

The Early Middle Ages

Section 1



MAIN IDEAS

1. The physical features of Europe vary widely from region to region.
2. Geography has shaped life in Europe, including where and how people live.

Key Terms and People

Eurasia the large landmass that includes Europe and Asia

topography the shape and elevation of the land in a region

Section Summary

THE PHYSICAL FEATURES OF EUROPE

Europe is a small continent, but it is very diverse. Many different landforms, water features, and climates can be found there. Although we call Europe a continent, it is part of **Eurasia**, a large landmass that includes both Europe and Asia.

Europe's **topography**, the shape and elevation of the land, varies widely from place to place.

Southern Europe is very mountainous, with some of the world's highest mountains in the Alps. As you travel north, the land gets flat. Northern Europe was once covered in thick forests.

Most of Europe's rivers are in the north. Farther north, the land gets rugged and hilly again, though not as high as the mountains in the south. Many peninsulas jut out from Europe, creating a long and jagged coastline. The climate is hotter and drier in the south, and gets progressively colder as you move north.

Why is Europe considered to be part of Eurasia?

What mountains in Europe are some of the highest in the world?

GEOGRAPHY SHAPES LIFE

Not surprisingly, with this variety of topography and climate, life in early Europe was different depending upon where you lived. In southern Europe, most people lived on coastal plains or in river valleys where the land was flat enough to farm.

Section 1, *continued*

People grew crops like grapes and olives that could grow on mountainsides and also survive the region's dry summers. High in the mountains, where the land was too steep or rocky to farm, people raised sheep and goats.

Because southern Europe has a long coastline with numerous peninsulas, many people turned to the sea for food and transportation. Societies that lived in southern Europe often became great traders and seafarers.

Most people in northern Europe lived much farther from the sea than people in southern Europe did. They still had access to the sea, however, through northern Europe's many rivers. Because rivers were an easy means of transportation, many towns grew up along them. These rivers also sometimes provided protection for cities.

In the fields around cities, farmers took advantage of northern Europe's rich soils to grow all sorts of crops. These fields were excellent farmlands, but the flat land also created an easy route for invaders to follow. No mountains blocked people's access to northern Europe. As a result, the region was frequently invaded.

List two reasons why grapes and olives are ideal crops for southern Europe.

Why was northern Europe frequently invaded?

CHALLENGE ACTIVITY

Critical Thinking: Drawing Inferences Where would you have preferred to live in Europe during the Middle Ages, if you had your choice? Write a short letter to a family member explaining what daily life is like in the area you choose and why you like it there.

Section 1, *continued*

Alps	Eurasia	Northern European Plain
peninsula	rivers	Scandinavia
topography	Ural Mountains	

DIRECTIONS Read each sentence and fill in the blank with the word from the word bank that best completes the sentence.

1. The shape and elevation of land in a region is called _____.
2. The large landmass that includes both Europe and Asia is called _____.
3. Geographers consider the _____ to be the boundary between Europe and Asia.
4. The _____ are the highest mountains in Europe.
5. The _____ is the location of most of Europe's major rivers.
6. _____ is Europe's largest peninsula.
7. Because _____ were an easy method of transportation, many Northern European towns grew up along them.
8. Europe has been called a _____ of peninsulas.