In this unit, you will learn about the first Americans—the American Indian peoples who were here when the first Europeans arrived. You will also learn about the Europeans who colonized North America. The British colonies settled along the Atlantic coast would become the first 13 states in the nation.

Political divisions like colonies and states did not exist before the Europeans arrived. Each American Indian group occupied a territory that had no formal boundaries. As the map on the opposite page shows, the continent’s physical geography varies greatly. American Indians lived in harmony with the land. Their different environments gave them different ways of life.

Contact with European colonists changed those ways of life. The map below shows where European nations claimed land in North America. To satisfy French demand for furs, American Indians in regions claimed by France began to hunt more. The Spanish tried to enslave Indians and, along with the English, wanted their land.
Increased hunting, flight from slavery, and loss of land pushed some Indian groups into territory occupied by other Indians. As the British colonies became a nation, and as that nation grew, this population shift continued. Eventually, almost no Indian lands remained. However, the names of many places in North America are reminders of those lands. The Ohio, Mississippi, and Missouri rivers get their names from American Indian words, as do about half the states.

Analyze the maps in “Setting the State” for Unit 1 in your book (pages 2 & 3.) Read the passage provided. Then answer the following questions.

1. The colonies that became the original United States were part of which European nation’s land claims?

2. What demands did colonists in this region place on the American Indians who lived there?

3. How did involvement with Europeans in the Great Lakes region change how American Indians lived in that region?

4. In areas where physical geography made farming more difficult for British colonists, what else do you think they might have done for a living?

5. Suppose you are a settler in the British colonies. You want to settle on land where the Ohio River meets the Mississippi River. What physical feature do you have to cross to reach that area?

6. Traveling over land, what might be a good route?

7. Look at the map of physical features of North America in your book. Suppose you were traveling west from the Mississippi River to the Pacific Coast. In terms of elevation, describe the land on your route westward.

8. Where might farming be easiest in this western region? Why?