

India

A Reading A-Z Level Y Leveled Book
Word Count: 1,480

LEVELED BOOK • Y

India

Discussion Questions

Evaluate:

How does India's large population affect its people and environment?

Analyze:

How are the celebrations in India influenced by its history?

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Front and back cover: The Golden Temple was built in a pool of water in the Indian city of Amritsar (uhm-RIT-suhr).

Title page: Decorated elephants are used in India for many processions, such as those in festivals.

Page 3: A girl collects firewood near the Taj Mahal (in background). Many people think the Taj Mahal, built in the 1600s, is one of the most beautiful buildings in the world.

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Countries Around the World
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Where Is It?

India is a country in Asia that is mainly a **peninsula**. Pakistan, China, Nepal, and Bhutan lie along India's northern border. Bangladesh and Myanmar, or Burma, lie to the east of India, and just south of India is the island nation of Sri Lanka.

To the southwest of India is the Arabian Sea. To the southeast is the Bay of Bengal. India also includes islands such as the Andaman Islands and the Nicobar Islands.

The capital of India is New Delhi (DEL-ee), which is part of Delhi. Delhi is a very old city, but New Delhi was built in the early 1900s. At the time New Delhi was built, India was part of the British Empire, and the city was constructed to be the capital of British India. Delhi is a complex maze of small streets with crowded **bazaars**, while New Delhi has spacious avenues and modern shopping centers. Delhi is a huge city of more than twenty million people, and New Delhi is only a small part of this large urban area.

Delhi and another large city in India, Mumbai, are racing each other for the title of the country's largest city. The populations of both cities are very close in size, and the numbers continue to rise each year. Mumbai was known as Bombay for many years, but in 1995 the name was changed to reflect the native language of the region. Mumbai has been called the *Gateway of India* because of its large port, and the city actually has a monument by the same name. This monument was built at the entrance to the harbor in 1911 to celebrate the first visit to India by a British king and queen. At that time, India was a British colony. About forty years later, when India gained its freedom, the lead British government official left by that same gate. Mumbai lies on an island in the Arabian Sea just off the west coast of mainland India.



Many people in rural India get water from wells because most homes do not have indoor plumbing.

People

With more than 1.2 billion people, India ranks second only to China in population, and India's population continues to grow. Most people live in small towns and villages in the countryside, even though India does have some large cities. Most rural homes do not have indoor plumbing, and about half do not have electricity.

Indian society used to be divided into classes that made up the **caste system**. In this system, people had to follow strict rules depending on their social group. Each group had its own traditional foods, customs, and ways of making a living. Some castes were treated badly by other castes. Today, the caste system is illegal, but some people still maintain these traditions.

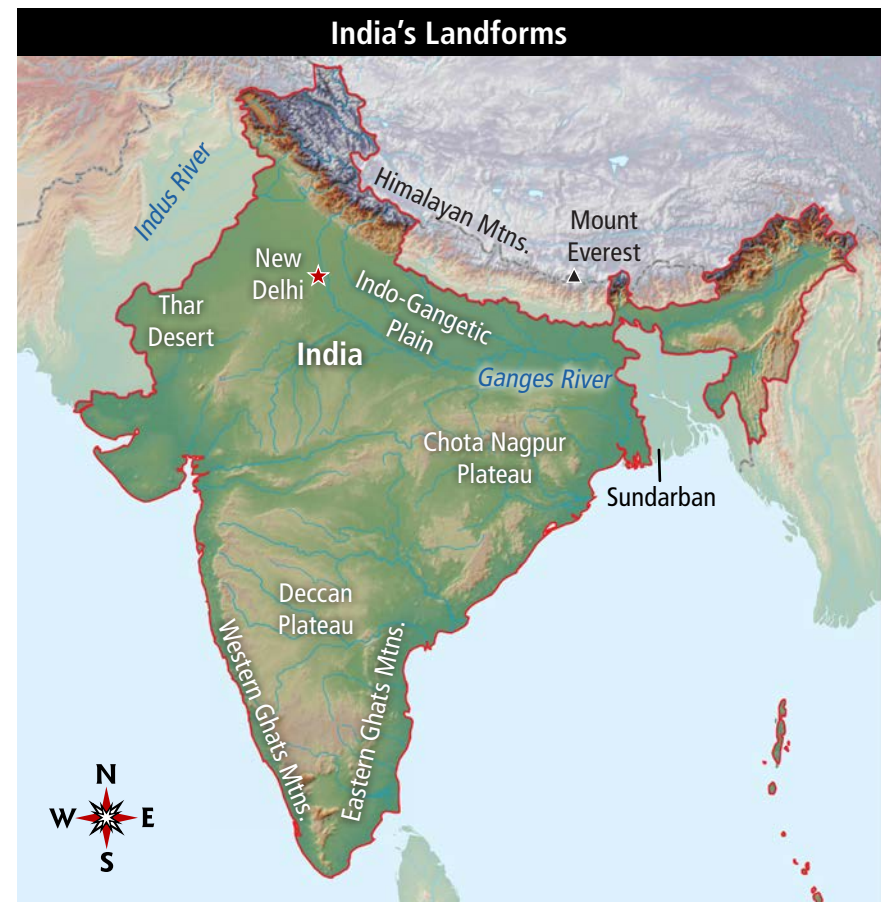
Half of the people in India make their living from agriculture. They raise cattle, water buffalo, and other animals; however, Indian people do not raise cattle to eat, because most Indians belong to the Hindu religion. For Hindus, cows are **sacred**. Other animals such as sheep, goats, and chickens are raised for meat.

Indian cities are extremely crowded. Most people live in apartment buildings along very narrow streets. Many shopkeepers live above or in the back of their shops.

Because India has such a large population, it has been hard for the country's electricity supply to keep up with the demand. Power outages and power rationing, or the limited use of power at certain times, are very common in cities. In addition, average incomes are among the world's lowest, and many of the country's people live in poverty. At the same time, however, many people in India are highly educated and work in science and technology industries.



Many streets in India's cities are crowded with shops and people, such as this street in Old Delhi.



Land

The Himalayas form India's northern border. These mountains are the highest in the world and act as a barrier that separates India from the rest of Asia. Thus, India is often called a **subcontinent**.

A low-lying plain called the Indo-Gangetic Plain stretches across northern India. This rich land was formed long ago as rivers continuously flooded and left **sediment** behind.

The Ganges River lies in the northern part of India. In Hinduism, the Ganges is a sacred river. Hindus from all over India travel to the river to enter its waters. South of the Indo-Gangetic Plain lies the Deccan Plateau. This raised land takes up more than half of India and includes low hills as well as coastal areas. Many people live on the Deccan Plateau because it has rich soil and a climate just right for growing crops. Toward the western part of India, the land becomes drier to form the Thar Desert. The sand dunes of this region constantly shift.

Most of India has three seasons: hot and dry, hot and wet, and cool and dry. The hot and dry season lasts from March until May or June and brings high temperatures, strong winds, and dust storms. The hot and wet season is known as the **monsoon** season. Beginning in May or June, strong winds from the south bring very heavy rains that fall in the afternoon on most days. About three-fourths of India's yearly **precipitation** usually falls during this season. In some years, the monsoon season brings flooding to many parts of the country. By late October, the rains stop, and the weather becomes cool and dry.



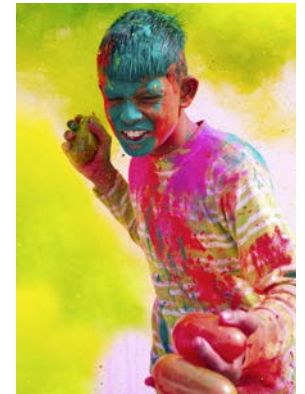
The Thar Desert covers about 200,000 square kilometers (77,000 sq. mi.).

Celebrations

People in India celebrate many special days. On October 2, people celebrate the birthday of Mohandas Gandhi, a famous leader who led Indians to independence from the British. People attend prayer services and ceremonies to honor the "Father of the Nation."

Diwali (dih-WAH-lee), also known as the festival of lights, lasts for five days in autumn each year. During this time, people light small candles, shoot firecrackers, and give sweets to friends and family.

Holi (HOH-lee) is a spring Hindu celebration known as the festival of colors. During Holi, people celebrate the end of winter by throwing colored water and powder on each other. People also sing, dance, and enjoy special foods. Holi festivities can be messy, but at the end of the day, everyone bathes and puts on clean white clothes.



During Holi, many children use water guns and balloons filled with colored water to spray each other.

August 15 is India's Independence Day. On this day, the Indian people celebrate their independence from Great Britain in 1947. People often fly colorful kites that symbolize freedom.

History

India's civilization is very old. By about 321 BC, people living in the land now known as India were united under one ruler. In the AD 700s, **Muslims** invaded India and set up a kingdom with Delhi at its center. Muslim rule lasted until the 1600s, and one Muslim ruler, the Shah Jahan, left behind one of India's most famous landmarks, the Taj Mahal. This beautiful building is a **mausoleum** built for the Shah's wife after she died.



Also during this time, Europeans began to explore the world. In 1498, the Portuguese explorer Vasco da Gama sailed to India, and by 1858, India became part of the British Empire.

Around 1920, Mohandas Gandhi began urging the Indian people to resist British rule—but not with violence. Gandhi showed that nonviolent protest could make a difference. Independence for India took twenty-seven years, but the country became a free democracy in 1947. Since that time, India has faced wars, poverty, and a growing population. However, it is quickly becoming a modern country, filled with opportunity. In 2007, India elected its first female president. It is the world's largest democracy.



The Jungle Book

Rudyard Kipling, a British author who was born in India, wrote many children's stories about India under British rule.

In *The Jungle Book*, published in 1895, he included many exotic animal characters, such as Shere Khan the Bengal tiger, Baloo the brown bear, Kaa the python, and Rikki-tikki-tavi the mongoose.

Animals

India's wildlife includes many exotic species, including large cats. In fact, India is the only country in the world with both lions and tigers. It is also the home of two kinds of leopards. While both types of leopards are rare, the snow leopard of the Himalayas is far scarcer.



The king cobra is one of the types of cobras that live in India.

One of India's most famous reptiles is the cobra, a poisonous snake known for spreading its hood when it feels threatened. Because it hunts mice and rats, which live close to humans, the cobra does sometimes bite people.

The Indian elephant was once prized for its strength and helped to clear many forests in India. People used elephants to lift logs and to transport crops and people. Today, some Indians still use elephants to help them with their work. Wild elephants are found in most regions of India, but they are threatened by habitat loss.



Some elephants are still used to carry crops and do other work.

Along the Bay of Bengal, the **mangrove** forests in the swampy **Sundarban** provide a unique habitat for many animals. The Sundarban is the home of sea turtles, sharks, and crocodiles. It is also the largest home of Bengal tigers, and the tigers actually swim in the swamp's waters to catch prey. A male Bengal can grow to 3 meters (10 ft.) in length and weigh as much as 230 kilograms (500 lbs).



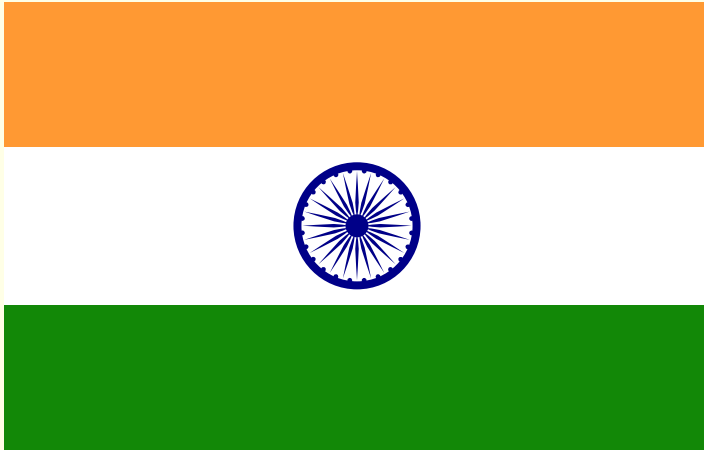
Scientists are working hard to protect India's endangered Bengal tiger.



The India Gate in New Delhi is a popular gathering place for many Indians as well as tourists.

Conclusion

India is a large country filled with many people and exotic animals. The country has been faced with enormous challenges, such as feeding and housing its population while protecting its amazing natural beauty. At the same time, India continues to grow, becoming an important player on the world stage.



Population: 1,236,344,631

Land: 2,973,193 sq km (1,147,956 sq. mi.)

Capital City: New Delhi

Primary Languages: Hindi

Primary Religion: Hinduism

Currency: Rupee (ROO-pee)



Source: Central Intelligence Agency (July 2014),
World Bank

Glossary

bazaars (<i>n.</i>)	markets with rows of small shops (p. 5)
caste system (<i>n.</i>)	a rigid system of social position based on birth and profession (p. 6)
mangrove (<i>n.</i>)	a tropical tree that grows in swamps or shallow salt water (p. 13)
mausoleum (<i>n.</i>)	a large tomb, or a structure that contains several tombs (p. 11)
monsoon (<i>n.</i>)	a seasonal storm that brings heavy rain to an area (p. 9)
Muslims (<i>n.</i>)	people who follow the religion of Islam (p. 11)
peninsula (<i>n.</i>)	a long piece of land almost completely surrounded by water (p. 4)
precipitation (<i>n.</i>)	water that falls to the ground, such as hail, sleet, rain, or snow (p. 9)
sacred (<i>adj.</i>)	related to a religious or spiritual purpose (p. 7)
sediment (<i>n.</i>)	particles of dirt and rock that are carried by water, wind, or ice to another place (p. 8)
subcontinent (<i>n.</i>)	a large land area that is a part of a continent (p. 8)
Sundarban (<i>n.</i>)	a heavily forested swamp area next to the Bay of Bengal in India and Bangladesh (p. 13)