**Directions:** Read and highlight the information that will help you to identify the countries and territories of Southwest Asia. On your maps locate and label the countries and territories that are bolded in the reading.

**Political Geography of Southwest Asia**

The country of **Afghanistan** is located at the far eastern edge of the region of Southwest Asia. This country is landlocked, which means it has no seacoast, and is very mountainous.

**Iran**, to the west of Afghanistan, is one of the largest countries in Southwest Asia. It is mountainous as well, but this country also has long seacoasts and is able to use both the Persian Gulf and the Arabian Sea. Iran uses the Persian Gulf and the Strait of Hormuz to transports its exports to the Arabian Sea and then to many different world markets.

Just to the west of Iran is the country of **Iraq**. Iraq has the added advantage of having two of the largest rivers in the region, the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers, flowing through its territory. In southern Iraq, these two rivers join and form a waterway that empties into the Persian Gulf. This river forms part of the international boundary between Iraq and Iran, and a number of disputes have occurred there over access to the waterway.

The kingdom of **Saudi Arabia** is the largest country of the Arabian Peninsula. The Persian Gulf lies to the northwest of the country and the Red Sea is to its west.

**Turkey** is located to the north and west of Iraq. Turkey shares a border with Iraq, Syria, and Iran. Turkey is also the country in which the Euphrates and the Tigris rivers begin. Turkey has built a number of dams in recent years to try saving water from these two rivers for use by Turkish farms, villages and towns.

South of Turkey is the country of Lebanon, south of Lebanon is **Israel**. The United Nations created Israel in 1948 as a homeland for the Jewish people of the world. The **Gaza Strip** along the southern coast and the **West Bank** to the east bind the country of Israel. The Jordan River forms the boundary between the West Bank and the country of Jordan.

**Directions**: Read and highlight the information that will help you to identify the Physical features of Southwest Asia. On your maps locate and label the physical features that are bolded in the reading.

**Physical Geography of Southwest Asia**

The rivers of Southwest Asia (the Middle East) are important because much of this region of the world is dry and desert or semi-desert. One of the longest rivers in the region is the **Euphrates River**, which begins in Turkey and flows through Syria and Iraq before joining with the Tigris and emptying into the Persian Gulf.

The **Tigris River** begins in the mountains of Turkey and flows south through Iraq. It joins the Euphrates in southern Iraq. These two rivers provide water for both drinking and farming. The countries that share these rivers have had problems over how the water is to be shared among them.

The **Persian Gulf** is one of the main ways oil is transported from the rich fields of Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, Iran, and the other countries that line its shores. All of the counties that produce oil in that region depend on the Persian Gulf as a shipping route. Any ships coming out of the Persian Gulf must flow through the very narrow **Strait of Hormuz**. This waterway connects the Persian Gulf to the **Arabian Sea**.

Once in the Arabian Sea, ships can sail east into the **Red Sea**, which is bordered by Saudi Arabia to the east and Egypt to the west. At the northern end of the Red Sea, ships can enter the man-made **Suez Canal**, which will allow them to get the Mediterranean Sea without having to sail all around the continent of Africa.

The Jordan River is a much smaller river than either the Tigris or Euphrates, but it is still very important. The Jordan river is one of the main sources of water for Israel, Jordan, parts of Syria and many of those living in the West Bank and Gaza Strip. The Jordan River is also important because it is the political boundary between Israel and the West Bank, a small part of Syria and the country of Jordan.

**Directions:** Read and highlight the answers to each section on Southwest Asia (Middles East). Write out your answers to each question in complete sentences on your own sheet of paper.

**Environmental Issues**

Water is a natural resource that is distributed unevenly in Southwest Asia. Some countries, like Turkey and Iraq have major rivers that provide enough water for farming communities. Others, like Saudi Arabia, have almost no water. They are predominately made up of deserts.

Many types of **irrigation** (watering crops so they will continue to grow when there is insufficient rainfall) can be found in Southwest Asia as farmers struggle to bring water to their fields from local rivers and from **underground aquifers.** Rains and streams do not replace this water, and once it is used, is gone forever. There has been a lot of work done to learn how to take water from the ocean and desalinate it to use for drinking and irrigation. **Desalination** (the process of removing salt and other chemicals from sea water) is very expensive and requires complex technology.

As countries in Southwest Asia have worked to modernize their system of agriculture, **water pollution** has been a growing problem. Increased demand for irrigation to expand farming has led to overuse of rivers and streams. Many farmers have begun to use chemical fertilizers, which have contaminated water supplies through runoff in these same rivers and streams. Access to water is also a source of conflict, especially among countries that share a river system. Dams built along a river to create lakes for irrigation and the production of **hydroelectric** **power** (electricity produced from the energy of running water) in one country cuts down on the water available to the other countries located further downstream.

**Vocabulary to Know**

* Subsistence agriculture- growing small amounts of crops, to take care of their local needs
* Underground aquifers- layers of underground rock where water runoff from rains and streams are trapped
* Fossil water- water that has been underground for centuries

1. **Which two rivers do Turkey and Iraq share?**
2. **How has the building of dams created problems for countries sharing rivers in Southwest Asia?**
3. **How has the use of chemical fertilizers affected water supplies in many countries?**
4. **Why is desalinization not used more in Southwest Asia?**

**Directions:** Read and highlight the answers to each section on Southwest Asia (Middles East). Write out your answers to each question in complete sentences on your own sheet of paper.

**Location, Climate and Natural Resources**

Two of the most important **natural resources** found in Southwest Asia are **natural** **gas** and **oil**. These two resources bring wealth into the region because they are needed for much of the world’s economy. Over half of the world’s known oil reserves are found in this part of the world. This has made some of these countries extremely rich and has led them to have a lot of control over the global economy.

In the 1960s, several of these Southwest Asian countries joined with other oil-rich countries around the world to create the **Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC)** in order to have more control over the price of oil on the world market. While some countries in Southwest Asia have grown very rich due to their oil production, others have struggled to help their populations make a decent living.

The Southwestern countries with the greatest reserves of natural gas and oil are Saudi Arabia, Iraq, Iran, and Kuwait. These countries have enjoyed tremendous growth in national wealth and an improved standard of living in the past fifty years. Those countries without oil reserves have had a much harder time improving living conditions for their populations. This difference in wealth in some of the Southwest Asian countries has led to conflicts among the nations.

1. **What are the two most valuable natural resources in Southwest Asia?**
2. **How much of the world’s oil supply is found in Southwest Asia?**
3. **How has the discovery of oil in some Southwest Asian countries affected the economic development of this area?**
4. **Which countries are the most oil-rich in the Southwestern Asian region?**
5. **Why does the organization of OPEC play a powerful role in the world economy today?**

**Directions:** Read and highlight the answers to each section on Southwest Asia (Middles East). Write out your answers to each question in complete sentences on your own sheet of paper.

The three major river systems located in Southwest Asia: the **Euphrates River**; the **Tigris River**; and the **Jordan River**. In addition to being important sources of water, these rivers also provide boundaries between nations. These three rivers are important because they provide water for drinking and irrigation, as well as routes for transportation and trade for those who live along their routes. Many of the major cities in Southwest Asia are located on or near these rivers. These cities and towns are also centers of industry, as is that is where workers can most easily be found.

Southwest Asia has a number of very large desert areas. Some people have always managed to live in and around the desert, living in tent camps and surviving as sheep and camel herders. These people are known as “**Bedouins**,” or desert nomads, and their way of life is gradually disappearing.

The countries of Southwest Asia generally have a very **arid**, hot and dry, climate. Four large bodies of water border Southwest Asia. Even so, mountain ranges close to the coastal areas block rains resulting in much of the interior of Southwest Asia being desert. Because there are coastal areas as well as a number of large rivers, other parts of this region have enough water to support agriculture and towns and cities of significant size.

Southwest Asia is located between three major continents: Europe, Africa, and Asia. For this reason, the region has played a major role in trade among these continents through the centuries. Ships loaded with trade goods from Asia would travel to the coast of Southwest Asia. These goods would then be loaded unto caravans that traveled across the desert to the coast on the other side of Southwest Asia. Today the **Suez Canal** in Egypt links the Mediterranean Sea with the Red Sea and the Indian Ocean, making it possible to continue the trade among continents without having to use overland caravans.

**Vocabulary to Know**

* Climate- the type of weather a region has over a long period of time

1. **Many of the largest cities in Southwest Asia are located on or near?**
2. **The “Bedouins” are Southwest Asian s who have traditionally lived in and around…?**
3. **People living in the deserts in Southwest Asia have usually made their living by…?**
4. **How have the major rivers of Southwest Asia become a part of part of the political conflict?**
5. **Which describes the climate of much of Southwest Asia?**
6. **Because mountains block winds coming from the oceans, much of the interior of Southwest Asia is…?**
7. **Dams built along the ricers have caused problems for people living further downstream because…?**
8. **Which river do Turkey, Syria, Iraq and Kuwait share?**