Lesson 1 The Geography of the Americas

BEFORE YOU READ
In this lesson, you will learn about the kind of environment early people faced in the Andes and in Mesoamerica.

AS YOU READ
Use this diagram to compare the geography of the Andes with the geography of Mesoamerica.

1. In what part of North America and South America are different mountain ranges located?

TERMS & NAMES
- **isthmus**: narrow land bridge that connects two larger bodies of land
- **tropical**: areas that are warm and rainy
- **Mesoamerica**: region in North America that includes southern Mexico and parts of Central America
- **Yucatán Peninsula**: area of land that lies between the Gulf of Mexico and the Pacific Ocean
- **slash-and-burn agriculture**: technique of clearing land by cutting back and burning it

Physical Geography of the Americas
(pages 289–290)

What is the physical geography of the Americas like?
The continents of North and South America are connected by an **isthmus**, which is a narrow land bridge. However, the geography and climate of the two continents are very different.

Mountains are found on the western part of both continents. They run from north to south. The mountain range in North America is called the Rocky Mountains. The mountain range in South America is called the Andes. Water from the mountains flow into rivers. The Mississippi is the major river system in North America. The Amazon and Paraná are the major river systems in South America.

North America is located above the equator and South America is below it. Most of North America has a mild climate with four seasons. Most people live in the areas with the mild climate. Some parts of North America are very cold.

South America also has many different climates. Much of South America receives a great amount of rain. About half of South America is warm and rainy. These areas are called tropical. Some parts of North America are also **tropical**. They are in Central America. Early people built ancient civilizations in these tropical areas.
Geography of the Andes
(pages 290–291)
What geographic features are characteristic of the Andes?
Ancient civilization started in the Andes Mountains of South America. The peaks of these mountains are the highest in the Americas. The Andes are located where two plates bump together. The movement causes volcanic activity and earthquakes in the Andes. In the high parts of these mountains, temperatures can be very cold and rainfall is unpredictable.

In parts of the Andes, the mountains split into two ranges. High plateaus are found between them. The plateaus include deserts and landforms such as hills, valleys, and plains.

Because of the harsh environment, ancient farmers in the Andes developed irrigation canals. They grew crops, such as potatoes.

2. Why do earthquakes often occur in the Andes?

Geography of Mesoamerica
(pages 292–293)
How do the geography and climate of Mesoamerica contrast with those of the Andes?
Mesoamerica is a region in North America that includes southern Mexico and parts of Central America. Mesoamerica has two main regions. They are the highlands and lowlands. The tropical lowlands are areas of jungle found along the coast of the Gulf of Mexico. They are also found on the Yucatán Peninsula, which is located between the Gulf of Mexico and the Pacific Ocean. The highlands of Mesoamerica are located between mountains called the Sierra Madre. The area often has volcanic activity and earthquakes.

The lowlands receive more than 100 inches of rain each year. The highlands have a cooler and drier climate. In the drier highlands, early farmers had to irrigate their fields. They grew corn, beans, and squash. In the lowlands, farmers used slash-and-burn agriculture. They used this technique to clear parts of the jungle and burn it

3. What are the two main regions of Mesoamerica?