***The Five Themes of Geography***

**LOCATION:** Position on Earth’s Surface

There are two types of *location*: **absolute** and **relative**.

**Absolute** location answers the question: **Where is it?**

Every point on the earth has an **absolute** location that can be pinpointed using latitude and longitude or an exact address. For example, the **absolute** location of Cohasset, MA is 42 degrees north and 70 degrees west (42°N, 70°W) and Cohasset Middle High School is located at 143 Pond Street. Finding the absolute location of a place is the starting point for geographic research.

**Relative** location is the relationship of a place to other places.

For example, your home has a **relative** location. Where is it located in relation to schools, stores, and convenient transportation? My home is three streets east of the town library. Cohasset is located next to Scituate and both towns share a football team called SciCo.

Together, **absolute** and **relative** location give us the tools we need to answer the question: **Where is it?**

**PLACE:** Physical and Human Characteristics

The theme of **place** answers the question: **What is it like there?**

Just as every individual has a unique personality, every place has **physical** and **human** characteristics that distinguish it from other places.

**Physical** characteristics include landforms, bodies of water, climate, soils, natural vegetation, and animal life. These characteristics form the natural environment. Cohasset is known for its proximity to the ocean.

The **human** characteristics of a place include its ethnic makeup, language, economic activities, and architecture. For example, Cohasset is known for its predominantly Irish population and for its historic, colonial architecture (think of the First Parish Unitarian Church in Cohasset Center).

The **physical** and **human** characteristics of places provide keys to understanding the interactions and interrelationships between people and their physical environments.

**Place** characteristics help us to answer the question: **What is it like?**

**HUMAN AND ENVIRONMENTAL INTERACTION:** Shaping the Landscape.

How people respond to and modify their environment is a central focus of geography. **Human interaction** with the **environment** produces both positive and negative effects. The study of geography helps us to understand both. The study of geography also helps us to appreciate nature and to manage the environment responsibly. For example, around 1877, the South Shore Railroad Company cleared miles of land to lay tracks that were part of a major railroad system. The Old Colony Railroad leased the tracks between 1849 to 1854. Today, these tracks are part of the MBTA Greenbush commuter rail line. A negative effect of clearing the land for the railroad tracks is that animal habitats were destroyed. A positive effect is that many people are now able to commute to Boston more quickly and easily. Geographers ask if the overall gain of this action is positive or negative.

**Human and environmental interaction** helps us answer the question: **What is the relationship between humans and the environment?**

**MOVEMENT:** Humans Interacting on the Earth

Humans interact with other humans both near and far. They communicate with each other, travel to different places, and rely on products and ideas that come from places beyond their immediate location. The theme of **movement** helps us understand how we are connected with, and dependent upon, other regions, cultures, and people in the world. For example, the transportation of goods between the United States and France is critical to the economies of both the United States and France. In addition, the United States continuously receives new immigrants from France. This **movement** of people also encourages the sharing of ideas between people.

By studying the **movement** of people, goods, and ideas we can answer the question: **How and why are places related to each other?**

**REGIONS:** How they Form and Change

**Regions** are areas on the earth’s surface that are defined by certain unifying characteristics. These characteristics can be **physical** (tropical region, mountainous region, desert region), **cultural** (French-speaking region, religious region such as the Bible Belt), or political (United States, the Northeast Corridor that is the highly urbanized area between Boston and Washington, D.C.). Geographers have developed **regions** as tools to examine and analyze the human and physical environment.

By studying **regions**, we can answer the question: **How are areas similar and different?**