

LESSON 6



A Boat and Bus Tour of the Southeast

What factors have shaped the culture of the Southeast?

Introduction

Hello, I'm Mr. Davis. You can probably tell from my uniform that I'm a park ranger. As part of my job, I get to take groups like yours on tours.

During the next few days, we will use a bus and four different kinds of boats to tour the Southeast. We will start on an airboat through the Everglades. We will sail on a fishing trawler, from Florida to Virginia. From there, we'll take a big bus and cross the Appalachian Mountains. Then we'll board an old-time riverboat and sail down the Mississippi River to the port of New Orleans. A port is a place where ships load and unload their goods. We'll take a short motorboat ride to an oil rig in the middle of the Gulf of Mexico. Then it's back on board the bus for our final two stops in Mississippi and Alabama.

As we travel, keep your eyes, ears, and minds wide open. Notice the land and how each place is used in different ways. Listen for the sounds and music of this region. Think about how the Southeast has changed over time.

The captain says he's ready. So put on your life jackets, and let's go.

Social Studies Vocabulary

bayou

delta

hurricane

mineral

petroleum

plantation

savanna

segregation

strip mine

swamp

- ◀ Airboats are a common type of boat in the Southeast. They allow people to easily travel through swamps.



Civics



Economics



Geography



History

The Southeast Region



Important Ports in the Southeast Region



Many waterways flow through the flat land of the Everglades. These waterways are home to many different types of plants and animals.



swamp a low area of land that is covered by water at least part of the year

savanna a flat grassland

hurricane a storm, with heavy rains and high winds, that develops over the ocean and often moves toward land

1. Everglades National Park, Florida

Our first stop on our tour of the Southeast is the Everglades National Park in Florida. The Everglades is a vast area of swamp, savanna, and forest at the southern tip of Florida. A **swamp** is an area of low land that is covered by water. A **savanna** is a flat grassland. We will use an airboat to help us travel through the Everglades.

My first job as a ranger was in Everglades National Park. I had studied geography in college and wanted to work in a real live swamp. But I had no idea just how alive it would be!

Many different types of animals live in the Everglades. Alligators, crocodiles, turtles, and snakes can all be found here. Deer, bears, panthers, bobcats, otters, and other animals can also live in the park. I like to record the sounds that these animals make.

More than 300 kinds of birds live in the Everglades. I get up early many mornings to record their calls on my pocket tape recorder. The park looks peaceful now, but I was here in 1992 when Hurricane Andrew hit southern Florida. A **hurricane** is a dangerous storm with heavy rains and high winds that develops over the ocean and often moves toward land. Andrew's winds damaged some of the park's visitor center. I recorded the sound of that storm at its worst. Whenever I listen to that tape, the roar of the winds gives me chills.

It's time to depart from our airboat and board a fishing trawler. It will head north as we leave the Everglades and travel up the east coast of Florida toward Cape Canaveral.

2. The John F. Kennedy Space Center at Cape Canaveral, Florida

Florida is in a part of the United States called the Sunbelt. The Sunbelt stretches across the country from Florida to California, and states in the Sunbelt have a mild climate all year long. A mild climate means that it is usually warm and sunny there.

Florida's sunny climate makes it a popular place to visit. People from all over the world travel to Florida for vacation. People who travel for fun are called tourists.

Many tourists visit Florida every year. Some come to enjoy the sunshine and the beaches. Disney World's Magic Kingdom alone sees more than 17 million visitors every year.

I like to visit the John F. Kennedy Space Center at Cape Canaveral. In 1961, the people at the space center launched Alan Shepard into space in a rocket-propelled ship. He was the first American to travel in space. Today, Cape Canaveral is home to our nation's space shuttles.

Visitors of the Kennedy Space Center learn all about space exploration. They may even see a shuttle launch. I saw a launch last year and recorded the sound. The blast from the rockets was so loud that the ground shook under my feet.



The Kennedy Space Center is home to our nation's space program. A space shuttle, like this one, uses rockets to blast off its launch pad.

Today, you can visit Jamestown. People demonstrate what life was like in the 1600s.



3. Jamestown, Virginia: England’s First American Colony

We have traveled quite a distance along the east coast of the United States and have reached the state of Virginia. You are looking at the site of Jamestown, Virginia. Jamestown was the first permanent English settlement in America.

In the spring of 1607, settlers from England chose this spot on the James River to build a colony. John Smith, one of their leaders, called it “a very fit place.” He was wrong! The land was swampy. Mosquitoes also made life miserable, and they carried a dangerous disease called malaria.

By summer, many people in Jamestown were hungry. The forests around Jamestown were full of food, but the colonists didn’t know how to find it. By fall, many of the colonists were dead. For many years, the pattern continued—new colonists arrived during the spring, but by winter, most had died.

However, in 1612, things started to get better. The colonists found a crop that grew well in this area. It was tobacco. Virginia tobacco sold well in England, and the colony began to make money.

In 1619, an English ship arrived in the Virginia colony. Its cargo included 20 Africans. They had been taken from Africa by force and were sold as workers. By the mid-1600s, Africans were being sold as slaves in the American colonies.

My ancestors were Africans. They were brought to the Americas in the late 1600s, and they were forced to work as slaves on large farms.

It is time to leave the trawler now. We have a bus waiting for us that will take us on the next part of our journey.

4. A Coal Mine in Appalachia

Welcome to Appalachia. This mountain area is located in the southern part of the Appalachian mountain range. Appalachia has no exact borders. It covers most of West Virginia and parts of several other states, including North Carolina, South Carolina, and Georgia. A bus is a good way to travel through these mountains.

Appalachia is too hilly for large-scale farming, but it is rich in **minerals**. Minerals are natural substances found in rocks. One important mineral is coal. Coal is used to heat homes and produce electricity.

There are underground coal mines in Appalachia. Miners have dug tunnels into the mountains to get at the coal hidden inside. Some coal also comes from **strip mines** like the one you see here. Strip mines are mines that are found on the surface. Miners use heavy machinery to strip away the dirt and rocks covering the coal. Then they use giant shovels to dig the coal out of the mountain.

Last fall, I went to a bluegrass music festival near this mine. Bluegrass is the traditional music of Appalachia. It is played on banjos, guitars, and fiddles. I recorded a lot of old songs. The fast beat of this music always makes me feel good. Let's get back on the bus to learn more about the music of the Southeast.

mineral a natural material found in rock

strip mine a place where minerals are scraped from the ground



Miners dig coal out of strip mines such as this one. Coal is often used to produce electricity for homes and businesses around the United States.

Riverboats have been used to move goods and people down the Mississippi River. Today, they are still used to tour the river.



delta a triangle-shaped area of land at the end of a river

Memphis is famous for its blues music. Many places play blues for locals and tourists alike.



5. Musical Memphis, Tennessee

We've reached Memphis, Tennessee. From here, we'll be traveling on a riverboat like the one you see here.

Memphis is at the northern end of the Mississippi Delta region. Now, a true **delta** is a triangle-shaped area at the end of a river. Soil carried downstream by the river slowly builds up, creating a delta. The Mississippi River's delta is in Louisiana, and it juts out into the Gulf of Mexico.

Where we stand today is not a true delta, though. What geographers call the "Mississippi Delta" is really a basin of land mostly in Mississippi that lies between the Mississippi and the Yazoo rivers. The area is laced with rivers, and the land here is fertile and good for farming.

In the early 1800s, the Delta's rich soil attracted cotton planters to this region. At that time, cotton was a valuable crop. Many planters brought slaves with them. Slaves did most of the work of planting and picking cotton.

Slaves led hard lives. They worked from sunrise until sundown most days of the year, and they were given no right to choose what they wanted to do. Since these planters thought of slaves as property, slaves could be bought and sold.

Slaves would sometimes sing about their sorrows. These sad songs contributed to a musical style that became known as the blues. In 1912, W.C. Handy, an African American songwriter in Memphis, wrote the first popular blues song, which he called "Memphis Blues." Today, Memphis is famous around the world as one of the birthplaces of the blues.

6. The French Quarter in New Orleans, Louisiana

Welcome to New Orleans, the largest city in Louisiana. French colonists built the city near the mouth of the Mississippi River. Here, in the French Quarter, you can still see homes similar to those the original colonists built.

In 2005, Hurricane Katrina did serious damage to many parts of New Orleans when it caused the Mississippi River to overflow. Today, the people of New Orleans continue to work hard to restore the city.

Ships from all over the world come to New Orleans. It is an important port in the United States.

New Orleans is also the birthplace of jazz. African American musicians living in the area created this new style of music. One of the most famous jazz musicians of all time was Louis Armstrong, known for his great trumpet playing. There are many kinds of jazz. One of the oldest is called Dixieland. You can hear great Dixieland jazz right here in the French Quarter.

Louisiana's nickname is the Bayou State. A **bayou** is a stream flowing through swampy land. In the 1700s, French colonists from Canada settled along Louisiana's bayous. They called themselves Acadians. Over time, the name was shortened to Cajuns.

Cajuns and their way of life used to be hidden away in the bayous. Not anymore! Cajun food is all the rage in New Orleans. It has a lot of seasonings, and it is delicious. Cajun music is even more popular. It's as great as Cajun food—and it makes your toes tap!

We will now leave our riverboat. It is time for us to board a motorboat for the short journey to an oil rig in the Gulf of Mexico.

bayou a stream that flows through a swamp

The French Quarter is the oldest neighborhood in New Orleans. It is the part of the city that most tourists visit.



petroleum a thick, black liquid found underground

7. An Oil Rig in the Gulf of Mexico

Many people who live near the Gulf Coast are oil workers. Another name for oil is **petroleum**. The state of Louisiana has more than 58,000 wells that pump petroleum out of the ground.

Petroleum is a thick, black liquid that is found deep in the soil and under the ocean floor. Drilling for oil under the ocean is not easy, and oil workers build huge platforms, called rigs, to hold their machinery. Then they drill down under the sea until they find oil.

Once the oil is pumped out of the earth, it is sent to a factory. This factory is called a refinery, and it turns petroleum into useful products. The product you probably know best is gasoline for cars.

Oil is also used to make petrochemicals, a big word that means “chemicals made from oil.” Petrochemicals are used in all kinds of products, from medicines to plastics. I’ll bet you’re wearing a petrochemical product right now. It might be a button, a zipper, or the soles of your running shoes.

Let’s take the motorboat back to New Orleans. We still have two more places to visit by bus on our journey through the Southeast.

From shore, you may see oil rigs like this one all along the Gulf of Mexico. They drill for oil that can be used around the United States.





This plantation home is in Natchez, Mississippi. Plantation homes are often very large.

8. A Cotton Plantation in Natchez, Mississippi

Our bus has brought us back to Natchez, Mississippi. You are looking at a cotton **plantation** home. A plantation is a large farm.

In the early 1800s, cotton planters settled this area. Many of them became very rich growing cotton, and they spent their wealth building big homes like this one. Then they filled their homes with the best things money could buy.

In the mid-1800s, many planters wanted to start new plantations on western lands that belonged to the United States. They wanted to use slave labor, but other people felt that slavery should not spread into new areas. Who had the right to decide—the federal government or the Southern slave owners?

It took a war to settle this argument. Divided into North and South, Americans fought the American Civil War for four long years. Much of the Southeast was damaged in the fighting, and more than 600,000 people died.

One good thing came out of this terrible war. Slavery was ended forever in the United States. I wonder how my slave ancestors felt when they heard they were free. It must have been an amazing feeling.

Natchez escaped most of the fighting, so many of its beautiful homes were not damaged in the war. Today, they are one of the city's main tourist attractions. Let's get on our bus for one last trip.

plantation a large farm, usually worked by many laborers

The Civil Rights Memorial shows the names of 40 men and women who were killed during the civil rights movement.



9. Montgomery, Alabama: Birthplace of the Civil Rights Movement

You are looking at the Civil Rights Memorial in Montgomery, Alabama. This memorial honors 40 Americans who were killed during the civil rights movement.

After the American Civil War, blacks in the South were free. But many still did not treat them as equal. They were denied many of the rights other white citizens had. At the same time, **segregation** became a way of life. Segregation is the separation of people because of race, religion, or gender. African Americans were often segregated from white people. They could not go to school with whites. They could not eat at white lunch counters. They couldn't even sit beside white people on a bus.

African Americans were unhappy that they were not being treated equally. For several years, African Americans fought against this unfair treatment. Montgomery was home to one of the important milestones in the struggle to achieve racial equality.

In 1955, a minister named Martin Luther King Jr. led a protest against segregation on buses. Before 1955, African Americans could not sit at the front of the bus and had to stand if a white person wanted their seat. African Americans in Montgomery refused to ride the buses until they were treated the same as whites.

segregation the separation of people because of race, religion, or gender

Most African Americans back then did not have cars. They needed the bus to get to their jobs. But the people of Montgomery, like my grandma, chose to walk to work every day for a year rather than ride on a segregated bus. Thanks to all the people who protested using the buses of Montgomery, bus segregation was finally ended here.

When I was little, I asked my grandma how her feet held up during the protest. She told me something a woman named Mother Pollard had once said:

“My feet were tired, but my soul was rested.”

Throughout our travels, we have seen many different places and have learned about our nation’s history. I hope you have enjoyed this adventure!



In the 1950s, African Americans could not sit with white people on buses. The civil rights movement ended segregation.

Lesson Summary

I asked you to keep your eyes, ears, and minds wide open on this journey. Now I’ll tell you why.

I wanted you to use your eyes to see the different ways in which the land is used in the Southeast. In Everglades National Park you saw land that people are trying to protect. But, in Appalachia, you saw a mountain being mined for coal.

I wanted you to use your ears to hear some of the sounds of the Southeast. You heard the sounds of nature—even the roar of a hurricane. You also listened to the music of this region, like bluegrass and jazz.

Finally, I wanted you to learn how the Southeast has changed over time. Slavery and segregation are part of this region’s past—but not its future. As my grandma likes to say, “Times have changed, and they’ve changed for the better.”

Landmarks of Your State

You just read about different points of interest in the Southeast. Many of these places are called *landmarks* or places that stand out because they are very important in some way.

Your state probably has several landmarks. If you live in Pennsylvania, you may know about the Liberty Bell in Philadelphia. It is a symbol of American freedom, and it has a mysterious crack. Another landmark in Pennsylvania is the Leap the Dips in Altoona, which is the world’s oldest roller coaster.

What do you think is the most important landmark in your state? Pick a landmark. At the end of this activity, you will make a presentation to convince your school to send your class on a trip to this landmark.

You will need to support your argument with facts that you find in research. Facts are different from opinions.

An opinion tells what someone thinks or believes. You may read opinions on someone’s blog. (“The Battle at Gettysburg should never have been fought.”) You may read them in advertisements (“Philadelphia has the best pizza in the state.”) You can’t prove that an opinion is correct.

Facts, on the other hand, can be proven or checked with reliable sources. Look for Web sites that end with “.gov.” These may be government Web sites that give facts about national or state monuments. Other reliable sources include an encyclopedia or the official Web site for the landmark.

Make a table like this one. In the left column, write strong facts about your favorite landmark in the state. For each fact, list your source. In the next column, tell why that source is one that you trust.

Facts about the Liberty Bell	Why I trust this source
The Liberty Bell cracked on the first test ring. Source: http://www.nps.gov	This is a government Web site.
In the late 1800s, the bell traveled across the country so people could see it. Source: http://www.nps.gov	This is a government Web site.
The Liberty Bell weighs 2,080 pounds. Source: <i>World Book Encyclopedia</i> , Vol. 12, page 232	This is an encyclopedia in our school library.



Students in Philadelphia may choose the Liberty Bell as a favorite landmark in their state. Visitors like to look at and learn about the mysterious crack.

Let's Visit a Landmark!

Pretend that your school can send your class to visit one of your state's landmarks. Try to convince the teachers to choose the landmark that you think is most important.

Write a persuasive letter. At the beginning of the letter, state which landmark you want to visit. Then support your argument with opinions. If you live in Pennsylvania, you might say, "The Liberty Bell is one of the most important historical symbols." Also support your argument with facts from reliable sources. For example, you might say, "The 2,080-pound Liberty Bell traveled across the country before it returned to Philadelphia." Be sure your facts tell why the landmark is important and a good place to visit. At the end of the letter tell what you want the reader to do. It might say, "Please decide to send our class to this landmark."

Exchange letters with a classmate. Read each other's letters, and write a reply. Tell you classmate if his or her letter was persuasive. Ask questions about the facts or sources and revise your letter, if needed. Then give copies of your letter to some teachers and hope you can persuade them!



The Quilters of Gee's Bend

Gee's Bend is a small, out-of-the-way town in Alabama. There, its people have created a great tradition of art. For many years, the women of Gee's Bend have made quilts of great beauty. How has the isolated location of the town helped shape this art?

Not too long ago, most women in Gee's Bend hardly ever left their area. After all, Gee's Bend is a rural community. It took about an hour to travel by road to the nearest town.

But times have changed. Since the 1960s, women such as Arlonzia Pettway have done a lot of traveling. They have visited big cities, like New York City and Houston, Texas. In those cities, they have gone to fine art museums. Arlonzia Pettway and the women of Gee's Bend have made these trips to see their own art, for they are now famous artists. The quilts they have made are considered great treasures.

"I felt so good," said Pettway, after she saw her quilt in a museum exhibit. "I had the happiest time I had in my life to see our quilts hanging on the wall, and peoples just praising our quilts, and everybody's eyes full of water."

The quilts of Gee's Bend certainly are beautiful. They also help tell the story of an amazing place.

To many people, the quilts of Gee's Bend are great treasures. In 2006, the U.S. Postal Service created a set of stamps that show their quilts.





This old photograph shows the ferry that people used to take to get to Gee's Bend. In recent years, the ferry has been re-opened.

An Out-of-the-Way Place to Live

Gee's Bend is located on a small piece of land five miles wide and eight miles long. It is almost an island. The muddy Alabama River bends around—and nearly surrounds—the community. To get to Gee's Bend, you must take a ferry or travel the one road into town.

That makes Gee's Bend an isolated place to live. An isolated place is a long way from large towns and might be difficult to reach.

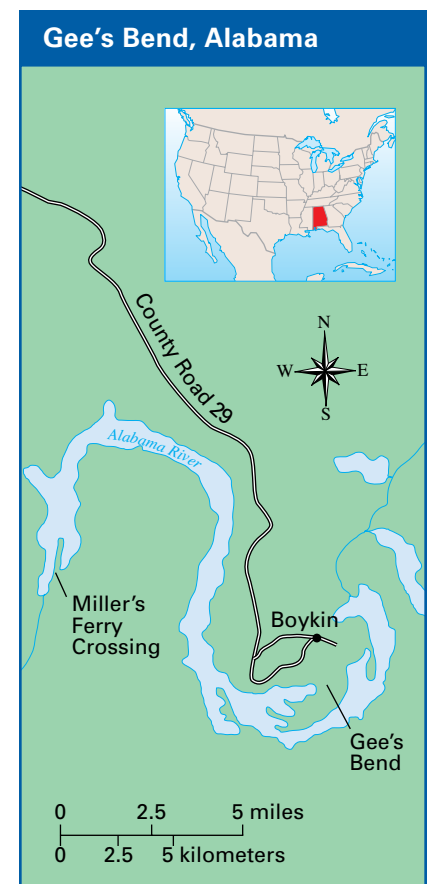
The community is named for its first white owner. His name was Joseph Gee. The land later passed to another white man, named Mark Pettway. Around 1845, Pettway brought his family and 100 slaves to Gee's Bend. After the American Civil War ended, the slaves in Gee's Bend were free men and women.

Over time, all the white people in Gee's Bend left. The African Americans, however, stayed and continued to farm the land.

For most of the people of Gee's Bend, life was hard in the late 1800s and early 1900s. Even though they were free, they struggled to make a living. Most of them were very poor.

The women of Gee's Bend learned to make use of every little thing they had. They learned not to throw out pieces of old fabric. For example, scraps of worn-out work pants and dresses or bits of burlap sack could all be used again. They could be used to make quilts, which would help keep a person warm at night.

Gee's Bend is located on a small piece of land that is hard to reach.



Arlonzia Pettway (far right) is not the only woman in her family who makes quilts. All the quilters shown here with their quilts are her relatives.



From Parent to Child

While quilting was a way of making something useful out of worn-out fabric, it was also a way of making something beautiful. The quilters of Gee's Bend never thought that they were making art, but they did work hard to make something that would please the eye.

The making of quilts is an old tradition in Gee's Bend. For as long as anyone there can remember, the women of Gee's Bend have been gathering in groups to piece together bits of fabric. They have been sharing ideas about new designs, and they have been telling each other stories about their lives.

They have also been teaching their children. In this way, the craft of quilting has been passed down from parent to child, on and on over the decades. Stories and memories have also been kept alive.

For a long time, the only people who enjoyed these quilts were the people of Gee's Bend. Few people from outside the community ever visited there. And few of Gee's Bend's residents ever left the community.

That changed in the 1960s. Civil rights workers came to visit Gee's Bend. They noticed the fantastic quilts drying on the clotheslines. They saw the vibrant colors and the exciting designs. The quilters of Gee's Bend had been discovered.

Sharing Their Talent with the World

What makes the quilts of Gee's Bend so special? Of course, the bright colors are beautiful, and the skill of the quilters is outstanding, each quilt being sewn with great care. But it is the startling designs of the quilts that make them so remarkable.

Usually, quilts follow a rigid pattern. Lines are straight, and the shapes repeat in an orderly way. But the Gee's Bend quilts are different. The patterns shift and change, and the lines are not straight. Each quilt is unique. Yet, certain styles keep coming up in quilt after quilt. You can see how ideas were shared by the quilters, changed a bit, and then passed on to others.

Some experts think that the Gee's Bend quilts look like modern art. Although the quilts seem to have simple designs, they are actually very complex. In fact, they have **abstract** designs. Something is considered abstract if it makes use of shapes and patterns, rather than showing people or things as they actually are.

When people outside the community of Gee's Bend saw the quilts, they wanted to buy them. Museums wanted to put them on display. The quilters of Gee's Bend began their own business to make and sell their quilts, which helped improve their lives.

This style of quilting is found only in Gee's Bend. But now, the quilters are also happy to share their work with the rest of the world. ♦

abstract making use of shapes and patterns, rather than showing people or things as they actually are



Gee's Bend quilts have traveled the country. They have stopped at museums in New York City, Boston, Washington, D.C., Houston, Atlanta, and other large cities.