

USES OF GEOGRAPHY

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World Trade Patterns

People and nations trade with one another to get things they do not have or cannot make for themselves. Among the world's industrial and developing nations this exchange of goods follows a particular pattern.

Since developing nations have fewer factories to manufacture goods, they import most of their factory-made goods from industrial nations. To import means to buy goods from other countries. These manufactured goods are expensive and few developing nations anywhere can afford to buy as much as they need and want.

Developing nations export metals, fuels, farm products, and other raw materials. To export means to sell goods to other countries. Raw materials are goods needed to manufacture finished products in factories.

For industrial nations the trade pattern is just the opposite. Industrial nations export manufactured goods; they import many raw materials. In some cases they do not have the raw materials at home. In other cases it is cheaper for them to buy from developing nations.

The industrial nations of Western Europe and Japan must depend almost entirely on imported oil. Some of the developing nations of North Africa and the Middle East are extremely rich in oil and export huge amounts to these countries. Income from oil exports has brought immense wealth to a few Middle Eastern nations. Most of the world's developing nations, however, can never expect such good fortune from the sale of their natural resources.

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Preserving the World's Environment

If you gather sticks to build a fire on a camping trip, you are using a natural resource taken directly from the environment. When you use kitchen utensils to cook a steak, or drink a glass of water, or fill a car's gasoline tank, you are also making use of natural resources, either directly or indirectly. You depend on Earth's resources every day of your life.

People and nations all over the world know that careful management of resources is essential for human survival. Some resources are renewable; they can be replaced. Careful cutting and replanting in forests, for instance, allow more trees to grow for future use. Similarly, soil can be used year after year to grow crops, so long as farmers take care not to exhaust it.

Many important natural resources are nonrenewable; their supplies are limited and cannot be replaced once they have been used. Fossil fuels, namely coal, oil, and natural gas, fall into this group. Industrial nations have used oil at extremely fast rates since the end of World War II. Some scientists estimate that even the Middle East's huge reserves could last less than 50 years at those rates. Scientists are searching for ways to use nuclear power safely and to capture energy from the Sun and wind to replace fossil fuels.

People all over the world have seen how industry's use of resources can pollute the air, land, and water. Scientists and government leaders in many places have set safe levels for wastes given off by factories, motor vehicles, nuclear power plants, and the like. Some are now trying to get nations with nuclear power plants to agree on how to build and operate their facilities safely.

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