



# **Families of the United States**

## **Teacher's Guide**

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## **Rural Script - Families of U.S.A.**

### **Kyle 5 Years Old**

It's early morning in our farm in North Dakota. I live here with my mother and father, 3 brothers, grandparents, and several uncles and their families. We all farm together. The farm belonged to my Grandma's family. They were homesteaders, which means they were the first people to farm this land. The government gave homesteaders 160 acres of land if the homesteader lived on the land for 5 years and planted trees there.

My name is Kyle and I'm 5 years old.

Dad and I stop in to see grandma and grandpa, who are having breakfast. They live in the old farmhouse. The rest of us have newer houses nearby.

While we're here the garbage truck comes to pick up the trash. Even though North Dakota has a lot of land and not many people, we don't dump trash on the land. And we don't burn trash either. We want to keep our air and land clean.

When we get back home, it's my job to feed our tropical fish. My brother, Jeff, takes care of our pet rabbit.

We're on summer vacation now, but I will start first grade this fall, and Jeff will be in 3<sup>rd</sup> grade. Our nearby town's too small to have a school, so we take a bus to school in a bigger town about 15 miles away.

We help mom pick vegetables from our garden. We're growing peas, beans, carrots, corn, potatoes, and tomatoes. We eat our vegetables all summer, but mom also freezes a lot that we use during the winter. I like fresh peas. So does our dog!

Today mom's making caramel rolls. She's mixed wheat flour with water and yeast to make the dough. She sprinkles cinnamon and sugar on the dough that she's pressed flat. Then she rolls up the dough so the cinnamon is on the inside. She cuts the dough into pieces by pulling a string through it.

Then the pieces go into a pan that has a mixture of sugar and butter in the bottom. When the rolls are baked, the mixture on the bottom becomes caramel.

I'm washing my hands so I can make rolls too. I have my own special pans. I spread butter on the sides of the pans so the bread won't stick.

Now we have to wait for the bread to rise. That means the yeast in the dough makes tiny bubbles. In 2 or 3 hours, when the dough gets almost twice as big as it is now, it'll be ready to bake.

We like to have cats around the farm to catch mice and rats. But this kitten is really a pet and she loves to play with string. Whoops...she needs some help!

While we're working in the kitchen, the rest of the family's busy harvesting. We grow a lot of wheat, and now it's ready to cut, or harvest.

We use machines called combines to harvest wheat. Combines cut the wheat and pull off the wheat seeds, which are called kernels. Everyone works as fast as they can, way into the night, to harvest the wheat before a storm knocks the kernels off the plant and onto the ground. The whole family helps.

Sometimes we kids ride in the combine, too. The combine's cab is air-conditioned and has a radio, so it's pretty nice even on a hot day.

When the combine gets full, a truck comes to pick up the grain. The truck takes the grain to big storage bins on the farm. A giant screw carries the wheat to the top where it's dropped into the bin.

When the storage bins on the farm get full, we take the grain into town to even bigger storage buildings called elevators. The elevators are built next to railroad tracks so trains can take the grain to cities. There, factories make the wheat into things like bread, spaghetti and breakfast cereal.

The people at the elevator weigh and write down the weight of each truck before and after it's unloaded. The difference in weight between the full and empty truck shows how much the truck was carrying.

Dad told me the railroad never has enough cars to carry the grain after it's harvested. That used to mean that farmers had to dump their grain on the ground until the railroad could take it to the city. So all the farmers got together and built these elevators to store their grain until it's sold. Mom says most towns in North Dakota were started by railroad companies that paid people to come here from places like Germany, Norway and Ireland. She said that recently the railroads have stopped coming to a lot of towns. So the elevators have had to close, and then, when farmers don't come to town as much, the little stores and restaurants have to close, too. Mom says those towns are dying.

From the top of the elevator you can see all around. Dad says our town has about a hundred people, and half of them are our relatives.

We have lots of churches here: Lutheran, Methodist, and Baptist, and our family is Catholic. Our priest takes care of churches in several nearby towns, because there aren't enough priests to go around. This is our priest. He runs a farm that the church owns. Today it looks like he's going hunting. People in this area hunt pheasants, ducks and deer.

Farms in North Dakota are big and getting bigger all the time. The price of wheat and cattle is so low that many farmers can't pay their bills. So they sell their land to the farmers that are left. Our farm is 8000 acres, or 12 ½ square miles.

Sometimes when Mom talks to Dad on their cell phones, we find out that it's raining on his side of the farm and sunny on ours.

Besides wheat, we also grow sunflowers. We sell one kind of sunflower for cooking oil and another for people to eat. We like to eat salted sunflower seeds when we go to ball games.

We also raise cattle on our farm, and a neighbor just called to tell us that some of our cows are on the road. So grandpa goes out to check on them. Grandpa uses his truck to chase the cattle to the gate where they got out. They had pushed against the gate 'til it had gotten loose. Sometimes grandpa rides his horse to get the cattle, especially if they're in a wheat field.

We raise a kind of cattle that are gentle, so they are easy to work with and aren't dangerous.

One of the combines has a problem, and my uncle and his son are working on it. Farmers here have to know how to fix almost anything because it can take a long time to get someone out to the farm to help.

Mother's talking to my cousin to see how fixing the combine is going, because it's almost noon, and time to eat.

She puts a little butter on top of the buns that she made while Paul sets the table.

Dad and my brother, Barry, who've been harvesting, come in to eat. When they're really busy, we take dinner out to the field.

Today we're having chicken, potatoes and gravy, fresh peas, Jell-O with fruit, milk, coffee and caramel rolls for dessert.

In the afternoon, Jeff and I play with models of the machines we use on the farm.

We ride over to the shop to see how the repairs on the combine are going.

Then we play some catch. When I get older I want to play on the summer baseball team, like my brothers.

In summer, the sun goes down around 9 o'clock. But the crew will keep harvesting until 10 or 11 at night. Then they'll come in and clean up and eat supper before they go to bed around midnight. My grandpa says, "Make hay while the sun shines", which means we should harvest while we have good weather.

Dad's still in the field when I get ready for bed.

When I get to bed, I think about my dad going round and round the fields, and I get very sleepy.

Goodnight!

## **Urban Script -Families of U.S.A.**

### **Kristin 10 Years Old**

My name is Kristin and I'm 10 years old. I live in Wilmington, Delaware, with my mom, dad and 5 year old sister, Kourtney. It's 7 o'clock and I'm getting up to get ready for summer camp.

The rest of the family has already eaten. I'm having orange juice and a waffle that I heat in the toaster. Mom and Dad have left the TV turned to the news channel. I like to surf until I find something I like. Sometimes we use plastic dishes so we can throw them away instead of washing the m.

I'm taking a computer class in summer camp and I need to print out my homework to take to class. Mom, Dad, and I all use our home computer.

That's my dad. He's just leaving for work.

My computer class is only a couple of blocks from our house. While I'm waiting for class, I practice hitting tennis balls. I'm just learning to play, and our coach says we should practice whenever we get a chance.

My class has a dozen students. Our teacher says about half the homes in the US have computers, so lots of kids like to take computer classes. After class we'll have swimming and tennis.

While I'm at summer camp, Dad's at work. He's the director of an organization that helps people in lots of different ways. If a family has an emergency like a fire and needs food and clothing, Dad's center will help them. Some people there have a club where they buy food in big quantities so it's cheaper, and then they divide it up. They even have a free class to help people learn to use computers. This morning he and the staff are meeting to discuss a job-training program they run.

At about 4 o'clock, Dad picks me up from summer camp and takes me to my tap dancing class, which I have twice a week. We watch ourselves in big mirrors to see if we're moving the right way.

After dance class, I have a basketball game. The games are run by volunteers like Dad and some of the other parents. Dad says about half the people in the US do some kind of volunteer work.

It's 8 o'clock when I finish my game, and Dad and I stop for some dinner on the way home. I always have chicken and Dad has a hamburger, french fries and a soda.

Then it's time to head for home.

Today's Sunday and our family's going to church. We go to an Episcopal Church in Wilmington. Kourtney and I go to the activities for kids...and Mom and Dad go to the regular Church service. In this part of the service everyone wishes each other peace. Near the end of the service, we kids come in for communion, which is a symbol of our being together. During the winter, our church is usually almost full, but now lots of people are on summer vacation. Delaware has nice beaches and people often go to the beach for the weekend. Mom says almost half the people in the country go to some kind of church every week.

It's September now, and I just started 4th grade. I go to a public school close to home and I could walk, but my dad usually likes to drop me off on his way to work. We're a little early so I wait outside. I'm just getting to know these girls because this is my first year here. I used to go to a private school. That means Mom and Dad paid for me to go there.

Before class we put the books we're not using in our lockers. Public schools pay for our books. We each have our own locker with special numbers that we dial to open our lock.

Classes start at 9 o'clock. We go to homeroom first for announcements and to pledge allegiance to the flag. Our school has 1200 kids in grades 4-6. We have 7 classes every day. Each class is an hour long.

My first class is creative writing, where we're learning to write short stories. Today the teacher gives us three ideas and we have to choose one of them to write about.

In math our teacher shows us some shortcuts to solving problems.

At about noon we have lunch in the school cafeteria. Our school makes our lunches, which each cost a dollar and 10 cents. Today we're having foot long hot dogs, fruit and milk. Our school used to get milk in little cardboard cartons. But cardboard is made from trees so someone had the idea of using little bags instead. They take less space in a landfill and save a lot of trees.

We have a half-hour break after lunch, but today we're too noisy, so the teacher makes us quiet down before we go outside.

While I'm in school, my mom's in school too! She teaches physical education at a public school, but not where I go.

Two of her students come early to help her get ready for class. This boy is a new student, so another student introduces him to my mom and to the class. Mom plans several activities for each class. Today these kids are learning how to move a soccer ball with their feet.

Then they talk about the food pyramid, which reminds us which foods are best for our health. I'm thinking about becoming a teacher, too, but I think I'd also like to be a geographer or a geologist.

When Mom finishes teaching at about 3:00 o'clock, she picks up Kourtney from kindergarten. On the way home they stop to get a few things at the grocery store. Sometimes mom uses a credit card to pay for groceries, but today she's using cash. Then they go home to have dinner. Kourtney is thanking God for her food. Mom and Kourtney are having salad, chicken nuggets, peas and iced tea. Dad and I aren't home because Dad has taken me to my dance class.

After Mom cleans up, they go to Mom's dance class. Mom goes to the same dance school that I do!

Every year at Christmas time our school has a concert. The school auditorium is filled with parents and friends. Christmas is a Christian holiday, but this is a public school and we have kids with lots of different beliefs. We want to include everyone, so we sing and play Islamic, Jewish and Asian songs, as well as Christian songs. The chorus is singing about Kwanzaa, which is an African American celebration of Christmas. This is Silent Night, a Christian song about the birth of Jesus. I play the flute, and this is the first time we 4th graders have played our instruments in a concert.

The concert was really fun. But I still have a half-hour of homework to do.

Then it's time to get ready for bed. I take a shower every night. It's been a big day and I'm really tired!

Good night!

## Glossary

**acre:** A measurement of land. One acre equals 4840 square yards.

**combine:** A machine that cuts grain and removes the kernels of grain from the stem or straw.

**chicken nuggets:** A “fast food”. Boneless strips of white meat from chicken coated with a bread-like mixture and deep-fried.

**food pyramid:** Chart showing the amounts of each type of food recommended that a person eat every day.

**geology:** The study of earth’s crust and the formation of its various layers.

**geography:** The study of earth’s continents and countries, climate, plants, animals, resources, inhabitants and development.

**harvest:** To gather a crop from a field.

**homestead:** A 160-acre piece of land given by the US government to a settler (woman or man) to be developed as a farm.

**kernel:** A grain or seed.

**public school:** A school supported with money from taxes and free to all students.

**private school:** A school that students must pay to attend.

**“surf” the TV:** Quickly change from channel to channel

**volunteer:** A person who does something for someone else without being paid.

## **Discussion and Activities After Viewing**

- Ask each child to list some of the similarities and differences between their family and school and those in the video.
- Discuss what manners the class thinks their parents most want them to learn. What is the purpose of manners?
- Take a poll of the class to see how many people from different countries each of the children know.
- Discuss why English is the official language of the USA.
- Ask the class to discuss the similarities and differences between life on the farm and life in the city. Discuss advantages and disadvantages of living in the two places.
- Ask the class to name as many religions as they can that are practiced in the USA.
- Ask someone to explain how a credit card works. Discuss the advantages and disadvantages of using a credit card.

## Questions

1. Kyle's family farm 8000 acres of land or 12.5 square miles (32 square kilometer). Most people in China and India farm 2 to 3 acres. How can Kyle's family farm so much land?
2. Do many people live in North Dakota?
3. What affects the price of wheat?
4. Are there many people of African descent in the United States?
5. Why do people use throw-away disposable utensils and plates?
6. What do people do with their computers?
7. Why does Kristin and her Dad eat on the way home?

## Questions and Answers

1. Kyle's family farm 8000 acres of land or 12.5 square miles (32 square kilometer). Most people in China and India farm 2 to 3 acres. How can Kyle's family farm so much land?

Kyle's family rely on large machines to plant, harvest, thresh and store the wheat. They depend on rainfall to water the plants. 100 years ago half of Americans were farmers. In China and India most farmers use manual or animal labor.

2. Do many people live in North Dakota?

No. Only 660,000 people live in North Dakota. And North Dakota is two-thirds the size of France. North Dakota is one of the largest wheat growing states. Since North Dakota has about 70,000 square miles, it does not take many farms the size of Kyle's family farm to farm it all. There are about 30,000 farms and the average size farm is about 2 square miles. (5 square kilometers),

3. What affects the price of wheat?

Wheat is bought and sold all over the world. How much wheat is grown depends on things like weather, how much farmers are planting and what the price is. Farmers and scientists are trying to raise the amount of wheat they can grow on every acre of land.

4. Are there many people of African descent in the United States?

According to the 2000 U.S. census, the two largest racial and ethnic minorities were Hispanics, which includes people from many origins and who may be of any race, and African Americans. Both each accounted for about 13% of the population.

5. Why do people use throw-away disposable utensils and plates?

People use disposable items because often they do not want to spend the time to wash the items up. Americans value their time highly and if they can save time in order to spend on things they feel are more important they will. Many people understand that they should recycle, and many communities have recycling programs for glass, aluminum cans, plastic bottles and newspapers

6. What do people do with their computers?

Two thirds of American households own a computer. Computers can be used for balancing checkbooks, keeping records, writing letters. Those with Internet access can go visit many sites and gather information, play games, listen to music. You can plan your trips, do your banking, find out the weather, send mail to friends and read the news.

7. Why does Kristin and her Dad eat on the way home?

They eat at the fast-food restaurant to save time and energy. They may not have enough time to make their own dinner. There are many fast food restaurants in the United States. Many of them are owned by the same company and look identical all across the United States. Some serve hamburgers, other serve chicken, pizza or roast beef.

## **Quiz Some Things We've Learned About the USA**

1. Why is English the official language of the USA? What other languages could have become the official language?
2. Why isn't the "USA" the same as "America"?
3. What was a homesteader?
4. Why can losing a railroad hurt a community? What can happen if a busy road going through a town is replaced by a road that passes by the town? What happened to some early port cities in the USA when railroads began to replace ships for carrying goods?
5. How can it be raining on one side of the farm and sunny on the other side?
6. What does "Make hay while the sun shines" mean?
7. What are some reasons that farms in the USA keep getting bigger and bigger?
8. Why does Kyle's mother cut the bread dough with a string?
9. Why did the railroad have to get people from Europe to live in the towns they started?
10. How does Kristin's father's organization help people?
11. Why does the food club buy food in large quantities?
12. If eggs cost \$1.00 a dozen in a store, but the food club could buy 50 dozen for \$30.00, how much would each dozen eggs cost? If a family bought a dozen eggs from the food club, how much would they save over buying them at a store?
13. What is the official currency of the USA?
14. Draw a series of pictures telling Kristin or Kyle's story. Try to include as much detail as you can remember from each part of the story.

## **Introduction**

The United States is famous around the world for having the largest and most advanced economy in the world. It is also well known as a nation made of immigrants from all over the world. It is the home of many modern inventions from the light bulb to the computer chip to the airplane. It is also home of the beautiful San Francisco Bay Bridge, the Grand Canyon, the famous redwoods and the skyscrapers of Manhattan.

## **The Land and the Climate**

The United States consists of 50 states. There are 48 states that are bordered by Canada in the north and by Mexico in the south. The state of Alaska lies in the far northwestern corner of the North American continent next to the country of Canada. The state of Hawaii is an island chain in the middle of the Pacific. A great river system, the Missouri-Mississippi, runs down the middle of the country and empties into the Gulf of Mexico. Five great lakes lie between Canada and the United States, connected to the Atlantic Ocean by the St. Lawrence River. The lands east of the Mississippi tend to be well forested. The forests change to prairie in the Midwest, while the lands in the west tend to be much drier. In the southwest there are great deserts, and in much of the west arid scrublands predominate. An exception is the Pacific Northwest region which has mild weather with drizzly winters. Two great chains of mountains run down the country, in the east the Appalachians run from Maine to Georgia. In the west, the Rocky Mountains run from Alaska down to New Mexico. The weather is very diverse. In the extreme north, there may be five months of snow, while the extreme south would hardly ever see snow. Rainfall is fairly dependable year round in many agricultural areas from the Midwest to the South. Tropical hurricanes often lash the Gulf coast and the south Atlantic during the summer and fall seasons. Tornados often arise through out the Midwest and the South.

## **Plant and Animal Life**

The plant and animal life is also diverse. Polar bears, grizzly bears, seals and caribous roam the Alaskan wilds. In the lower 48 states, there are large populations of deer, buffalos, coyotes, cougars and elks. Notable plant species include the tallest living tree in the world a giant sequoia tree and the oldest living tree, a bristle cone pine tree. Many of the plant and animals of

Hawaii, such as the nene goose, are unique to the tropical islands. 56 national parks and hundreds of state parks have been created to preserve the natural environment.

## **The People**

More than 80% of the United States population lives in the cities. The majority of the inhabitants are of European descent. Major countries of ancestry include the British Isles, Ireland, Germany, Scandinavia, Italy, Russia, Poland, and the former Austro-Hungary. More recent immigrants come from Vietnam, Mexico, China, India, Philippines and Central America. According to the 2008 U.S. census estimates, the two largest racial and ethnic minorities were blacks and Hispanics, which includes people from many origins and who may be of any race. Blacks were at 13.5% and Hispanics at 15%. The Asian population (including Pacific Islanders) totaled about 4%. The Native American population of the United States constituted about 1% of the population. Hawaii, New Mexico, Texas and California are the only states without a non-Hispanic white majority.

The distribution of income is also very wide. 23% of the households made less than \$25,000 per year while 20% made more than \$100,000 per year. The increase in global trade has greatly benefited the top 20% while the income of the bottom 50% has stagnated as low cost goods from around the world have kept wages down.

The people are also diverse in religion; the many Protestant faiths predominate, making up 55% of the population. 28% of the population are Catholic, 2% Jewish, 2% Muslim and 5% other.

## **Daily Life, Arts and Cultural Life.**

In most families, both the husband and the wife work. Parents have to make arrangements to have their children taken care of after school. Over 60% of families own their own homes. The preferred American housing is a suburban single family home with a yard. Taking care of the home requires a significant commitment of time. There are a growing number of mixed households where one or both parents have been previously married and had children from the previous marriage as 43% of first marriages breakup within 15 years.

Most people are Christian and about a quarter to a third go to church on Sundays. Sports are a major activity for many families. Children and adults join soccer, football, baseball and basketball teams. Other sports include golf, bowling, fishing, track, tennis and swimming. To save time, families often dine out. Children are permitted to drive by the age of 16, and many take jobs at that age. Children are encouraged to be independent and leave home after college.

The United States has a great tradition in the arts. In addition to homegrown talent, the United States has often been able to attract the best talents from other countries. So in addition to the likes of painter Georgia O'Keefe, author John Steinbeck and composer Stephen Foster, many recent immigrants or children of immigrants people have also contributed to the artistic world. These include the ballet dancer Baryshnikov, the cellist Yo Yo Ma and the composer Irving Berlin. The fusion of different styles has created new genres, as when the fusion of African American music styles with Scotch-Irish music produced country music and rock and roll.

## **Government**

The government is a republic, where an representative assembly elected by the citizenry run the government. The founders sought a fine balance between limiting the power of any one person, and providing leadership to the country. They devised a three-branch government consisting of the executive, the legislative and the judiciary. The legislative branch, the Congress, make the laws. These laws are enforced by the executive branch, which is headed by the president. The members of the judiciary, headed by the Supreme Court, are all appointed for life by the president. The judiciary determined whether the laws conformed to the Constitution. If it does not conform, the judiciary will rule is it unconstitutional and thus null. It requires a supermajority in Congress to pass an amendment to the Constitution. The president also serves as a check on the legislative by having the power to veto legislation. Overriding a veto also require a supermajority in the legislature. The Congress also serves to check the powers of the executive by holding hearings to examine, criticize, and otherwise question executive policy.

The states are also given many powers. Each state also has an executive, legislative and judiciary. The people of the state elect the executive and legislature. Thus each state is highly autonomous in the area of education,

state income tax, granting of municipal charters, and laws regarding commerce.

## **History**

Man has been living in what is now the United States for thousands of years. Artifacts have been found from over 10,000 years ago. The native Amerindian population developed agriculture based on corn, knew how to work copper and lived variously as farmers, hunter-gatherers and fishers. It seems that the population experienced a sudden collapse with the coming of Europeans. When the Europeans first discovered the Americas, the English first settled on the eastern coast during the 17<sup>th</sup> century. Other Europeans followed, Scotch- Irish, Germans, French and Dutch. A great many African slaves were forcibly brought over to work in the southern plantations. The first colonies united and gained their Independence from the British monarchy in 1776. In 1789 they adopted the US Constitution, establishing one of the first republics of the modern world. The franchise was at first limited only to white, male property owners.

The United States grew rapidly. The country was able through superior organization and arms to push the native Amerindian population out as they expanded across the continent. The population increased as immigrants arrived to first turn the virgin forests into farmland and then to provide the labor in the factories. The United States was favored by good leadership, as a natural aristocracy arose that was imbued with the ideals of the Renaissance. Riding on the momentum of the Industrial Revolution, and blessed with abundant resources, the nation established factories and cities across the continent. The cities were tied together first with steamboats and then with railroads.

The paradox of slavery in a democracy was resolved by a great civil war in the mid nineteenth century, where hundreds of thousands fought and died as soldiers from slave-holding states fought with those from free states. With the emancipation of the slaves, the nation quickly continued its growth.

Rapid technological progress characterized the latter half of the nineteenth century and the twentieth century. Electricity, telephones, automobiles, airplanes, computers all had their beginnings in the United States. The country also made great contributions in the medical field. The economy's course can be described as a series of boom followed by short busts. The

greatest of the busts was the Great Depression in the early twentieth century when a third of the labor population was jobless.

The economy slowly worked off the excess inventory. The advent of the Second World War in 1941 mobilized the entire economy to provide arms and supplies for the military. The great industrial capacity of the United States led her and her allies to victories in the Second World War against the Axis powers and in the Cold War against the Soviet Union. With the fall of the Soviet Union in 1991, the United States became the only superpower in world affairs.

In the social field, the franchise was extended to women in 1920. In 1952 the use of race was abolished as a barrier to immigration. In 1964 the US government passed the Civil Rights Act that prohibited discrimination on the basis of race.

## Map of the USA



## Flag of the USA



## Geography

**Location:** North America, bordering both the North Atlantic Ocean and the North Pacific Ocean, between Canada and Mexico

**Geographic coordinates:** 38 00 N, 97 00 W

**Map references:** North America

**Area:**

*total:* 9,629,091 sq km

*land:* 9,158,960 sq km

*water:* 470,131 sq km

*note:* includes only the 50 states and District of Columbia

**Area - comparative:** about one-half the size of Russia; about three-tenths the size of Africa; about one-half the size of South America (or slightly larger than Brazil); slightly larger than China; about two and one-half times the size of Western Europe

**Land boundaries:**

*total:* 12,248 km

*border countries:* Canada 8,893 km (including 2,477 km with Alaska), Cuba 29 km (US Naval Base at Guantanamo Bay), Mexico 3,326 km

*note:* Guantanamo Naval Base is leased by the US and thus remains part of Cuba

**Coastline:** 19,924 km

**Climate:** mostly temperate, but tropical in Hawaii and Florida, arctic in Alaska, semiarid in the great plains west of the Mississippi River, and arid in the Great Basin of the southwest; low winter temperatures in the northwest are ameliorated occasionally in January and February by warm chinook winds from the eastern slopes of the Rocky Mountains

**Terrain:** vast central plain, mountains in west, hills and low mountains in east; rugged mountains and broad river valleys in Alaska; rugged, volcanic topography in Hawaii

**Elevation extremes:**

*lowest point:* Death Valley -86 m

*highest point:* Mount McKinley 6,194 m

**Natural resources:** coal, copper, lead, molybdenum, phosphates, uranium, bauxite, gold, iron, mercury, nickel, potash, silver, tungsten, zinc, petroleum, natural gas, timber

**Land use:**

*arable land:* 18%

*permanent crops:* 0%

*permanent pastures:* 25%

*forests and woodland:* 30%

*other:* 26% (2005 est.)

**Irrigated land:** 223,000 sq km (2005 est.)

**Natural hazards:** tsunamis, volcanoes, and earthquake activity around Pacific Basin; hurricanes along the Atlantic and Gulf of Mexico coasts; tornadoes in the midwest and southeast; mud slides in California; forest fires in the west; flooding; permafrost in northern Alaska, a major impediment to development

**Environment - current issues:** air pollution resulting in acid rain in both the US and Canada; the US is the largest single emitter of carbon dioxide from the burning of fossil fuels; water pollution from runoff of pesticides and fertilizers; very limited natural fresh water resources in much of the western part of the country require careful management; desertification

## People

**Population:** 307,212,673 (July 2009 est.)

**Age structure:**

*0-14 years:* 20.2%

*15-64 years:* 67.0%

*65 years and over:* 12.8% (2009 est.)

**Population growth rate:** 0.977% (2009 est.)

**Birth rate:** 13.83 births/1,000 population (2009 est.)

**Death rate:** 8.38 deaths/1,000 population (2009 est.)

**Net migration rate:** 4.32 migrant(s)/1,000 population (2009 est.)

**Sex ratio:**

*total population:* 0.96 male(s)/female (2009 est.)

**Infant mortality rate:** 6.22 deaths/1,000 live births (2009 est.)

**Life expectancy at birth:**

*total population:* 78.12 years

*male:* 75.65 years

*female:* 80.69 years (2009 est.)

**Total fertility rate:** 2.05 children born/woman (2009 est.)

**Nationality:**

*noun:* American(s)

*adjective:* American

**Ethnic groups:** white 79.96%, black 12.85%, Asian 4.43%, Amerindian 1.0% (2008)

*note:* a separate listing for Hispanic is not included because the US Census Bureau considers Hispanic to mean a person of Latin American descent (especially of Cuban, Mexican, or Puerto Rican origin) living in the US who may be of any race or ethnic group (white, black, Asian, etc.)

**Religions:** Protestant 52%, Roman Catholic 24%, Jewish 1.7%, Mormon 1.7%, Muslim 0.6%, other 3.2%, none 4%, unaffiliated 12% (2009)

**Languages:** English, Spanish (spoken by a sizable minority)

**Literacy:**

*definition:* age 15 and over can read and write

*total population:* 97%

## Government

**Country name:**

*conventional long form:* United States of America (United States)

*abbreviation:* US or USA

**Government type:** federal republic; strong democratic tradition

**Capital:** Washington, DC

**Administrative divisions:** 50 states and 1 district\*; Alabama, Alaska, Arizona, Arkansas, California, Colorado, Connecticut, Delaware, District of Columbia\*, Florida, Georgia, Hawaii, Idaho, Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Kansas, Kentucky, Louisiana, Maine, Maryland, Massachusetts, Michigan, Minnesota, Mississippi, Missouri, Montana, Nebraska, Nevada, New Hampshire, New Jersey, New Mexico, New York, North Carolina, North Dakota, Ohio, Oklahoma, Oregon, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, South Carolina, South Dakota, Tennessee, Texas, Utah, Vermont, Virginia, Washington, West Virginia, Wisconsin, Wyoming

**Dependent areas:** American Samoa, Baker Island, Guam, Howland Island, Jarvis Island, Johnston Atoll, Kingman Reef, Midway Islands, Navassa

Island, Northern Mariana Islands, Palmyra Atoll, Puerto Rico, Virgin Islands, Wake Island

*note:* from 18 July 1947 until 1 October 1994, the US administered the Trust Territory of the Pacific Islands, but recently entered into a new political relationship with all four political units: the Northern Mariana Islands is a commonwealth in political union with the US (effective 3 November 1986); Palau concluded a Compact of Free Association with the US (effective 1 October 1994); the Federated States of Micronesia signed a Compact of Free Association with the US (effective 3 November 1986); the Republic of the Marshall Islands signed a Compact of Free Association with the US (effective 21 October 1986)

**Independence:** 4 July 1776 (from Great Britain)

**National holiday:** Independence Day, 4 July (1776)

**Constitution:** 17 September 1787, effective 4 March 1789

**Legal system:** based on English common law; judicial review of legislative acts; accepts compulsory ICJ jurisdiction, with reservations

**Suffrage:** 18 years of age; universal

**Executive branch:**

*chief of state:* President Barack OBAMA (since 20 January 2009) and Vice President Joseph BIDEN. (since 20 January 2009); note - the president is both the chief of state and head of government

*cabinet:* Cabinet appointed by the president with Senate approval

*elections:* president and vice president elected on the same ticket by a college of representatives who are elected directly from each state; president and vice president serve four-year terms

**Legislative branch:** bicameral Congress consists of Senate (100 seats, one-third are renewed every two years; two members are elected from each state by popular vote to serve six-year terms) and House of Representatives (435 seats; members are directly elected by popular vote to serve two-year terms)

**Judicial branch:** Supreme Court (the nine justices are appointed for life by the president with confirmation by the Senate)

**Political parties:** Democratic Party; Republican Party; several other groups or parties of minor political significance

**Flag description:** thirteen equal horizontal stripes of red (top and bottom) alternating with white; there is a blue rectangle in the upper hoist-side corner bearing 50 small, white, five-pointed stars arranged in nine offset horizontal rows of six stars (top and bottom) alternating with rows of five stars; the 50 stars represent the 50 states, the 13 stripes represent the 13 original colonies; known as Old Glory; the design and colors have been the basis for a number of other flags, including Chile, Liberia, Malaysia, and Puerto Rico

## **Economy**

**Economy - overview:** The US has the largest and most technologically powerful economy in the world, with a per capita GDP of \$46,900. In this market-oriented economy, private individuals and business firms make most of the decisions, and the federal and state governments buy needed goods and services predominantly in the private marketplace. US business firms enjoy greater flexibility than their counterparts in Western Europe and Japan in decisions to expand capital plant, to lay off surplus workers, and to develop new products. At the same time, they face higher barriers to enter their rivals' home markets than foreign firms face entering US markets. US firms are at or near the forefront in technological advances, especially in computers and in medical, aerospace, and military equipment; their advantage has narrowed since the end of World War II. The onrush of technology largely explains the gradual development of a "two-tier labor market" in which those at the bottom lack the education and the professional/technical skills of those at the top and, more and more, fail to get comparable pay raises, health insurance coverage, and other benefits. Since 1975, practically all the gains in household income have gone to the top 20% of households. The war in March-April 2003 between a US-led coalition and Iraq, and the subsequent occupation of Iraq, required major shifts in national resources to the military. Hurricane Katrina caused extensive damage in the Gulf Coast region in August 2005, but had a small impact on overall GDP growth for the year. Soaring oil prices between 2005 and the first half of 2008 threatened inflation and unemployment, as higher gasoline prices ate into consumers' budgets. Imported oil accounts for about two-thirds of US consumption. Long-term problems include inadequate investment in economic infrastructure, rapidly rising medical and pension costs of an aging population, sizable trade and budget deficits, and stagnation of family income in the lower economic groups. The merchandise

trade deficit reached a record \$840 billion in 2008 before shrinking to \$450 billion in 2009. The global economic downturn, the sub-prime mortgage crisis, investment bank failures, falling home prices, and tight credit pushed the United States into a recession by mid-2008. GDP contracted till the third quarter of 2009, making this the deepest and longest downturn since the Great Depression. To help stabilize financial markets, the US Congress established a \$700 billion Troubled Asset Relief Program (TARP) in October 2008. The government used some of these funds to purchase equity in US banks and other industrial corporations. In January 2009 the US Congress passed and President Barack OBAMA signed a bill providing an additional \$787 billion fiscal stimulus to be used over 10 years - two-thirds on additional spending and one-third on tax cuts - to create jobs and to help the economy recover. Approximately two-thirds of these funds will have been injected into the economy by the end of 2010.

**GDP:** purchasing power parity - \$14.26 trillion (2009 est.)

**GDP - real growth rate:** -2.4% (2009 est.)

**GDP - per capita:** purchasing power parity - \$46,400 (2009 est.)

**GDP - composition by sector:**

*agriculture:* 1%

*industry:* 18%

*services:* 80% (2009)

**Population below poverty line:** 12.7% (2008 est.)

**Household income or consumption by percentage share:**

*lowest 10%:* 2%

*highest 10%:* 30% (2007)

**Inflation rate (consumer prices):** -0.7% (2009)

**Labor force:** 154.5 million (includes unemployed) (2009)

**Labor force - by occupation:** managerial and professional, technical 35.3%, sales and administrative support 24.8%, services 16.4%, manufacturing, mining, transportation, and crafts 22.5%, farming, forestry, and fishing 0.6% (2009)

**Unemployment rate:** 9.4% (2009)

**Industries:** leading industrial power in the world, highly diversified and technologically advanced; petroleum, steel, motor vehicles, aerospace, telecommunications, chemicals, electronics, food processing, consumer goods, lumber, mining

**Industrial production growth rate:** -5.5% (2009 est.)

**Agriculture - products:** wheat, other grains, corn, fruits, vegetables, cotton; beef, pork, poultry, dairy products; forest products; fish

**Exports:** \$994.7 billion (f.o.b., 2009 est.)

**Exports - commodities:** capital goods, automobiles, industrial supplies and raw materials, consumer goods, agricultural products

**Exports - partners:** Canada 20.1%, Mexico 11.7%, China 5.5%, Japan 5.1%, Germany 4.3%, UK 4.1% (2009)

**Imports:** \$1445 billion (c.i.f., 2009 est.)

**Imports - commodities:** crude oil and refined petroleum products, machinery, automobiles, consumer goods, industrial raw materials, food and beverages

**Imports - partners:** China 16.4%, Canada 15.7%, Mexico 10.1%, Japan 6.6%, Germany 4.6% (2009)

**Currency:** 1 United States dollar (US\$) = 100 cents

**Exchange rates:**

British pounds per US dollar: (2009), 0.6494 (2009), 0.5302 (2008), 0.4993 (2007), 0.5418 (2006), 0.5493 (2005)

Canadian dollars per US dollar: 1.1548 (2009), 1.0364 (2008), 1.0724 (2007), 1.1334 (2006), 1.2118 (2005)

Chinese yuan per US dollar: 6.8249 (2009), 6.9385 (2008), 7.61 (2007), 7.97 (2006), 8.1943 (2005)

euros per US dollar: 0.7338 (2009), 0.6827 (2008), 0.7345 (2007), 0.7964 (2006), 0.8041 (2005)

Japanese yen per US dollar: 94.5 (2009), 103.58 (2008), 117.99 (2007), 116.18 (2006) 110.22 (2005)

## **Communications**

**Telephones - main lines in use:** 150 million (2008)

**Telephones - mobile cellular:** 270 million (2008)

## **Transportation**

**Railways:**

*total:* 226,000 km mainline routes (nongovernment owned) (2008)

**Highways:**

*total:* 6,465,227 km

*paved*: 4,209,757 km (including 75,009 km of expressways)

**Waterways:** 41,009 km of navigable inland channels, exclusive of the Great Lakes

**Ports and harbors:** Anchorage, Baltimore, Boston, Charleston, Chicago, Duluth, Hampton Roads, Honolulu, Houston, Jacksonville, Los Angeles, New Orleans, New York, Philadelphia, Port Canaveral, Portland (Oregon), Prudhoe Bay, San Francisco, Savannah, Seattle, Tampa, Toledo

**Airports:** 15,095 (2009 est.)

**Airports - with paved runways:**

*total*: 5,174

## Websites

[travel.yahoo.com/t/North\\_America/United\\_States/](http://travel.yahoo.com/t/North_America/United_States/)

[www.50states.com](http://www.50states.com)

<http://discovernd.com/visiting/snapshot.html>

## Recipes

### Pancake

An American favorite is a fluffy hot pancakes with warm maple syrup. This version is extra nutritious with whole-grain oats and toasted pecans, and is made in a nonstick skillet lightly brushed with oil.

### Ingredients

1/2	cup	all-purpose flour
1	teaspoon	baking soda
2	cups	buttermilk
-	-	confectioners' sugar
1/4 to 1/2	teaspoon	ground cinnamon
2	-	large eggs
1	cup	maple or maple-flavor syrup
1 3-ounce	can	pecans
1 1/2	cups	quick-cooking oats, uncooked
1	tablespoon	salad oil
1/2	teaspoon	salt
grapes	and	strawberries for garnish

### Preparation

- 1 Estimated cooking time: 40 minutes - In nonstick 12-inch skillet over medium-high heat, cook pecans until golden brown. Cool pecans slightly; coarsely chop.
- 2 In large bowl, combine buttermilk, oats, flour, baking soda, salt, eggs, and 1-tablespoon confectioners' sugar and stir just until flour is moistened; stir in toasted pecans.
- 3 Over medium heat, heat same skillet until hot; brush lightly with salad oil. Pour batter by 1/4 cups into hot skillet, making 2 or 3 pancakes at a time. Cook until tops are bubbly and bubbles burst; edges will look dry. With pancake turner, turn and cook until undersides are golden; place on warm platter; keep warm. Repeat until all batter is used, brushing skillet with more salad oil if necessary.
- 4 In small saucepan over medium heat, heat maple syrup until very warm. In cup, mix cinnamon with 1-tablespoon confectioners' sugar. Sprinkle pancakes with cinnamon-sugar; serve with warm maple syrup. Garnish platter with fruit.

## **Activities**

### **Statue of Liberty Torch**

#### Materials Needed

Inside roll of a paper towel roll.

Construction paper – red and white

Paper cup

Safety Scissors

#### Instructions

Cut a hole at bottom of the paper cup

Push paper towel roll through it

Cut 4 – 5 inch strips of paper with tapered ends

Glue to the top of the tube