

Strategic Straits - Chokepoints for World Commerce

Background: A strait is a narrow place between continents or islands.

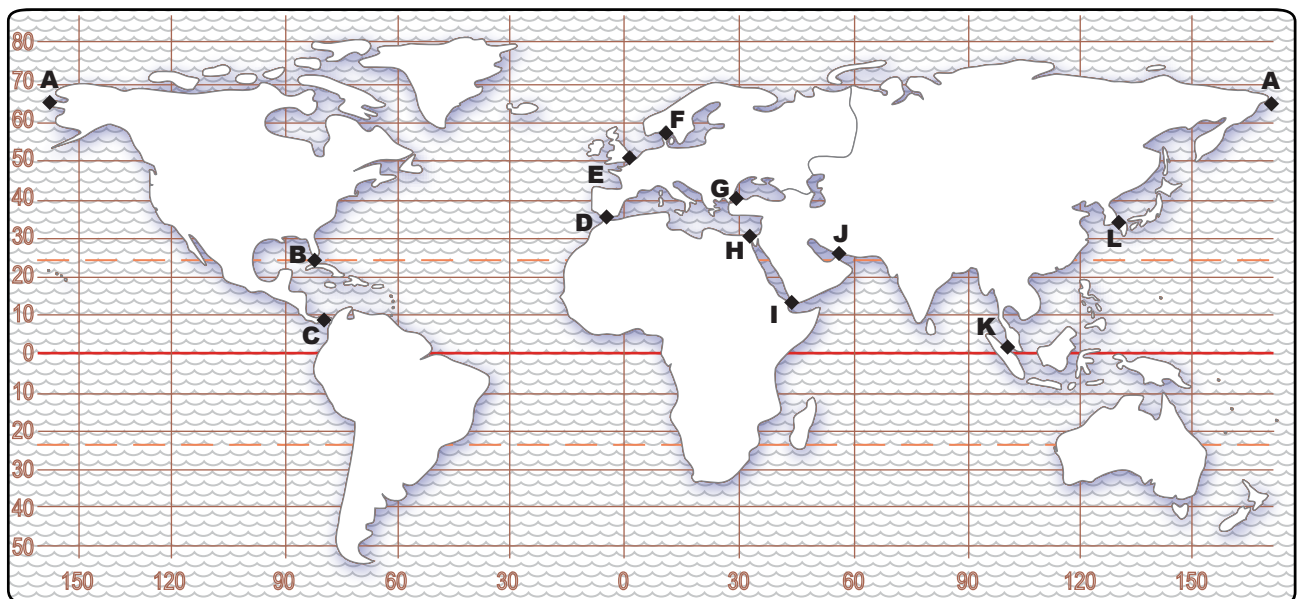
In peacetime, a strait is a good place to collect tolls from ships going through.

In wartime, a strait is a good place to control, because enemy ships may have to go through the strait in order to get to ports or battles on the other side.

Your job: Examine this list of historically important straits.

- 1) Use the latitude-longitude numbers to find the letter of each strait on the map.
- 2) Use an atlas or website to identify the country or countries that control the strait.
- 3) Circle the Y if you think that country seems friendly toward the United States.
- 4) Circle the N if that country has not been friendly in recent years.
- 5) Circle the ? if you are not sure.
- 6) Write a brief for a congressperson, describing the results of your research.
Your brief should identify three or four straits that you think are most likely to be targets for terrorist attack or other political complications.

Letter on map	Strait	Latitude	Longitude	Oil Transit (m bbl/day)	Country(s) in control	Friendly?
___	Hormuz	27°N	56°E	15	_____	Y N ?
___	Malacca	2°N	102°E	11	_____	Y N ?
___	Bab el-Mandeb	13°N	43°E	4	_____	Y N ?
___	Suez Canal	31°N	32°E	3	_____	Y N ?
___	Bosporus	41°N	29°E	3	_____	Y N ?
___	Gibraltar	36°N	6°W	2	_____	Y N ?
<u>C</u>	Panama Canal	9°N	80°W	1	<u>Panama</u>	Y N ?
<u>B</u>	Florida	24°N	82°W	<1	<u>Cuba, United States</u>	Y N ?
<u>E</u>	Dover	51°N	1°E	<1	<u>England, France</u>	Y N ?
<u>L</u>	Korea	35°N	130°E	<1	<u>Japan, Korea</u>	Y N ?
<u>F</u>	Kattegat	56°N	13°E	<1	<u>Denmark, Sweden</u>	Y N ?
<u>A</u>	Bering	66°N	168°W	<1	<u>Russia, United States</u>	Y N ?



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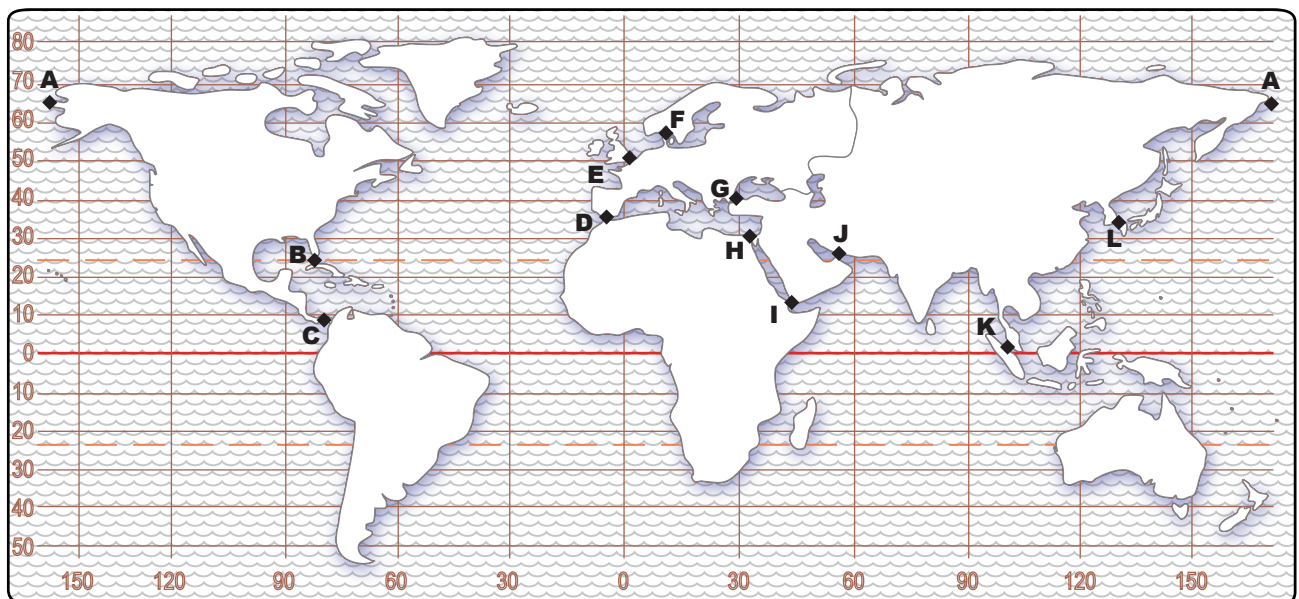
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Teacher's Notes: **Strategic Straits**

Overview: Students need to learn latitude and longitude. On that point, we probably all agree. But some seem to think that the way to teach the global coordinate system is all by itself, as a separate lesson, often with an imaginary continent full of cutesy names. That is a missed opportunity. The focus of this lesson is on some geopolitical hotspots that could be in the headlines at any time.

GLCE: **6G441**, 6G442, 6G421

Common Core links: ELA

Related Discipline: History

Time: ½ to 1 class period

Setup: An ocean ship is a big, slow, and tempting target. Once it gets out on the open ocean, it can be hard to find, because the ocean is so big. But the tankers that carry oil from Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, and Iraq have to go through narrow straits in order to get to Europe, Japan, Korea, and the United States. These straits, often called chokepoints, are places where the world oil supply chain is vulnerable to disruption by terrorists. Other chokepoints are important for other commodities or military reasons. For example, container ships going from China, Japan, or Korea to Europe have to go through some narrow places between Singapore and various Indonesian islands.

Alternative setup: Some of the major sea battles in history – including the Spanish Armada – were fought in some of the narrowest areas in the ocean, the straits between continents or islands.

Procedure: The worksheet is the core of the activity. It can be done as an individual or small-group activity, whole-class discussion (with or without a computer projector), or takehome project, perhaps with a report, poster, or presentation as the “product” (see extension below). You can use the form that already has “the answers” for half of the straits, or model a few orally or with the powerpoint presentation. Like any worksheet, the activity works better when linked with a larger task that justifies doing a worksheet like this in order to master the skill involved. Those larger tasks might include a study of historical conflicts or present-day terrorist risks.

Answers: (Answers also available on the clickable pdf.)

Hormuz – Iran, Oman (Saudi Arabia) Malacca – Malaysia, Indonesia (Singapore)
Bab el-Mandeb – Yemen, Saudi Arabia Suez – Egypt Bosphorus – Turkey (Istanbul)
Gibraltar – Spain, Morocco Panama – Panama Florida – Florida, Cuba
Dover – England, France Korea – Korea, Japan Kattegat – Denmark, Sweden
Bering – Russia, U.S. (Alaska)

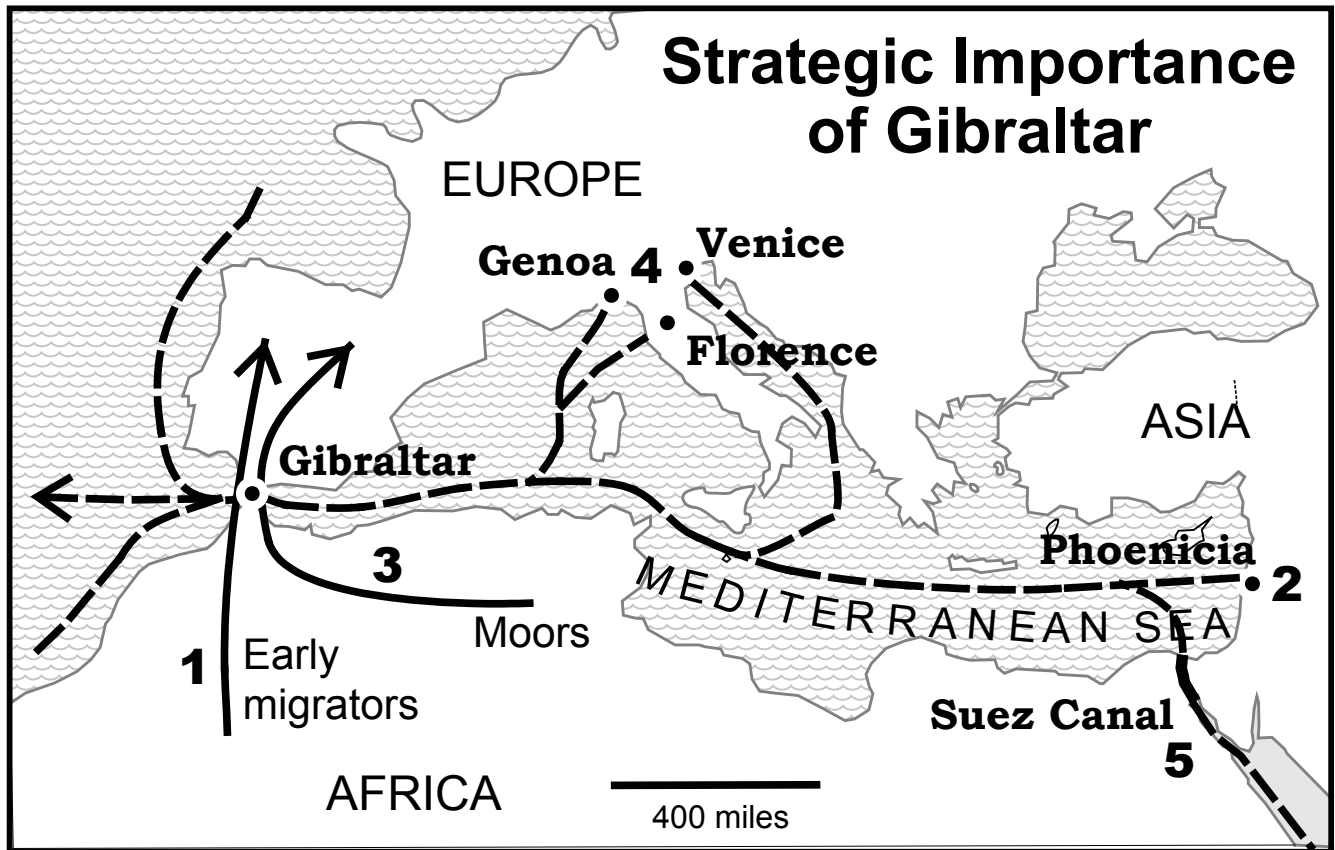
Debrief: Reassure students that the goal is not to memorize a lot of details – it is to gain an understanding of the idea of strategic location, which in turn can make a lot of historic events and details easier to understand.

Vocabulary: chokepoint latitude longitude strait isthmus trade

Extensions: Students can design briefing papers, posters, or powerpoint presentations to describe the historic importance and present-day threats in each strait. Several of the chokepoints on this map are widely regarded as among the most dangerous places in the world. The Gibraltar page can be used to provide a preview, review, or additional background and instructions for the inquiry.

A parallel objective is to enhance student ability to “translate” between several different locational vocabularies – the mathematical coordinates of the latitude-longitude grid, and the topological statements that identify the location of a strait as *between* a named pair of countries or other political entities (or as the connection between specific oceans or seas).

Strategic Importance of Gibraltar



The Strait of Gibraltar is a small place with a big role in history. It got that role because of its **strategic importance**. Its strategic value, however, was different at different times, because it depended on the technology of the time.

A **strait** is a narrow passage of water between two large masses of land.

1. Before people had good boats, it was the short way to cross from Africa to Europe.
2. For Phoenicians, who had sailing ships, it was the way out to the Atlantic Ocean.
3. For Islamic Moors, with powerful armies, it was a way to invade Christian Europe.
4. For captains from Genoa and Venice, it was the gateway to riches across the ocean.
5. For the British, it was a "tollgate" for oil tankers coming through the Suez Canal.
6. Now, in an age of missiles, satellites, and supertankers that are too big for Suez, Gibraltar has little strategic significance. (It's like the Erie Canal in the U.S.)

Project: Here are eight important straits around the world.

Bering - between Alaska and Russia

Davis - between Canada and Greenland

Magellan - near the tip of South America

Skaggerak - between Denmark and Norway

al Mandeb - between Africa and Arabia

Hormuz - between Iran and Arabia

Korea - between Korea and Japan

Malacca - between Singapore and Indonesia

Pick a strait, and design a poster to explain its strategic importance.

Your poster should include at least five of the following:

- a world map to show the general location of the strait in the world
- a close-up map to show the nearby countries
- a description of the strategic importance of the strait in the past
- a description of at least one migration, trade route, or invasion involving the strait
- a description of some countries that depend on using the strait today
- a recommended policy for dealing with issues around the strait