Section 1

MAIN IDEAS
1. Mexico’s physical features include plateaus, mountains, and coastal lowlands.
2. Mexico’s climate and vegetation include deserts, tropical forests, and cool highlands.
3. Key natural resources in Mexico include oil, silver, gold, and scenic landscapes.

Key Terms and Places
- Río Bravo: Rio Grande, forms part of Mexico’s border with the U.S.
- peninsula: piece of land surrounded on three sides by water
- Baja California: peninsula stretching from northern Mexico into the Pacific Ocean
- Gulf of Mexico: body of water that forms Mexico’s eastern border
- Yucatán Peninsula: land separating the Gulf of Mexico from the Caribbean Sea
- Sierra Madre: “mother range” made up of three mountain ranges in Mexico

Section Summary
PHYSICAL FEATURES
Mexico shares a long border with the United States. Part of this border is formed by a river called the Río Bravo, known as the Rio Grande in the United States. Mexico’s western border is the Pacific Ocean, where a long peninsula called Baja California stretches south from northern Mexico. In the east, the Yucatán Peninsula separates the Gulf of Mexico from the Caribbean Sea.

The interior of Mexico is mostly the high, rugged Mexican Plateau, which rises in the west to the Sierra Madre Occidental. In the east it meets the Sierra Madre Oriental. Sierra Madre means “mother range.” The country’s capital, Mexico City, lies at the southern end of the plateau in the Valley of Mexico. The city has earthquakes, and to the south there are active volcanoes.

Underline the names of Mexico’s two peninsulas.

Where is Mexico City located?
From the central highlands, the land slopes down to Mexico’s sunny beaches. In the east the Gulf coastal plain is wide, and there are many farms.

The Yucatán Peninsula is mostly flat. The limestone rock there has eroded to form caves and steep depressions called sinkholes, many of which are filled with water.

**CLIMATE AND VEGETATION**

Mexico has many climates with different types of vegetation. The mountains and plateaus are cool, and freezing temperatures can reach all the way to Mexico City. The mountain valleys are mild, and the southern coast is also pleasant. Summer rains support tropical rain forests, where animals such as jaguars, monkeys, and anteaters live. The Yucatán Peninsula is hot and dry, supporting only scrub forests. The north is also dry, much of it covered by the Sonoran and Chihuahuan deserts.

**NATURAL RESOURCES**

Oil is an important resource. Mexico sells a lot of oil to the United States. Before oil was discovered, minerals were the most valuable resource. Today Mexico mines more silver than any other country. Copper, lead, gold, and zinc are also mined.

Another important resource is water. Unfortunately, this resource is scarce in parts of Mexico, especially the north. However, the water surrounding Mexico draws many tourists to the country’s scenic beaches.

**CHALLENGE ACTIVITY**

**Critical Thinking: Making Predictions** Write a paragraph making a prediction about which of Mexico’s resources will be most important in Mexico’s future. Support your prediction with information you learned in the section.
**DIRECTIONS** On the line provided before each statement, write T if a statement is true and F if a statement is false. If the statement is false, write the term that would make the statement correct on the line after each sentence.

____ 1. In the Yucatán Peninsula, erosion of limestone rock has created many caves and sinkholes.

____ 2. The climate in southern Mexico is mostly warm and humid, or humid peninsula.

____ 3. Baja California is a narrow plateau that stretches into the Pacific Ocean.

____ 4. Petroleum is one of Mexico’s most important natural resources.

____ 5. The Gulf of Mexico is Mexico’s eastern border.

**DIRECTIONS** Write three words or phrases that describe the term.

6. peninsula ________________________________________________________

7. Río Bravo ________________________________________________________

8. plateau __________________________________________________________

9. Sierra Madre _____________________________________________________

10. Yucatán Peninsula _____________________________________________