Episode 1: Our Land, Our Roots

Lesson Title: Land Shapes Life - How Colorado's Geography Influenced People's Decisions

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Episode Description:

Our Land, Our Roots introduces audiences to the deep, layered histories that shaped Colorado long before statehood and continues through the settlement era of the 19th century. Establishing the thematic foundation for the entire series by highlighting land, roots, movement and adaptation, this story reinforces that Colorado's identity has always been shaped by many peoples whose connections with place continue to evolve, intersect and endure.

Episode Inquiry Questions:

1. How have differing views about land and resources impacted human migration of various ethnic and cultural groups across Colorado?
2. How have humans adapted to and changed the physical environment?
3. How do the stories and memories of various individuals tell the story of Colorado?
4. How do the interactions of differing cultural groups impact the development of Colorado?

Lesson Description:

This lesson explores how Colorado's diverse geography has influenced where people live, work, and build communities throughout the state's history. Students investigate the six major geographic regions of Colorado—the Mountain Region, Plains Region, Plateau Region, Front Range Region, River Valleys Region, and High Deserts Region—and examine how each region's landforms, climate, and natural resources support different industries and ways of life. By the end of the lesson,

students apply their understanding by designing a travel guide that explains how geography continues to shape Colorado's economy, communities, and culture.

Grade Level/Time Needed:

4th Grade/45 minutes (not including the assessment)

Lesson Inquiry Question:

1. How do Colorado's different geographic regions influence where people live and work?

Supporting Questions:

1. What natural resources are found in each region, and how do people use them?
2. Why do different industries develop in different parts of Colorado?
3. How have people adapted to the opportunities and challenges of Colorado's geography?
4. How do rivers, mountains, plains, and deserts affect transportation, farming, recreation, and community development?

Lesson Objectives:

Students will be able to:

1. Identify Colorado's major geographic regions.
2. Explain how geography influences industries.
3. Compare industries found in different regions of Colorado.
4. Design a community based on geographic resources.

Background Knowledge / Contextual Paragraph for Teachers:

Colorado's diverse geography has shaped where people live, work, and build communities throughout its history. The state's mountains, plains, valleys, and plateaus each offer unique natural resources and conditions that support different industries and ways of life. Understanding the connection between Colorado's physical geography and its economy helps explain why communities developed where they did and how they continue to thrive today.

A key concept for teachers is the close relationship between Colorado's physical geography and its economic activities. The landforms, climate, and availability of natural resources have always influenced where industries develop, where people settle, and how communities adapt to their environments.

Teachers should also recognize that Colorado agriculture is far more diverse than many people realize. Although much of the state receives relatively little annual precipitation, farmers and ranchers have successfully adapted by using extensive irrigation systems. Water stored as mountain snowpack melts each spring and summer, feeding rivers and reservoirs that supply farms, ranches, and cities across the state. This interconnected water system makes Colorado's geography not only a defining feature of the landscape but also a critical factor in sustaining its economy, agriculture, and population.

Building Background Knowledge for the Student:

1. Opening Activity: How Does Geography Affect Where People Live?
2. Begin by telling students: “People choose places to live based on the environment around them. Today we will explore how Colorado’s geography creates opportunities and challenges for people.”
3. Display three images showing examples of different Colorado environments:
    - Mountain town (example: a community in the Rocky Mountains)
    - Plains farm (example: agricultural land on the eastern plains)
    - Colorado city (example: Front Range community)
4. Have students complete the See–Think–Wonder about each of the pictures then have them think deeper by filling out the Colorado’s Regions graphic organizer on the back of what people have and possible challenges of living in each of the areas.
5. As students are analyzing the pictures, remind them that “Geography does not just describe where places are located. Geography influences how people live, work, travel, and solve problems.”

Lesson Sources:

1. Images of places in Colorado
2. See – Think – Wonder handout
3. Colorado's Regions graphic organizer
4. Map of Colorado
5. Sample text selections
6. Region cards
7. Colorado Regions Chart
8. Possible Answers for the Colorado Regions Chart
9. Student Directions for the Travel Guide

Lesson Instruction:

1. Introduce the concept of human-environment interaction by explaining to students that human-environment interaction means:
    - How people depend on the environment
    - How people adapt to the environment
    - How people change the environment

    Ask them if they can think of a time when they have seen changes in their own environment. (It could be that their parents move furniture around and they stubbed their toe on the couch)

2. Display the map of Colorado and review the major regions:
    - Rocky Mountains
    - Western Plateau
    - High Plains
    - Front Range Urban Corridor

    Explain that each region has different:
    - Landforms
    - Climate
    - Natural resources
    - Challenges

3. Have students read about different areas. Sample text selections are provided if needed.

4. Have students do a turn and talk as you ask them the following questions:
    - "How does geography create opportunities for people?"
    - "How does geography create challenges?"
    - "What are some ways people adapt to their environment?"

    Use the following sentence frame if needed:

    "People living in _____ must adapt to _____ because _____."

5. Move students into small groups of 3-5 students depending on class size.

6. Each group receives a region card or assigned region:
    - Mountain Region
    - Plains Region
    - Plateau Region
    - Front Range Region
    - River Valleys Region
    - High Deserts Region

7. Students participate in a jigsaw activity. Ask students to complete the Colorado Regions chart for their region. Then ask students to share their findings with their group so that each area is filled out.

8. After students complete their share out, discuss the following questions:
    - What makes this region unique?
    - What challenges come from the geography in this region?
    - How have people adapted?
    - Would you want to live in this region? Why or why not?

9. Closure (5 minutes)
    - Students share one idea:
        - "Geography affects people because…"
    - Teacher reinforces the essential understanding:
        - "Colorado's regions are different because of their landforms and resources. People have always adapted to their environment by creating solutions to geographic challenges."

Strategy Instruction Differentiation:

- Scaffolded Materials: Provide graphic organizers, structured note-taking templates, word banks, and sentence frames. Use two-column notes with pre-selected key terms
- Accessible Content: Use audio versions of text, pre-teach vocabulary, or use priority passages as needed to reduce the length of text to be analyzed.
- Flexible Learning: Incorporate oral rehearsal before writing, allow extended processing time, and use small-group or partner work. Provide sentence stems for summaries that keep components (origins, preservation, modern relevance) separated to scaffold the evaluation process.
- Inclusive Environment: Pair students who share a home language, utilize bilingual word walls, and offer movement breaks or quiet workspaces.
- Advanced Analysis: Introduce higher-level academic vocabulary and push students to analyze sources from conflicting perspectives. Have students use multiple source types (primary vs. secondary, articles vs. images vs. maps vs. graphs) and explore different perspectives on the same region

Assessment:

Students will design a travel guide that introduces visitors to Colorado's diverse geography. Their guide should help someone understand where places are located, what the land is like, and how people use and adapt to the environment. A sample student guide for how to complete this assessment has been provided.

2022 Colorado Social Studies Standards:

1. SS.4.1.2.EO.c: Describe both past and present interactions among the people and cultures in Colorado. For example: American Indians, Spanish explorers, trappers/traders, and settlers after westward expansion.
2. SS.4.2.2.EO.c: Analyze how people use geographic factors in creating settlements and have adapted to and modified the local physical environment.

2020 Colorado Reading, Writing, and Communicating Standards:

- RWC.4.GLE 2.EO.d: Develop the topic with facts, definitions, concrete details, quotations, or other information and examples related to the topic.

Extension Activity:

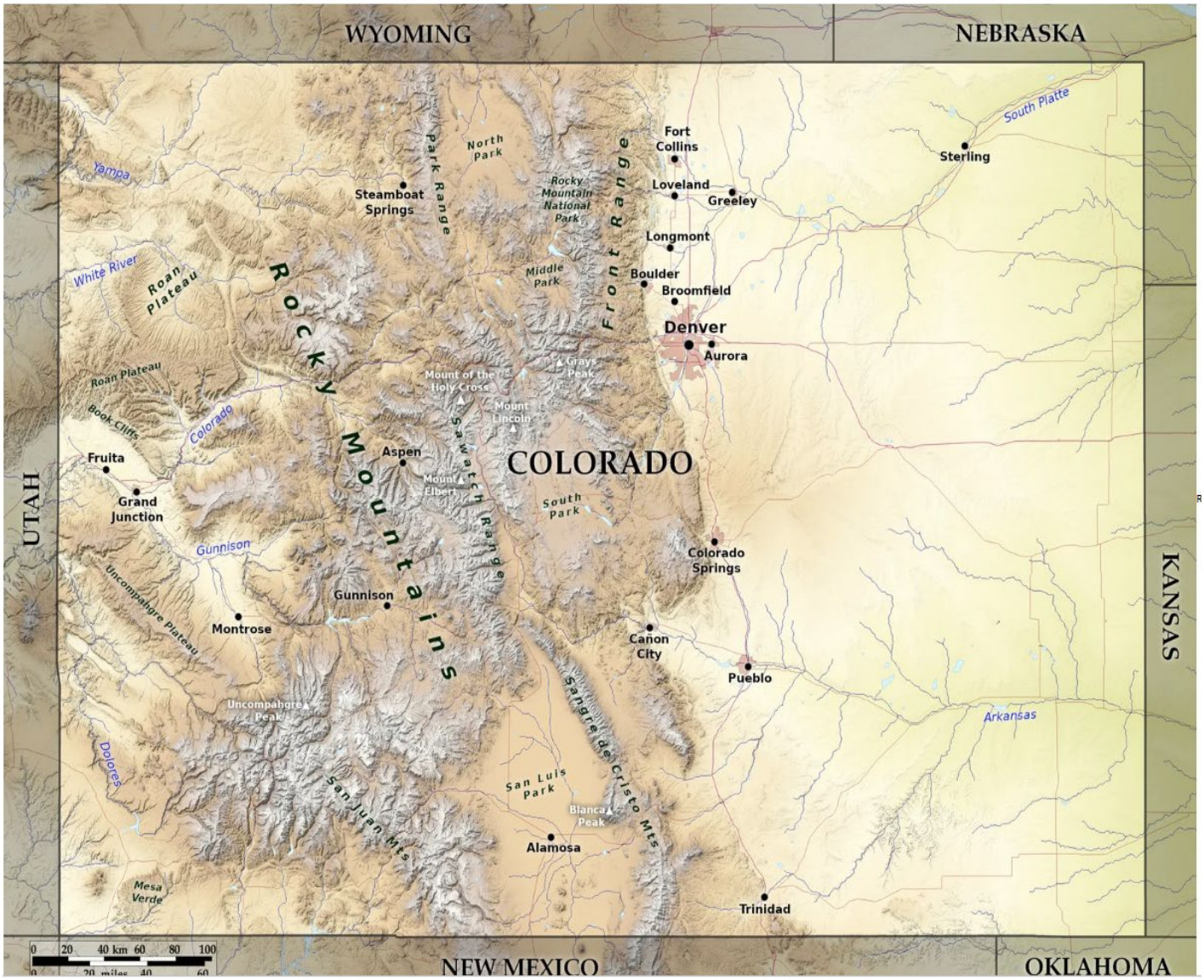
Colorado Travel Expo

1. Students display their travel guides around the classroom.
    a. Students participate in a travel expo where they try and convince another student to move to their area. You can use inside/outside circles and students show their brochure and have 3 minutes to give an elevator pitch.
    b. If there's time, you can come back as a group and answer the discussion questions:
        1. Which Colorado region would you most like to visit? Why?
        2. How does geography shape life in Colorado?
        3. What challenges might people face living in different regions?

Additional Resources:

1. Colorado Facts & Photos for kids - National Geographic
2. Colorado Facts – Kids World Travel Guide
3. Colorado's Symbols & Emblems – Colorado State Archives
4. Colorado for Kids: A Fun-Filled Adventure in the Centennial State (video)

See – Think – Wonder Worksheet		
See	Think	Wonder
● What do you notice about this ● What geographic features do you see? ● What resources might be available?	● Why might people choose to live here? ● What jobs or activities might exist in this area? ● How might the environment affect daily life?	● What challenges might people face living here?



A Map of the Geography of Colorado

Source: [Blue Green Atlas]

Sample Text selections:

Text 1: Mountain Communities

> Colorado's mountain communities are surrounded by steep slopes, forests, and high elevations. People who live in these areas must adapt to cold winters, heavy snowfall, and difficult transportation routes. Many communities depend on tourism, skiing, outdoor recreation, and natural resources for jobs.

Text 2: Plains Communities

> The eastern plains of Colorado have wide, flat areas that are important for farming and ranching. Farmers depend on fertile soil and water to grow crops. However, drought and limited rainfall can create challenges, requiring people to use water carefully.

Text 3: Colorado Cities

> Cities along the Front Range have grown because of transportation routes, jobs, and access to resources. As more people move to cities, communities must solve challenges such as traffic, housing needs, and protecting natural resources.

Region Cards: Made with AI

1. 1. MOUNTAINS



Key Features:

- High elevation with mountains and valleys
- Cold winters and cool summers
- Many rivers and forests
- Good for recreation and tourism



Example Places: Rocky Mountains, Aspen, Steamboat Springs, Vail, Glenwood Springs

2. PLATEAUS



Key Features:

- High, flat areas (plateaus)
- Dry climate with some rivers
- Red rock canyons and mesas
- Good for farming and ranching



Example Places: Grand Junction, Colorado National Monument, Mesa Verde, Montrose

3. PLAINS



Key Features:

- Flat or gently rolling land
- Warm summers and cold winters
- Good for growing crops and raising cattle
- Wide open spaces and big sky



Example Places: Fort Morgan, Sterling, Burlington, Lamar

4. RIVER VALLEYS



Key Features:

- Land along rivers
- Water for farming and drinking
- Lower elevation than mountains
- Good for towns and transportation



Example Places: Colorado River Valley, Arkansas River Valley, Roaring Fork Valley

5. HIGH DESERT



Key Features:

- Dry climate with low rainfall
- High elevation desert lands
- Shrubs and small trees
- Good for wildlife and recreation



Example Places: Pueblo, Canon City, Great Sand Dunes, San Luis Valley

6. FRONT RANGE



Key Features:

- Area along the Front Range of mountains
- Many cities and towns
- Growing population
- Mix of urban and natural areas



Example Places: Denver, Colorado Springs, Boulder, Fort Collins, Castle Rock

Colorado Regions: Geography, Challenges, and Human Adaptation				
Colorado Region	Geographic Features (What is the Land Like?)	Challenges People Face	Solutions People Create (How People	What industry is prevalent in this area?
Rocky Mountain Region				
Plains Region				
Western Plateau				
River Valley Region				
Front Range Urban Region				
San Luis Valley Region				

Travel Guide Directions

Step 1: Choose a Colorado Region

Select one of Colorado's major geographic regions:

- Rocky Mountains
- Western Plateau
- High Plains
- Front Range Urban Corridor
- San Luis Valley (optional extension)

Identify:

- Where the region is located.
- Important cities, communities, or landmarks in the region

Step 2: Create a Map

Include a labeled map showing:

✓ Colorado outline
✓ Their selected region highlighted
✓ Major cities or landmarks
✓ Geographic features (mountains, rivers, plains, valleys, etc.)
✓ A map key/legend

Teacher Checkpoint:
Ask students:

- "Can a visitor use your map to understand where they are?"
- "What geographic features help define this region?"

Step 3: Describe the Region and Landforms

Write a section titled: "Explore the Landscape"

Explain:

- What the land looks like
- Major landforms found in the region
- Climate or weather patterns
- Natural resources found there

Examples:

- The Rocky Mountains contain tall peaks, valleys, and forests.
- The Plains have flat grasslands that support farming.
- The Western Plateau contains mesas, canyons, and desert landscapes.

Use geographic vocabulary such as:

- mountain range
- valley
- plateau

- plain
- river
- elevation
- natural resources

Step 4: Explain Human Interaction

Create a section titled: “How People Live With the Land”

Explain how people have adapted to and used the environment.

Include examples of:

✓ Jobs and industries
✓ Communities and settlements
✓ Transportation
✓ Agriculture or natural resource use
✓ Recreation/tourism

Examples:

- Farmers on the eastern plains use the flat land and water resources to grow crops.
- Mountain communities use forests, rivers, and landscapes for tourism, recreation, and jobs.
- Cities along the Front Range developed near transportation routes and water sources.

Answer the following question: “How has Colorado’s geography influenced the way people live?”

Step 5: Add Illustrations and Design Features (10–15 minutes)

Students make their travel guide visually appealing by including:

- ✓ Drawings or printed images of landmarks
- ✓ Symbols representing the region
- ✓ Captions explaining pictures
- ✓ A creative title/logo/slogan

Examples:

- “Discover the Peaks of the Rockies!”
- “Explore Colorado’s Agricultural Heartland!”

Step 6: Include Written Evidence

Students add evidence from class resources, readings, maps, or videos.

Students must include:

- ✓ At least 3–5 facts about their region
- ✓ Evidence explaining how geography affects people
- ✓ Accurate geographic vocabulary

Sentence starters:

- “The geography of this region affects people because…”
- “One important landform in this region is…”
- “People use this environment by…”
- “A challenge people face in this region is…”

Possible Answers: Colorado Regions: Geography → Challenges → Solutions

Colorado Region	Geographic Features (What is the Land Like?)	Challenges People Face	Solutions People Create (How People Adapt)	Industry
Rocky Mountain Region	Tall mountains, steep slopes, forests, valleys, rivers, high elevation, snow-covered peaks	Heavy snowfall, cold temperatures, difficult transportation, limited space for building and farming	Build roads and tunnels, use snow removal equipment, create tourism jobs, build homes adapted to mountain conditions	Tourism, skiing, mining, forestry, outdoor recreation, hydropower
Plains Region	Flat grasslands, wide-open spaces, fertile soil, prairie, farms and ranches	Drought, strong winds, limited rainfall, water shortages, severe weather	Use irrigation, conserve water, grow crops suited to the climate, use wind energy, practice sustainable farming	Agriculture (wheat, corn, hay), cattle ranching, dairy farming, wind energy
Western Plateau	Dry landscapes, mesas, canyons, deserts, cliffs, unique rock formations, sparse vegetation	Hot temperatures, limited water, distance between communities, challenging farming conditions	Conserve water, tourism and recreation, protect natural resources, use drought-resistant plants and farming methods	Ranching, fruit farming (peaches, apples, cherries), vineyards, energy production (natural gas and oil), tourism

River Valley Region	Rivers, streams, fertile valleys, lower elevations, wetlands, farmland, areas with access to water	Flooding, water competition, changing water supplies, protecting ecosystems	Build dams and reservoirs, manage water use, create flood-control systems, use rivers for farming, transportation, and recreation	Technology, aerospace, education, healthcare, manufacturing, government, finance, tourism
Front Range Urban Region	Cities and suburbs along the mountains, plains, rivers, highways, growing communities	Population growth, traffic, housing needs, pollution, limited resources	Build public transportation, plan communities, protect open spaces, conserve water, develop sustainable solutions	Farming, orchards, vineyards, recreation, water management, tourism
San Luis Valley Region	High mountain valley surrounded by mountains, wetlands, farms, desert-like areas, rivers and lakes	Cold temperatures, short growing seasons, limited water, isolation from larger cities	Use irrigation, grow specialized crops, protect water resources, develop agriculture and tourism	Ranching, solar energy, outdoor recreation, tourism, archaeology, energy development