

# THINKING LIKE A GEOGRAPHER

Studying geography helps you develop ways of thinking about the world. There are four geographic thinking concepts that are unique to geographic learning: interrelationships, spatial significance, geographic perspective, patterns and trends. You can explore the Kayapo case study by examining it through the lens of each thinking concept.

## INTERRELATIONSHIPS

When geographers look at the significance of a place, they also look at **interrelationships**. Interrelationships are the connections between parts in one system, or between two systems, such as between the natural environment and human environments.

Geographers examine interrelationships by asking

- What characteristics do the physical and human environments in a specific area have?
- How are these systems connected?

- How do people change the physical environment?
- How do these connections affect the lives of people living in a specific area?

The Kayapo people have focused on maintaining a traditional lifestyle of hunting and fishing. They connect with the land and try not to change it. The chiefs appreciate the importance of land ownership and use twenty-first century technology to try to protect it. However, a planned dam development is threatening their environment and way of life.

## SPATIAL SIGNIFICANCE

*Spatial* refers to something that exists or occurs in a space. Spatial significance relates specifically to where places are located on the planet. To indicate where a place is, geographers talk about its

- **absolute location:** the precise position of a place; for example, the Kayapo territories are at latitude 7.98°S, longitude 53.03°W
- **relative location:** where a location is compared to other places around it; for example, the Kayapo territories are south of the Amazon River Basin

*Significance* means importance. So **spatial significance** can be defined as the importance of a place and those things that are around it.

In the Kayapo case study, we can use maps to locate where the Kayapo people live. Latitude and longitude can give us the precise location of the Kayapo territories. But, this place is also important to others because it will help them meet their energy needs. People value or see the significance differently.

The case study tells us some precise details about the physical characteristics of the area, such as its location in the Amazon River Basin.

## GEOGRAPHIC PERSPECTIVE

Geographers study a wide range of issues facing people and the planet today. Every issue has supporters and opponents that reflect environmental, political, economic, and social values. It is important to know and examine all **perspectives**, or points of view, in order to determine a plan of action to resolve the issue. This way, we understand how our plan will affect others.

These various perspectives are based on the beliefs and value systems of the people and groups involved. Geographers need to listen to what people say about a specific problem and consider the following values:

- **environmental:** related to the use of the natural world
- **political:** related to decisions made by a governing body
- **economic:** related to opportunities to make money in order to meet needs and address wants
- **cultural/social:** related to protection of a society

In the Kayapo case study, the government of Brazil believes that the dam is essential to develop industries. That is an economic perspective. It may also be a political perspective as the government's supporters want the development. However, for the Kayapo, their way of life is being threatened. They also agree with the environmentalists who say that building dams will have a severe impact on the environment. Understanding different perspectives can give geographers insight into how to develop alternative solutions.

## PATTERNS AND TRENDS

Once we know about a specific place, we want to compare its characteristics with characteristics of other places. That helps us to determine similarities and differences—that is, whether there are any patterns.

**Patterns** are arrangements or similarities in characteristics. **Trends** are patterns in how something is changing or developing. As you learn about the characteristics of the natural environment, think about the patterns that exist and ask questions about them, such as the following:

- What characteristics are similar or repeat in different places?
- What causes these patterns?
- Do all places have similar patterns?
- What has happened over time in particular places?
- What might happen in the future?
- How do these patterns affect the lives of people living there?

This will help you expand your understanding of the world around you.

If we look at a map of the Kayapo territory, such as the one on page 10, we might see a pattern of forests and deforestation. The case study tells us that the Kayapo have maintained a traditional lifestyle and have protected their land from development. It also tells us that the chiefs are concerned about development that is going on around them. We could find out how development has affected similar communities around the world. Then we could try to draw some conclusions about what might happen to the Kayapo in the future.