



THE HOLLOW CONTINENT

Objectives:

- Students will locate thirty large cities in South America and represent their populations.
- Students will explore the population patterns and analyze the percentage of urban to rural population in each country.

Recommended Grades: 3-5

Materials (all included in the trunk):

- *Plastic building blocks (130)*
- *Thirty (30) City Population cards*
- *Thirteen (13) Country Population cards*

Preparation: 5 minutes

- Set all the building blocks near the northern edge of the map for easy access.
- Preview the City Population cards so that you can help students locate them if necessary.

Rules:



Shoes are not allowed on the map. Please have students remove shoes before walking on the map.



No writing utensils on the map.

PART 1: POPULATION DISTRIBUTION

Divide the class into three groups and have each group line up along a different edge of the map perimeter.

Briefly review what the term population means. Explain to students that they will be locating large cities on the map and displaying the populations of these cities with building blocks. You may want to review the symbols for towns and cities and remind students that the larger the symbol and font size, the larger the population of the town or city.

Give each team a set of the City Cards and point out the building blocks. Explain that each building block equals 1 million people. Direct each team to locate the 10 cities on their cards and count the appropriate number of blocks on each city and stack them in a tower to represent its population. For example, if the card for Lima indicates that the population is 8 million, they will place a stack of 8 building blocks on that city. You might suggest that students work in pairs, so that once they have located a city, one student can wait in the correct spot while their partner retrieves the correct number of blocks. You may have to help students find their city, so be prepared with hints.

After each team has located all their cities and stacked the blocks, direct them to sit in the ocean, on the coastline nearest to their cities. Have each team point out the countries in which their cities are located. Ask which cities are the largest.

As a class, discuss the following:

- These are the largest cities in South America. What do you notice about where they are located?
- Where are there few or no large cities?
- Do you see a pattern? Why might this pattern exist?
- Are there cities that don't fit the pattern? Why do you think they are located where they are?

Inform the students that this pattern is called the “hollow continent” phenomenon because most of the people live around the edges of the continent. There are many factors contributing to this pattern, including the following:

Access to Water: Many of the most populated cities are located on the coast or along river systems, which can be used for transportation and trade. When European countries began to explore this area, they developed settlements along the coast, allowing for movement back and forth from Europe.

Natural Resources: Cities may be located near sources of minerals, timber, or seafood. They may also be located where food can easily be grown.

Accessibility of the Area: Many portions of the continent have not been settled because of the difficulty in reaching or living in those areas. For example, the densely forested areas in the Amazon Basin present challenges, as do some mountainous regions.

Historical Events: Before European contact, much of the population in South America was located the Andes, especially in Inca cities. When Europeans began to settle, they tended to do so near the coastal areas. As commerce grew, so did these settlements. At the same time, the population in the center of the continent declined due to disease and the lack of economic opportunities.

PART 2: URBAN AND RURAL POPULATION

Introduce or review the terms urban and rural. Select thirteen students and hand each of them a Country Population card. (Note: French Guiana will be treated as a country for purposes of this activity, but it is actually an overseas territory of France.) Direct the students to look at the total population of their countries and arrange themselves in a line from most populated to least. Once they are lined up in order, starting with the most populated country, have each student tell the class the name and population of their country one at a time and then go sit on that country.

Select thirteen new students and have them come onto the map and get a Country Population card from one of the students sitting on the map. Instruct the first group of students to sit on the golden braid. Direct the students now holding the Country Population cards to look at the percentage of urban population in their countries and line up facing the class in order from the largest urban population to the smallest. Once they are lined up in order, starting with the country with the largest urban population, have each student tell the class the name of their country and the percentage of people who live in urban areas. You may also want to have them go and sit on that country.

As a class, discuss the following:

Why do you think there are so many more people living in cities than in rural areas in South America? [*Easier to live in a city; more jobs, opportunities for education, healthcare, etc. in the urban areas*]

Sources: Population data from *The World Factbook* (<https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/>) with the exception of French Guiana, which was taken from Population Division of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs of the United Nations Secretariat, *World Population Prospects: The 2006 Revision and World Urbanization Prospects: The 2007 Revision*, <http://esa.un.org/unup>

