

## GROWTH OF AMERICA

### Discussion Guide

The following questions are designed to spark discussion and engagement with the map. The questions can be modified or adapted in any way to suit your class.

### Questions

---

1. When and where did America's expansion begin? Is there a general geographic progression or direction of expansion? What do you think are the reasons for this?
2. Look at the natural features noted on the map—the mountain ranges and rivers. Do you see any connection between these features and the various parts of the North American continent that became part of the United States?
3. Find your state on the main map and on the time line. When did the land become part of the United States? When did it officially become a state? If there is a gap between the two dates, what do you think explains the gap?
4. The map uses various words to explain how different areas of land became part of the United States—words like “annexed,” “bought,” and “ceded.” What do these terms tell us about the ways in which our country grew to its present size and shape?
5. If you were to design a set of maps on the growth of America, would you include a map for the U.S. territories? Why or why not?
6. Look at the countries from which the United States acquired land. What does this tell us about the broader history of the United States? And of the world?
7. Examine the inset map entitled U.S. Territories. Do you notice any patterns to when these territories were acquired? If so, what historical forces might explain these patterns?

## Answers

---

1. America's expansion officially began in 1776 with the adoption of the Declaration of Independence. Students should note that America expanded westward from the original 13 colonies. Student answers explaining westward expansion may include that land-based eastern expansion wasn't possible and settlers and colonial interests led to westward exploration and desire for more land and possible riches.
2. Students should draw connections between the Appalachian Mountains and the original 13 colonies; the Mississippi River and the Treaty of Paris; the Red and Arkansas Rivers, the Rocky Mountains, and the Louisiana Purchase; the Rio Grande and Texas Annexation; and the west coast and the Mexican Cession and Oregon Treaty.
3. Answers will vary.
4. These terms tell us that the United States gained land and territories in a variety of different ways: sometimes bought, sometimes claimed or taken, sometimes gifted. Land expansion was a result of different circumstances, including negotiations with other colonial powers (Britain, France, Spain) and negotiations with neighboring lands (Mexico, Russian Empire). The terms "bought" and "purchase" suggest that money was involved. All of the terms ("ceded," "split from," "annexed," "recognized by," "adopted," etc.) suggest that a formal process, declaration, or treaty took place.
5. Answers will vary. Reasons for inclusion may be that the territories are part of the United States and their citizens are U.S. citizens. Reasons against inclusion may be that the territories do not enjoy the same status as U.S. states. For instance, they do not have representation in the U.S. Congress.
6. Answers may vary, but should touch on the colonization of North America by European countries as well as the expansion of the United States into Mexican territory. The fact that other countries played a role in America's expansion tells us that America's growth did not happen in a vacuum. More than one group claimed the land and was impacted by the change in ownership.  
  
In taking a step back, the changing land ownership and changing borders tell us that the United States was not always the United States. Wars and other circumstances led to the dissolution of existing political boundaries and the formation of new political boundaries. This is true for political boundaries throughout the world.
7. Some territories were acquired at the end of the Spanish-American War in 1898. Some territories were acquired or returned around 1944–1946, connecting them with the end of World War II.