



The Great Basin Printable Reading Comprehension

Word Count: 359 | Lexile 950

The Great Basin is one of the most unusual regions in the United States. It covers much of Nevada and parts of Utah, Oregon, Idaho, and California. Unlike most of North America, the Great Basin has no outlet to the ocean. Every drop of rain or melted snow that falls here either sinks into the ground or ends up in a salt lake or dry desert basin. Because of this, scientists call it an *endorheic* region—a place where water flows in but not out.

The landscape of the Great Basin is shaped by alternating mountain ranges and wide valleys. This pattern, known as *basin and range topography*, was created by powerful forces in Earth's crust that pulled the land apart millions of years ago. Today, travelers can see long ridges separated by broad, flat valleys that stretch for miles. Snow-capped peaks rise above sagebrush plains, creating dramatic contrasts of color and height.

Despite its dry climate, the Great Basin supports a surprising variety of life. Sagebrush, the hardy gray-green shrub that covers much of the region, provides food and shelter for pronghorn, jackrabbits, and the sage grouse—a bird famous for its springtime mating dance. In the cooler mountain ranges, forests of pinyon pine and juniper thrive, while high elevations hold groves of ancient bristlecone pines, some more than four thousand years old.

People have lived in the Great Basin for thousands of years. Indigenous nations such as the Shoshone, Paiute, and Ute adapted to the region's limited water by moving seasonally to hunt and gather food. In the 1800s, settlers crossed the harsh deserts in search of gold and new farmland. Today, much of the Great Basin remains sparsely populated, but it continues to draw scientists, hikers, and photographers who come to study its geology, wildlife, and star-filled night skies.

The Great Basin reminds us that even in places that seem empty or dry, life and beauty find a way to endure.

1. What makes the Great Basin unusual compared to most of North America?

- A. It receives more rainfall than any other region.
- B. Its rivers flow directly into the Atlantic Ocean.
- C. It has no outlet to the ocean and water collects in basins or salt lakes.
- D. It sits below sea level across the entire area.

2. What caused the basin and range topography of the Great Basin?

- A. Repeated volcanic eruptions in recent decades
- B. Forces in Earth's crust that pulled the land apart millions of years ago
- C. Melting glaciers during the last hundred years
- D. Erosion from tropical rainstorms

3. Which description best matches the Great Basin landscape?

- A. Alternating long mountain ranges and broad valleys
- B. Flat prairies with few hills
- C. Dense tropical forests along a coastline
- D. Swampy wetlands and mangrove islands

4. Which animal is most closely linked to the region's sagebrush habitat?

- A. Sea otter
- B. Alligator
- C. Mountain goat
- D. Sage grouse

5. Which statement about people in the Great Basin is supported by the passage?

- A. The area has always been filled with large cities.
- B. Settlers avoided the region entirely in the 1800s.
- C. Indigenous nations adapted by moving seasonally to hunt and gather.
- D. Modern visitors come mainly to swim and sail on the ocean.

6. Why do scientists and hikers visit the Great Basin today?

- A. To study its busy ports and coral reefs
- B. To explore its geology, wildlife, and star-filled night skies
- C. To harvest tropical crops year-round
- D. To research rising sea levels along its coastline

7. Select ALL habitats or life zones described in the passage.

- Sagebrush shrublands
- Pinyon pine and juniper forests
- Mangrove swamps
- High-elevation bristlecone pine groves

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1. **C** – It has no outlet to the ocean and water collects in basins or salt lakes.
2. **B** – Forces in Earth’s crust that pulled the land apart millions of years ago.
3. **A** – Alternating long mountain ranges and broad valleys.
4. **D** – Sage grouse.
5. **C** – Indigenous nations adapted by moving seasonally to hunt and gather.
6. **B** – To explore its geology, wildlife, and star-filled night skies.
7. **Correct answers:** Sagebrush shrublands; Pinyon pine and juniper forests; High-elevation bristlecone pine groves.