Lesson 1: The Land of Texas

Geography and the four natural regions

Texas is the second-largest state in the United States; only Alaska is bigger. It covers about 268,000 square miles, so a drive from El Paso in the far west to Beaumont in the east takes more than ten hours. Texas borders four states, New Mexico, Oklahoma, Arkansas and Louisiana, and the nation of Mexico. Its southeast edge is a long coastline on the Gulf.

Rivers form many of its borders. The **Rio Grande** separates Texas from Mexico, the **Red River** runs along much of the border with Oklahoma, and the **Sabine River** marks much of the border with Louisiana. Inside the state, rivers such as the Brazos, the Colorado and the Trinity flow southeast toward the Gulf.

Geographers often divide Texas into four natural regions. The **Gulf Coastal Plains** stretch across the east and south: thick pine forests in the east, flat coastal prairies, and the warm Rio Grande Valley. Houston, the largest city, is here. The **North Central Plains**, around Dallas and Fort Worth and to the west, are rolling prairies of grass and farmland. The **Great Plains** include the flat, high Panhandle around Amarillo and Lubbock, where farmers grow cotton and wheat, and the hilly Edwards Plateau. Far to the west lie the **Mountains and Basins**, the driest region, with deserts, the Big Bend of the Rio Grande, and Guadalupe Peak, the highest point in Texas at 8,751 feet.

Because Texas is so large, its weather can be very different from place to place. East Texas may get more than 50 inches of rain a year, while parts of West Texas get less than 10. That variety of land and climate shaped how people lived in Texas long before it was a state.

KEY FACTS

- ★ Second-largest state (after Alaska)
- ★ Four natural regions
- ★ Borders 4 states and Mexico
- ★ Highest point: Guadalupe Peak, 8,751 ft

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