as the Himalayas, Gobi Desert, and the Ring of Fire influence patterns of settlement, trade, and cultural exchange. By tracing how human activity is shaped by geography, students begin to understand the ways in which environment and innovation have continually shaped life across the continent.

Throughout the unit, students analyze how Asia’s landscapes and resources have supported the rise of powerful civilizations and facilitated extensive networks of exchange, such as the Silk Road. Through maps, guided notes,

and primary source readings, students investigate how trade routes fostered both economic and cultural diffusion—spreading goods, technologies, and belief systems across continents. Lessons highlight key geographical concepts like monsoons, landforms, and natural hazards to help students connect the continent’s physical features to patterns of human adaptation and migration. Students apply this understanding in hands-on activities, including map analysis and simulation exercises, to strengthen spatial reasoning and evidence-based explanations.

In later lessons, students shift from historical exchange to contemporary issues, examining environmental challenges and human rights concerns that continue to impact East and Southeast Asia. Through guided research and collaborative inquiry, they evaluate the social, political, and economic factors contributing to issues such as deforestation, air pollution, and endangered species. Students engage with authentic case studies and explore the global consequences of modernization, industrialization, and population growth. These lessons encourage critical thinking about the balance between progress, sustainability, and equity in a rapidly changing world.

The unit culminates with a Human Rights Project in which students take on the role of NGO representatives presenting to the United Nations Human Rights Council. This final inquiry synthesizes students' geographic, historical, and civic understanding, empowering them to research a current human rights violation, analyze the role of the United Nations, and propose realistic solutions. Through this project, students not only demonstrate mastery of content knowledge but also develop global citizenship and advocacy skills—understanding how local actions and international cooperation can protect human dignity and promote justice.

Ultimately, *Exploring Asia* invites students to view the continent as a complex and interconnected region whose diverse geography, cultures, and histories continue to shape global dynamics. By integrating spatial reasoning, comparative analysis, and collaborative research, the unit equips students to interpret Asia not just as a place on a map, but as a living context for understanding the relationships between people, place, and power in our shared world.

CONTENT STANDARDS

Unit 7: Exploring Asia

Readiness

- 6.1(A)* Trace characteristics of various contemporary societies in regions that resulted from historical events or factors such as colonization, immigration, and trade.
- 6.2(B) Describe the social, political, economic, and cultural contributions of individuals and groups from various societies, past and present.
- 6.3(A)* Identify and explain the geographic factors responsible for patterns of population in places and regions.
- 6.3(C) Identify and locate major physical and human geographic features such as landforms, water bodies, and urban centers of various places and regions.
- 6.3(D)* Identify the location of major world countries for each of the world regions.
- 6.5(B)* Identify and analyze ways people have adapted to the physical environment in various places and regions.
- 6.5(C)* Identify and analyze ways people have modified the physical environment such as mining, irrigation, and transportation infrastructure.
- 6.6(C)* Explain the impact of the distribution of resources on international trade and economic interdependence among and within societies.
- 6.7(A)* Compare ways in which various societies organize the production and distribution of goods and services.
- 6.8(B)* Describe levels of economic development of various societies using indicators such as life expectancy, gross domestic product (GDP), GDP per capita, and literacy.
- 6.9(A) Describe and compare examples of limited and unlimited governments such as constitutional (limited) and totalitarian (unlimited).
- 6.10(A) Identify and give examples of governments with rule by one, few, or many.
- 6.13(A)* Identify and describe common traits that define cultures and culture regions.
- 6.15(A)* Identify and describe means of cultural diffusion such as trade, travel, and war.
- 6.15(D)* Identify the impact of cultural diffusion on individuals and world societies.

Supporting

- 6.1(B) Analyze the historical background of various contemporary societies to evaluate relationships between past conflicts and current conditions.
- 6.4(A)* Explain the geographic factors responsible for the location of economic activities in places and regions.
- 6.5(A) Describe ways people have been impacted by physical processes such as earthquakes and climate.
- 6.6(A) Describe ways in which the factors of production (natural resources, labor, capital, and entrepreneurs) influence the economies of various contemporary societies.
- 6.6(B) Identify problems that may arise when one or more of the factors of production is in relatively short supply.
- 6.7(B)* Compare and contrast free enterprise, socialist, and communist economies in various contemporary societies, including the benefits of the U.S. free enterprise system.
- 6.9(C) Identify and describe examples of human rights abuses by limited or unlimited governments such as the oppression of religious, ethnic, and political groups.
- 6.10(B) Compare ways in which various societies such as India and China organize government and how they function.
- 6.11(B) Explain how opportunities for citizens to participate in and influence the political process vary among various contemporary societies.
- 6.16(A) Explain the relationships that exist between societies and their architecture, art, music, and literature.
- 6.17(A) Explain the relationship among religious ideas, philosophical ideas, and cultures.
- 6.17(B) Explain the significance of religious holidays and observances such as Christmas, Easter, Ramadan, the annual hajj, Yom Kippur, Rosh Hashanah, Diwali, and Vaisakhi in various contemporary societies.
- 6.18(B)* Explain how resources, economic factors, and political decisions affect the use of technology.

UNDERSTANDINGS AND QUESTIONS

Key Understandings

- The geography of Asia—including its mountains, plateaus, deserts, and river systems—has profoundly influenced where people live, how they adapt to their environment, and how civilizations have developed over time.
- Human activity across Asia reflects both adaptation to and modification of the environment through innovations such as terracing, irrigation, and trade networks.
- The Silk Road served as a major route of cultural diffusion, connecting East Asia to Europe, Africa, and the Middle East, and facilitating exchanges of goods, ideas, religion, and technology.
- Environmental challenges such as monsoons, pollution, and deforestation continue to shape life in East and Southeast Asia, influencing economies, public health, and regional cooperation.
- Modern human rights issues in Asia—such as censorship, gender inequality, labor exploitation, and ethnic persecution—reflect complex social, political, and economic realities that require global awareness and collective action.
- Understanding Asia’s regional diversity helps students appreciate the continent’s interconnectedness and its impact on global culture, trade, and governance in the modern world.

Key Questions

- How does geography influence how people live, work, and interact across different regions of Asia?
- In what ways have humans adapted to and modified the environment to meet their needs?
- How did the Silk Road promote economic exchange and cultural diffusion across Asia and beyond?
- What environmental issues currently affect East and Southeast Asia, and how are countries responding to them?
- How do human rights challenges in Asia illustrate the relationship between government, culture, and individual freedom?
- Why is it important to understand Asia’s diversity and its role in shaping global systems today?

Unit Lesson Break-Down

Optional Pre-Assessment (or Homework!)

Lesson 01 [90 minute/2-day lesson]: Introduction to Asia

Lesson 02 [90 minute/2-day lesson]: The Silk Road

Lesson 03 [90 minute/2-day lesson]: South and Central Asia

Lesson 04 [90 minute/2-day lesson]: East and Southeast Asia

Lesson 05 [45 minute/1-day lesson]: Environmental Issues of East and Southeast Asia

Lesson 06 – 09 [135 minutes/3-day lesson]: Human Rights in Asia Presentation Project

90 Minutes Flex Time [2 days]

Unit 7 Assessment

