

United States Geography Activity

Conditions and Connections

Background

You and about 60 other people have spent the last month on a ship. You are sailing toward a new home across the ocean. During that long voyage, you often talked about what kind of town you want to build. You have also discussed where it should be located. You know that picking a bad location could be fatal.

Traders and scouts have given you a map that identifies five possible locations for a town. Your job is to analyze the map and make a recommendation about which place to choose.

Conditions and Connections (Site and Situation)

Before you start trying to pick a location for your town, it might be worthwhile to think about the concept of location. This simple-sounding idea really has two parts:

Site - the conditions that are right there in the place you are studying.

(For example, place A would have a dry landing sheltered from strong northwest winds.)

Situation - the connections between your place and other places.

(For example, place A would be nearly 15 miles away from good cropland.)

The ability to judge geographic conditions and connections from maps is a useful skill for planners.

It is a valuable tool for business decision-makers. It can also help ordinary people decide where they would like to live, work, or take a vacation.

The Role of Culture

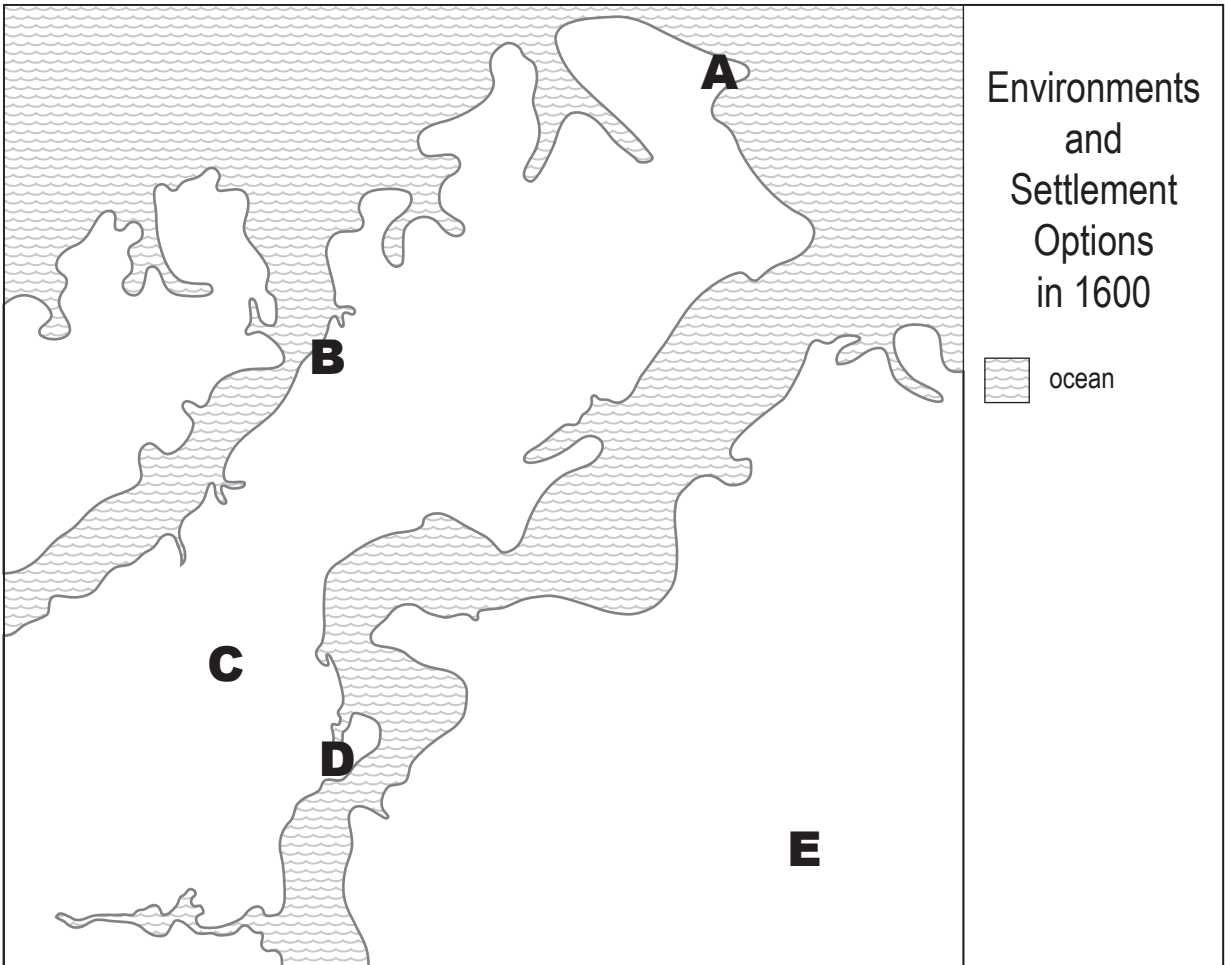
When you are evaluating places, remember this important rule: the value of a location depends partly on the culture of the people. (By "culture" we mean their shared knowledge and ideas about how to behave.)

Here are three examples:

- 1) A rock full of iron ore is a geographic condition. It is valuable for people, however, only if they have the technology to use iron. If they don't, iron ore does not make a place valuable for them.
- 2) A flooded field can be very fertile. It is valuable for people only if they know how to grow crops (such as rice) that tolerate flooding, or if they know how to build drains or protective levees.
- 3) A great natural harbor has little value for people who produce something that is small and light and therefore does not cost much to transport (e.g., diamond rings or computer games).

In short, every place on earth has a particular set of conditions and connections. The value of the place, however, depends on the culture of the people who live there. In doing this activity, therefore, you have to put yourself into the "mind-set" of the people moving to a new land in the early 1600s.

Conditions and Connections for a Colonial Settlement



To a geographer, the idea of location has two parts:

Conditions - what is it like right at that place?

Is it hot? cold? rocky? windy? crowded? safe? and so forth.

Connections - how is that place linked with other places?

Does a river flow between them? Is there a road? family connections? etc.

1. Which location do you think is the best for a settlement in 1600? Circle: A B C D E
Write two sentences to explain why you think that location would be good.
2. Which location do you think is the worst for a settlement in 1600? Circle: A B C D E
Write two sentences to explain why you think that location would be bad.