**Section 2: Geography Themes and Essential Elements**

**The Big Idea:**
Geographers have created two different but related systems for organizing geographic studies.

**Main Ideas:**
The five themes of geography help us organize our studies of the world.
The six essential elements of geography highlight some of the subject’s most important ideas.

**Geography Themes and Essential Elements: Main Idea 1**
- Geographers use themes that can be applied to nearly everything that they study.
  - Location
  - Place
  - Human-Environment Interaction
  - Movement
  - Regions

**Themes of Geography**
- Location
  - Every point on Earth has a location.
  - **Absolute location** is a specific description of where a place is, such as an address.
  - **Relative location** is a general description of where a place is.

- Place
  - Place refers to an area’s landscape, the features that define the area and make it different from other places.
  - Can include land, climate, and people

- Human-Environment Interaction
  - An area’s **environment** includes its land, water, climate, plants, and animals.
  - Geographers study how people interact with their environment.
• Movement
  o Study of why and how people move, including the roads and routes that make movement so common

• Regions
  o Geographers divide the world into regions.
  o Make comparisons between regions to help geographers learn why each place has developed the way it has

Geography Themes and Essential Elements: Main Idea 2
• The six essential elements of geography highlight some of the subject’s most important ideas.
  o In addition to the five themes, geographers use a system of standards and essential elements.
  o Identify the most important ideas in the study of geography
  o National geography standards list 18 basic ideas that are central to the study of geography.
  o Essential elements are based on the standards.
  o Each element is a big idea that links several standards together.
  o The six essential elements build on the five themes of geography, so they are closely related.

Essential Elements of Geography
• The World in Spatial Terms
  o How to use maps and other geographic representations, tools, and technologies to acquire, process, and report information from a spatial perspective
  o How to use mental maps to organize information about people, places, and environments in a spatial context
  o How to analyze the spatial organization of people, places, and environments on Earth’s surface
• **Places and Regions**
  o The physical and human characteristics of places
  o How people create regions to interpret Earth’s complexity
  o How culture and experience influence people’s perceptions of places and regions

• **Physical Systems**
  o The physical processes that shape the patterns of Earth’s surface
  o The characteristics and spatial distribution of ecosystems on Earth’s surface

• **Human Systems**
  o The characteristics, distributions, and migration of human populations
  o The characteristics, distributions, and complexity of Earth’s cultural mosaics
  o The patterns and networks of economic interdependence
  o The processes, patterns, and functions of human settlement
  o How the forces of cooperation and conflict among people influences the divisions and control of Earth’s surface

• **Environment and Society**
  o How human actions modify the physical environment
  o How physical systems affect human systems
  o Changes that occur in the meaning, use, distribution, and importance of resources

• **The Uses of Geography**
  o How to apply geography to interpret the past
  o How to apply geography to interpret the present and plan for the future