



a shell book

Countries of the World

United States of America



level: intermediate

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Written and illustrated for MissionAssist

This edition published in the United Kingdom in 2026 by MissionAssist

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This is one of a series of
Shell Books produced by
MissionAssist

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Countries of the World

Introduction to Series

There are a total of 195 countries in the world today:

- 54 countries in Africa
- 48 in Asia
- 44 in Europe
- 33 in Latin America and the Caribbean
- 14 in Oceania
- 2 in Northern America

In addition there are a number of dependencies which are not self-governing

This series of books looks at some of the countries, both large and small (we won't promise a book on all 195!) Each book will look at the location and population of each country, its history and customs, along with some famous people and the contribution that they have made to society as a whole.

The books also look at the way that individual countries have related to others, particularly those who have, in one way or another, had control over other countries.

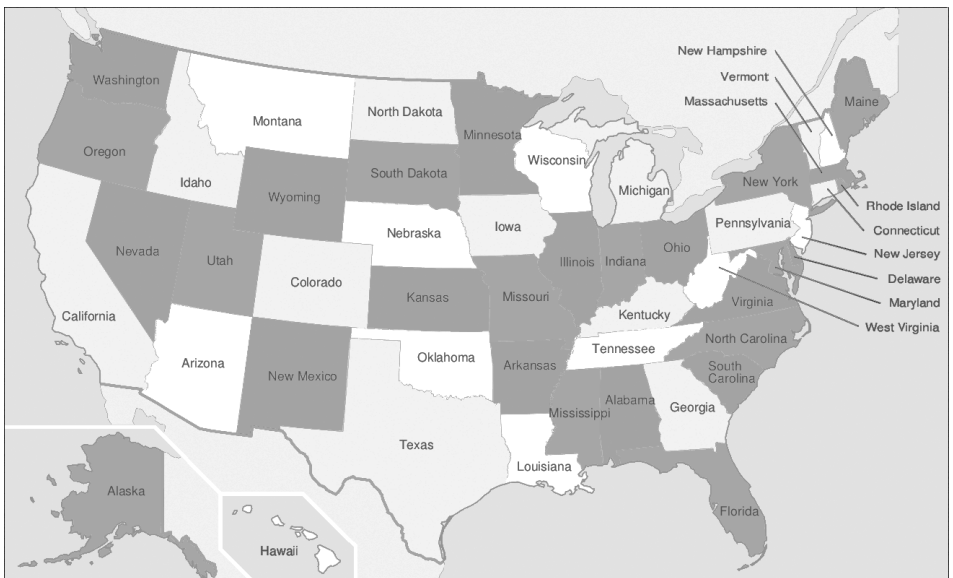
We hope you enjoy becoming an explorer from the comfort of your own homes!

United States of America (USA)

Introducing the USA

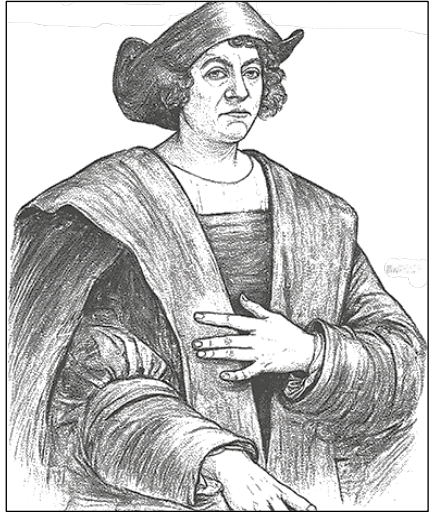
The United States of America shares the continent of North America with Canada. It has a population of about 340 million people. It is the world's largest economy and has a very powerful military. Although people have settled in America from all over the world, the main language is English.

The USA has 51 States, including Alaska, which is separated from mainland Washington State by 500 miles of the Canadian province of British Columbia, and Hawaii which is 2,286 miles west of California.



The history of America

The first inhabitants of North America migrated from Siberia over 12,000 years ago, either across the Bering land bridge from Asia or along the now-submerged Ice Age coastline. The first Europeans to come were Vikings in the 10th century, but the most famous explorer was Christopher Columbus who arrived on the continent in 1492.



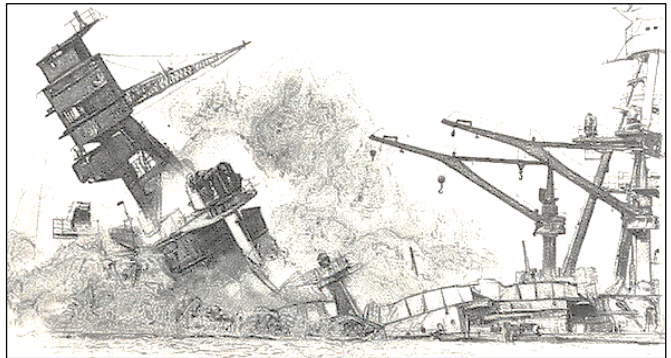
In 1607 settlers from the United Kingdom arrived in Virginia and religious pilgrims landed in Massachusetts in 1620 marking the start of colonisation of the country. The original 13 colonies belonged to Britain, but after increasing tensions they declared independence in 1776.

Over time the numbers of Europeans increased and they began to move westwards, at the expense of the original inhabitants of the country. More and more land which had belonged to other people was claimed.

Internal divisions among the colonies, most notably on the ownership of people as slaves, led to a bitter civil war which lasted four years in the 1860s. The northern states, which had opposed slavery, won and the country recovered, becoming a powerful industrial economy.

Millions of people from other countries arrived in the United States from all over the world in the next few decades. Some fled difficulties or persecution, while some simply wanted a better life for their families. In the 1920's many people became very rich, but shortly afterwards The Wall Street Crash, when finance markets collapsed, began a time of great poverty throughout the country and the world.

The United States fleet was attacked by Japan in 1941 and fought in the Second World War. Its

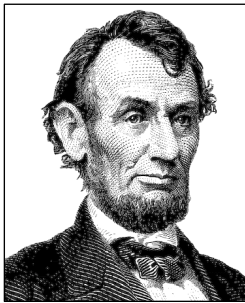
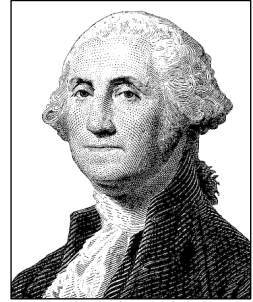


industrial strength meant that it emerged from the conflict as the most powerful country in the world – a position it still holds today.

Famous Americans

As you might expect for such a large country with a big influence in the world, there are lots of internationally famous Americans.

George Washington was the first president of the country. He was a soldier leader who helped his countrymen defeat the colonial British in the 18th century.

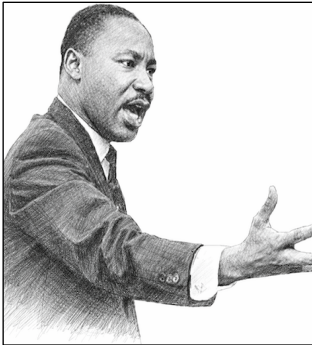
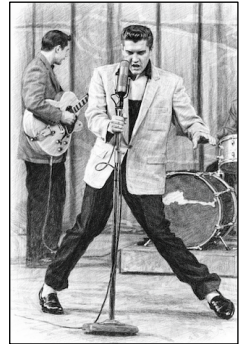


Abraham Lincoln was president during the horrors of the American Civil War. This conflict between the North and the South centred around the practice of slavery. Lincoln was assassinated at a theatre before the war finished.

All over the world children and adults love Disney cartoons. Walt Disney was an animator and film producer who developed the character Mickey Mouse and later produced a version of the classic tale, Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs.

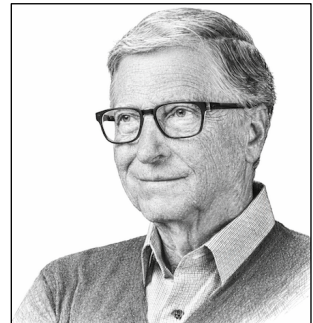


Elvis Presley was a singer and actor who sang in a wide variety of styles, inspiring and influencing generations of musicians.



Martin Luther King stood up against discrimination against black people. He was murdered in 1968.

Bill Gates is a businessman and computer expert who started the electronics company Microsoft, whose software programmes are used all over the world.



The Wild West

For many years European settlers to the United States lived on the Eastern side of the country. In the 1800's successive waves of people keen to start a new life began after land was bought from France. Explorers found ways to reach the Pacific Ocean and families followed.

There were many challenges: the vast and difficult terrain and the inhabitants of the land, who often saw the newcomers as a threat. Nevertheless people kept coming. At first they travelled on horse and wagon, but over time railways made the journey easier.

Often there were few laws and those who were strongest succeeded. The “Wild West” was a reality, later loosely reflected in Hollywood films that portrayed men with guns fighting other men with guns or the native Americans who rode horses and used bows and arrows.



Successive American governments tried to take land from the natives and place them in special areas called reservations. They made peace agreements but these were often broken. The power of modern technology was too much and the people who had lived in the land for thousands of years were eventually subdued.

The weather and geography

America is a big country. Between its sunny beaches in Florida and snow-covered mountains in Colorado, there are deserts, forests, plains, rivers, swamps and almost every type of geography you could imagine. It can be extremely cold and very hot. At certain times of the year, states on the Gulf of Mexico and those near the Caribbean can experience powerful storms called hurricanes which can cause huge swells of sea water and winds capable of destroying houses and causing death.

There are two large mountain ranges: the Rockies in the West, which stretch from Canada to New Mexico, a distance of 3,000 miles, and in the East, the Appalachians, from Canada in the North to Alabama, 2,000 miles away in the South. Both areas are extremely beautiful and attract large numbers of tourists each year who enjoy walking, wildlife and stunning scenery.

The Great Plains can be found to the East of the Rockies and are bordered by the Mississippi river towards the country's interior. Originally grasslands, this area has been converted extensively to farmland and a lot of the country's agricultural economy is based here.

Towards the North East, lie the Great Lakes, which is the largest collection of freshwater lakes in the world. With the exception of Lake Michigan, they all border Canada.

In the southern states and the Great Plains fierce storms and winds called tornadoes can cause a great deal of damage in spring and summer. Many people have special shelters in which to hide and keep safe.

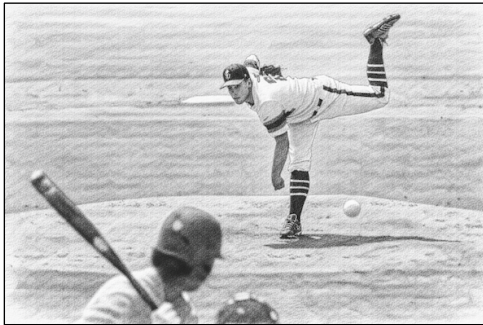
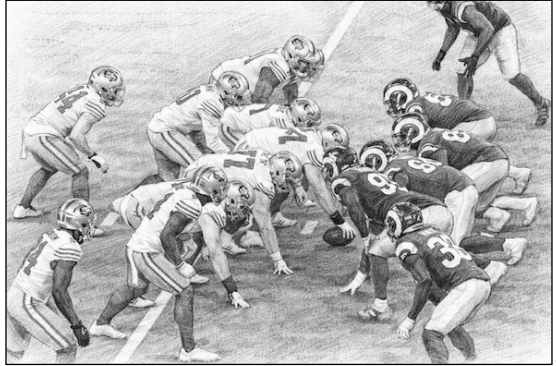


In America's North East region, New England, during autumn (or fall), the leaves on the trees change colour to dramatic reds, yellows and golds. Visitors flock to that part of America to see its beauty and it is said that the spectacle can be seen from outer space.

Sport

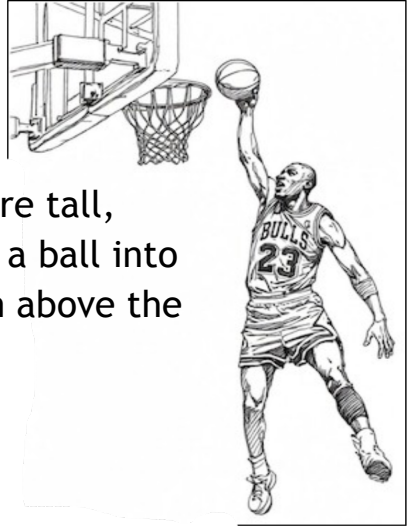
Sport is a huge part of American culture.

American football is played with an oval-shaped ball. Players are big, strong and very fast. Each team tries to score points by getting the ball to the opposition's end of the field.



In baseball teams score points, or runs, by hitting a small hard ball with a specially designed stick called a bat. Once they hit the ball, the batter has to run as fast

as possible between four different bases.

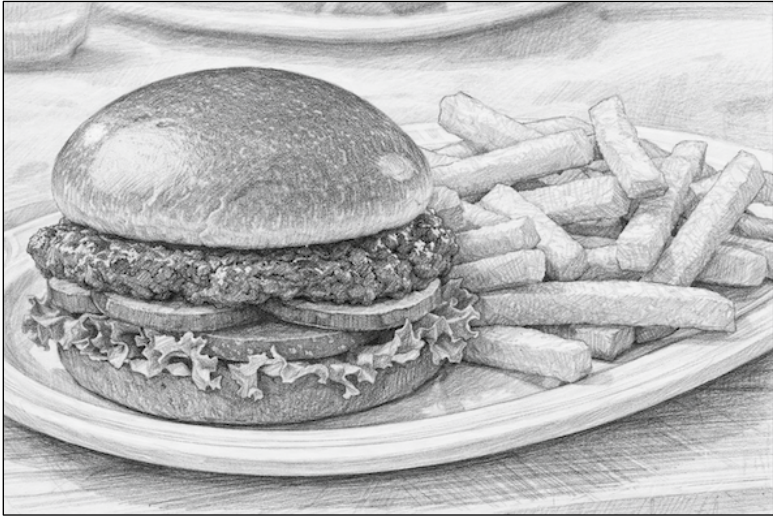


Basketball suits people who are tall, as competitors have to throw a ball into a hoop, or basket which is 3m above the ground.

Food

As Americans can trace their roots all over the world, they eat and enjoy a wide variety of food. The country is considered the home of fast food – meals that are prepared very quickly and in high volume. Often customers can eat in a restaurant or simply drive through. The food is ordered and paid for at one location and by the time the car has moved to the next location it can be picked up and taken away.





Perhaps the most famous of these outlets is MacDonaldis, which has branches, not just in the United States, but in other countries too. A typical meal would be a meatburger in a bun with French fries.

Another very famous item is Coca Cola, which is made to a secret recipe first developed in 1886. It was originally marketed as a health drink. The company sells other drinks. Over 1.5 billion of their products are drunk every day all over the world!



Important places

New York, sometimes called the Big Apple is an energetic city with many well-known buildings, such as the Statue of Liberty. The island of Manhattan has some very tall structures, such as the Empire State building, which give stunning views.



Equally famous is the White House in Washington, home to the President of the United States.

Niagara Falls in New York State and the Grand Canyon in Arizona are much visited tourist sites as are the National Parks, of which Yellowstone is a particularly wild and beautiful example

Symbols of America

One of the symbols of America is the bison. They were vital to the many nomadic native American tribes before the arrival of settlers from Europe. Between 1870 and 1880 they



were hunted extensively and almost became extinct. Now it is thought there are about 500,000 of them in the country.



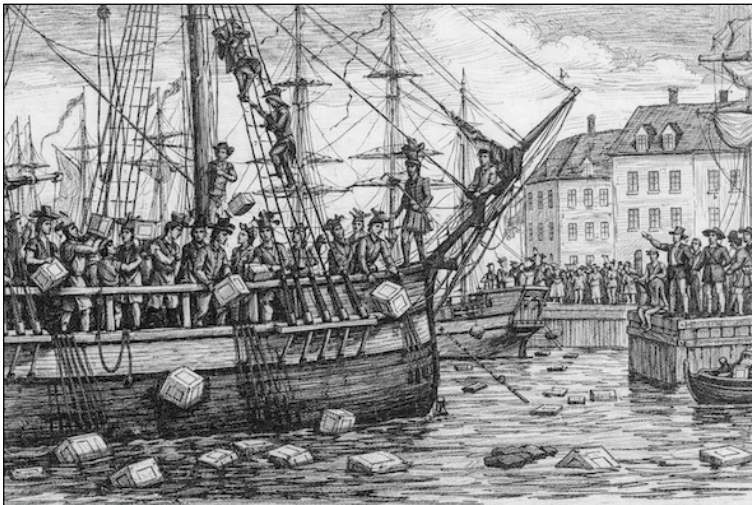
The bald eagle is the national bird of America. It lives by the sea and has a diet of fish. It is not really bald, but has a white head.

The Boston Tea Party

In 1773 a group of American colonists dressed as native Americans, went onto British ships in Boston harbour and threw a huge cargo of tea into the sea. This was an act of defiance against the British government which had imposed a tax on the drink. The colonists weren't happy at having to pay the tax - especially as they didn't have a say in the British Parliament.

This symbolic gesture became a major incident that started the American Revolution.

The colonists knew there was no better way of annoying the British than destroying their favourite drink!



Words or phrases you may not understand

animator – an artist who makes still draw comings appear to move

assassinated – when an important or significant leader is killed in a targeted attack

defiance – when someone says or does something to show they are not happy

marketed – a special campaign to sell something

persecution – when a group of people make life hard for others of another tribe, language or religion

stunning – amazing

successive – one after another

terrain – the shape of land

If there are other words or phrases that you do not understand, make a note of them and then ask someone what they mean.

Notes

Summary

The United States of America is a country in North America.

From its creation in the 18th century it has become one of the most powerful countries in the world today.

