LET’S GET PHYSICAL FEATURES

Objectives:
• Students will identify and locate examples of twelve common land and water forms found in North America.
• Students will match the names of basic land and water forms with specific examples.

Recommended Grades: 2-8

Materials (all included in the trunk):
• Let’s Get Physical Features Cards
• Let’s Get Physical Place-name Cards

Preparation: 5 minutes
• Read the overview and preview the definitions and locations that will be used by students during this activity.

Rules:
• Shoes are not allowed on the map. Please have students remove shoes before walking on the map.
• No writing utensils on the map.

OVERVIEW
This activity will help students learn or review the basic verbal definition and shape of twelve common land and water forms.

Ocean  Sea  Gulf  Bay  Lake  River
Mountain  Plain  Island  Peninsula  Plateau  Isthmus

Pairs of students will identify and locate examples of the above by associating a physical body movement with each concept. Teacher introduces and shows examples of each land and water form before the activity begins and can also have students participate in a brief assessment by using the Let’s Get Physical Features Cards and Let’s Get Physical Place-name Cards.
PART 1: IDENTIFY PHYSICAL FEATURES

Direct students to form two lines on the sides of the map that represent east and west. Have them stand side by side on the yellow border so that each has a clear view of the map. Introduce each land and water form below by giving its name and basic description. Walk over the map and point out a well-known example of each of the twelve land or water forms. This step may be very important for younger students but could be skipped to challenge students who have more experience with the concepts.

Pacific Ocean  Caribbean Sea   Gulf of Mexico
Bay of Fundy*  Lake Superior   Mississippi River
Rocky Mountains  Great Plains**   Island of Cuba
Baja Peninsula  Colorado Plateau   Isthmus of Panama

* Note: The Bay of Fundy is located just northeast of Maine on the Atlantic coast. It experiences the world’s greatest volume of tidal changes. It is a better example of a bay than Hudson Bay. Tell students that, as a general rule, water forms are arranged in the following order by size: ocean, sea, gulf, and bay. Oceans are larger than seas and gulfs are usually larger than bays. Notable exceptions are Hudson Bay (Canada) and the Bay of Bengal (India).

** Note: The Great Plains are not labeled on the map. Show students that they cover a large area east of the Rocky Mountains and stretch from central Canada south to Texas, and east to the Mississippi River.

PART 2: LET’S GET PHYSICAL

Call students onto the map two at a time (one from each side) and hand them each an ocean Let’s Get Physical Feature Card. Ask them each to find and stand in a different ocean. Once there, have each student tell the other students which ocean he or she is in (help those who are in an ocean but don’t know its name). Demonstrate the physical movement associated with each physical feature from the list that follows. Ask the two students on the map to say the name of their physical feature and perform its physical movement. Ask those students to sit on that spot on the map and then call the next two students onto the map to repeat these steps with each set of Let’s Get Physical Feature Cards in order as below:

Ocean – You can surf in the ocean (bend and model a surfer riding a wave).

Sea – You can cruise through a sea (extend your arms, with fingers touching at the tips and model a ship’s bow cutting through the waves).

Gulf – You can sail in a gulf (raise one hand like a sail or shark fin and move it forward like a sail catching the wind).

Bay – You can fish in a bay (use your hands to make a casting and reeling motion like you are fishing from the shore or a pier).

Lake – You can swim in a lake (model a swimming motion while remaining in place).

River – You can paddle in a river (use both hands to hold and pull an imaginary paddle through the water).
Mountain – Mountains are high and steep (have students stand on their mountains and extend their arms high above their heads, with finger tips touching, to simulate a mountain peak).

Plain – Plains are low and flat (have students lay down on their plain and extend their arms and legs to form an “X”).

Island – Islands are surrounded by water (have students sit on their island and look around in all directions).

Peninsula – Peninsulas are fingers of land, surrounded by water on three sides (have students stand up very straight on their peninsula and look to both sides).

Plateau – Plateaus are high and flat (have students extend their arms straight out from their bodies with palms down to simulate a high, flat surface).

Isthmus – An Isthmus is a narrow strip of land that connects two larger pieces of land (have students lay on their isthmus with arms and legs tight at their sides).

You will have 24 students sitting on the map when you finish with Isthmus (there are only two good examples of an Isthmus on the map—Panama and the Isthmus of Tehuantepec in southern Mexico).

Once all the cards have been used, have each set of students review their identity and corresponding movement. If you have more than 24 students have them participate from the border of the map or let them choose and join another student on the map during the review. If you have fewer than 24 students some will have to take a second turn with a new land or water form. Remember, you don’t have to use all twelve land and water forms if you think they are too advanced for your grade level.

PART 3: FIND YOUR MATCH
If there is time, try this quick and easy short-term assessment. Collect all the Let’s Get Physical Feature Cards and sort out one of each type (12) of land and water form. Add the (12) Let’s Get Physical Place-name Cards (Pacific, Caribbean, of Mexico, of Fundy, Superior, Mississippi, Rocky, Great, of Cuba, Baja, Colorado, of Panama) and shuffle them all together. Then, hand them out randomly to students who will again start on the outside border of the map. Make sure to include students who have not yet been on the map. Tell them that when you give the signal to begin, everyone is to walk out onto the map (holding their cards in front of them) and silently try to find their “partner” cards and stand on the proper location. The student with “Gulf” will be looking for the student with the “of Mexico” card, and so on. Give students ample time and subtle help if necessary. When all of the students are in place you can once again review the name of each feature and their corresponding physical movements as a group.