

# The Geography of Paradise

## Introduction

What mental image does the term *Paradise* bring to mind? How about a heavenly scene with clouds angels and harps, or perhaps, unspoiled pre-Columbian American Garden of Eden like wilderness? Maybe your “paradise” is a tropical island of sand, sun and ocean waves complete with Jimmy Buffet music. This lesson uses student perception of Paradise to teach the geography of the Pacific Islands.

**Length:** 1-2 class periods

**Grade Level:** 6-8

**Objectives:** *In this activity students will:*

1. Generate a pictorial and written image of their perception of paradise.
2. Compare their mental image with the physical geography of the Pacific Islands.
3. Categorize island types and
4. Identify the geological process that forms each type.
5. Assess the economic prospects of each island type.

## Connection to the Curriculum:

### Geography for Life Standards

- ***The World in Spatial Terms***
  - Standard 2: How to use mental maps to organize information about people, places, and environments in a spatial context
  - Standard 3: How to analyze the spatial organization of people, places, and environments on earth’s surface
- ***Places and Regions***
  - Standard 4: The physical and human characteristics of places
  - Standard 5: That people create regions to interpret earth’s complexity
  - Standard 6: How Culture and Experience Influence People’s Perceptions of Places and Regions
- ***Physical Systems***
  - Standard 7: The physical processes that shape the patterns of earth’s surface
- ***Human Systems***
  - Standard 11: The patterns and networks of economic interdependence on earth’s surface
- ***Environment and Society***
  - Standard 14: How human actions modify the physical environment
  - Standard 15: How physical systems affect human systems

## Materials:

- Physical Maps of the Pacific Region
- Images of high islands, low islands or atolls, coral, volcanic process.
- Colored Pencils, blank paper

# The Geography of Paradise

## Procedures:

1. Pass out Handout #1 or blank paper. Distribute colored pencils.
2. Read the following directions to the student (also found on Handout #1)

*Imagine that you have a chance to vacation in Paradise. Where is Paradise and what kind of place is it? Imagine who or what would be around you. Use your pencils to draw a picture of this place. Use all senses. What do you see? What do you hear? What does it feel like? What do you smell? Take a few more moments to imagine Paradise. (Pause a few moments.) Now draw a picture of Paradise. Artistic ability is not important. Do the best you can. Be sure to include information about all your senses. You may use captions to give further details about your picture.*

3. Give students 10 to 15 minutes to complete their drawings. The instructor may need to give a few prompts or suggestions to help some students draw “sound” or touch. For example, if a student says music is playing ask, “where is the music coming from?” If the student says they hear birds, have them draw birds and so forth. If students ask how to draw “touch”, talk about climate and weather. Ask what is the temperature? Does it ever rain? Etcetera. Some students may already have drawn pictures of certain types of trees or drawn images of themselves in a bathing suit. Point out the students how these images indicate touch or feeling. Walk around, continuing to offer suggestions but try not lead students into including specific information.
4. When most students are finished, use “popcorn style” response as you list the characteristics of Paradise on the board. It may be helpful to have two student recorders while you call on students.
5. When 30 or 40 characteristics of Paradise are on the board, stop. Ask students to identify the location of their Paradise. Some students may be very specific e.g., “Cancun”, others will be more general e.g., “an island somewhere”, or “the mountains”.
6. Look at the list of Paradise characteristics on the board. Ask students to identify the characteristics of Pacific Islands. Examples include: palm trees, sunshine, waterfalls, mountains, beaches, etc.
7. Explain to students that Geographers often divide Pacific Islands into two categories, high islands and low islands or atolls. Show examples (see “slides for students ppt) or explain the following.
  - *Low islands* are usually formed by the buildup of coral. They are relatively small rising only a few feet above sea level. Sandy soil and little fresh

## The Geography of Paradise

water make it difficult to grow crops. People living on these islands support themselves by fishing. Tourism is also prevalent in some places.

- An *atoll* is a low island in the shape of a ring. These are formed as extinct volcanoes subside and are worn away. Coral around the outside of the island continues to build, eventually leaving behind just a ring.
  - *Volcanoes form High Islands.* They are usually large (compared to low islands) and have plenty of fresh water and fertile soil (created by the volcanic ash). Therefore these islands can support more people than low islands.
8. Explain that Geographers also divide the Pacific Islands into three regions: Melanesia, Micronesia, Polynesia. (see “slides for students ppt.)
- Melanesia – “black islands” most are high islands. Examples: New Guinea, Fiji, New Caledonia.
  - Micronesia – “small islands” low islands make up most of this region. Examples: Marianas (Guam), Caroline and Gilbert.
  - Polynesia – “many islands” largest region made up of high and low islands. Examples: Hawaiian, Society Islands (Tahiti) and Tonga.
9. Climate and Vegetation: Most of the Pacific islands are located in the tropics. Daytime temperatures are usually in the 80’s or low 90’s, nighttime temperatures average in the 70’s. Though some of the Pacific islands have wet and dry seasons, most receive rainfall all year long (see climagraph).
- The fertile soil and heavy rainfall of the high islands result in varied dense vegetation. The highland areas are often covered in dense rainforests. The lowland areas support savannah grasses.
  - Poor soil on the low islands can only support palm trees, sparse grasses and small shrubs.
10. Let students compare their drawings of “Paradise”. Have the students identify characteristics of the Pacific Islands in each other’s drawings. Handout (2)
- Option: Have the class choose the best examples of low islands and high islands.

**Evaluation:** Have students use a concept web to check for understanding. (handout 2)

### Extension:

1. Have students do independent research to find how atolls are formed. The meaning of the names *Micronesia*, *Polynesia*, *Melanesia* etc.
2. Have students complete additional drawings showing characteristics of high islands and low islands.