

THE LITTLE "CLOSETS" OF EUROPE

Learning about Directions
N NE E SE S SW W NW

Where is it more fun to play hide-and-seek? In one big empty room, or in a house with many little rooms and closets?

That is how it was in history!

Look at Africa on a map. It is like a big balloon, smooth and round.

Europe is more like an old glove, with many fingers sticking out.

OR . . . Africa is basically one big room, like a basketball gymnasium.

Europe is more like a bedroom that has many little closets.

People could "hide" (live) on a **peninsula** until they got strong. Then they used ships to attack other people.

The letters on this map name some of those "peninsula people."



G. Ancient Greeks. They had a **democracy**. They voted for their leader. They built the Parthenon. Their peninsula is southeast of the "central hall" of Europe.

R. Romans. They built long roads and water-carrying **aqueducts**. They had **gladiators**. Circle their direction from the central hall: N NE E SE S SW W NW

P and **S.** Picts and Scots. "Pict" means "painted people" (origin of the word "picture"!.) They successfully resisted the Roman Empire. Their land is now called Scotland. Circle their direction from the central hall: N NE E SE S SW W NW

V. Vikings. Their **long ships** could travel on the ocean. They raided other people. Circle their direction from the central hall: N NE E SE S SW W NW

N. The Normans. These people crossed the English Channel and captured England. Circle their direction from the central hall: N NE E SE S SW W NW

I. Iberians (also called Spanish and Portuguese). **Columbus** sailed from Spain. The **ancestors** of many people in South America came from this area. Circle their direction from the central hall: N NE E SE S SW W NW

Important Peninsulas in European History

A **peninsula** is a narrow finger of land surrounded by water on three sides. An army can usually attack a peninsula from only one direction. As a result, it is much easier to defend a country that is located on a peninsula (unless its enemy also has a powerful navy).

"Peninsularity," of course, is not the only important geographic fact - for example, latitude is also important.

A peninsula that juts north from Europe into the Arctic Ocean will be much colder than one that juts south into the warm Mediterranean Sea.

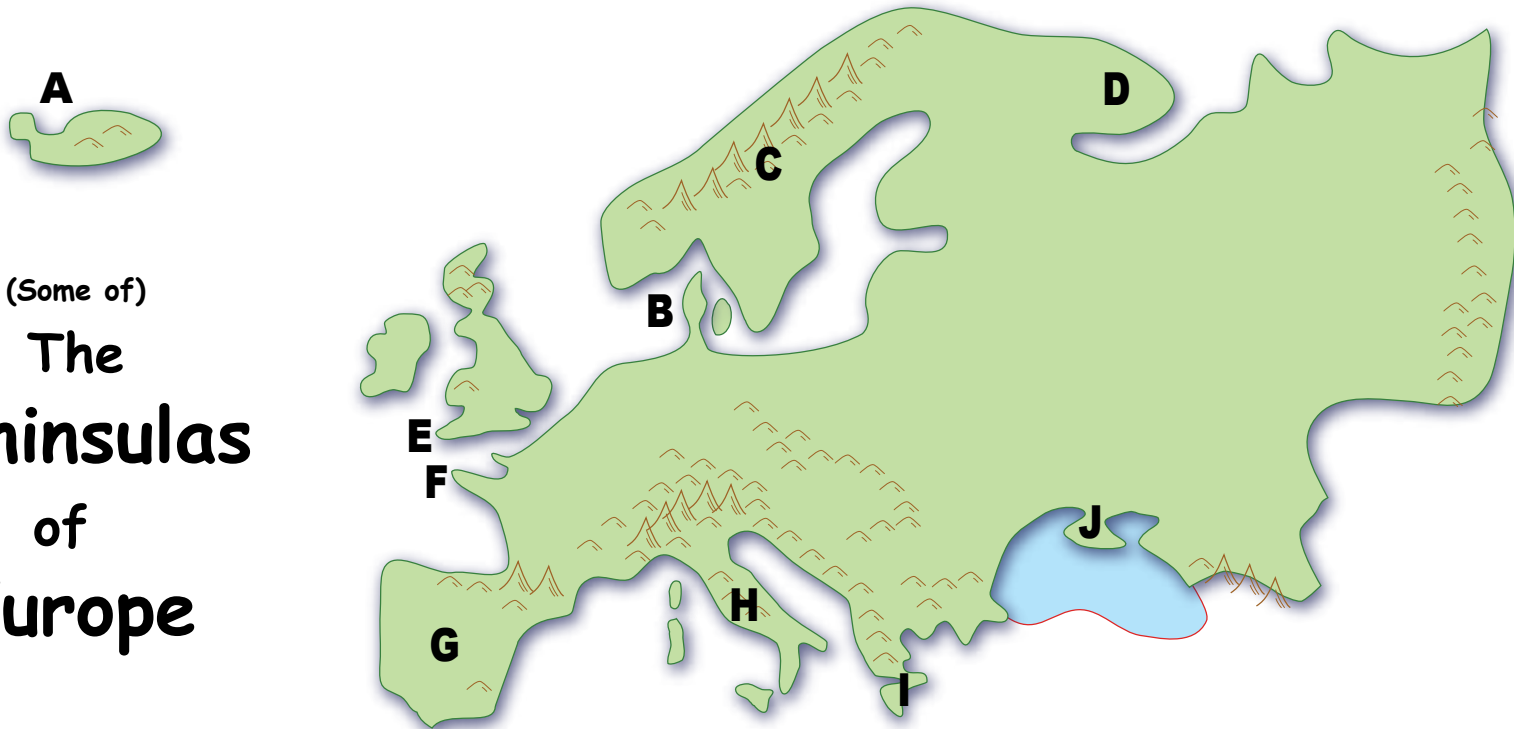
Put the letter of each peninsula name on the line next to the paragraph that best describes it.

- A** Athens, Greece
- C** Cornwall
- D** Denmark, also called Jutland
- L** Lisbon, Portugal
- N** Norman Peninsula (Normandy)
- R** Rome, Italy
- W** Warsaw, Poland



- ___ 1. This city-state on a peninsula in southeastern Europe had the world's first democracy. At a place called Thermopylae in 480 BCE, a small group of Spartans were able to delay a much larger Persian army that tried to invade the Greek peninsula.
- ___ 2. This city started on a long peninsula that looks like a leg sticking south from Europe. It became the capital of an empire that included much of Europe and north Africa. The trading network of this empire stretched from Spain to China. In 122 CE, Emperor Hadrian ordered a wall built across Britain (B) to protect the empire.
- ___ 3. This north European peninsula was the home area of the Vikings. The Vikings invaded Britain in 793 CE and later raided all around Europe. In their long ships, they sailed as far as North Africa, Greenland, and the coast of North America.
- ___ 4. A combined army from France under a Norman Prince called William the Conqueror crossed the English Channel and defeated a British army at Hastings in 1066. This invasion is one reason why English has a large number of French words in it. Later, in World War II, the Allied army landed on the beaches of this peninsula.
- ___ 5. This port on the west coast of a large peninsula was the home of Prince Henry the Navigator. Explorers from the two countries on this "Iberian" peninsula, sailed across the ocean and claimed colonies in the Americas as well as Africa.
- ___ 6. This small peninsula sticking out into the Atlantic from a large island became important way back before the Common Era (BCE), because people could find tin in the ground there. Tin plus copper makes bronze, the main metal before iron.
- ___ 7. This city on a plain in northeastern Europe did not have the advantage of location on an easy-to-defend peninsula. As a result, it was conquered by many enemies, including Huns, Vikings, Mongols, German Nazis, and the Soviet Union.

(Some of)
**The
Peninsulas
of
Europe**



- ___ 1. My name is **Italy**. I look like a leg sticking out of southern Europe. The Roman Empire started on me.
- ___ 2. My name is **Scandinavia**. I am a big peninsula. My mountain "backbone" is the border between Norway and Sweden.
- ___ 3. My name is **Greece**. I am a small peninsula in southeastern Europe. Some people say I am where democracy started.
- ___ 4. My name is **Denmark**. I am a small peninsula that points north toward Scandinavia. I was the home of the Vikings.
- ___ 5. My name is **Iberia**. I am a big square peninsula in southwestern Europe. Spain and Portugal are on me.
- ___ 6. My name is **Kola**. I am a round peninsula and I point east. I am really cold. A Russian submarine base is near me.
- ___ 7. My name is **Cornwall**. I am a small peninsula pointing west from a large island. The Romans had a tin mine on me.
- ___ 8. My name is **Crimea**. I point into the Black Sea in southeastern Europe. Many important battles were fought on me.
- ___ 9. My name is **Normandy and Brittany** - two peninsulas pointing west from France. One was famous in World War II.
- ___ X. My name is **Iceland**. I am a cold island that is made out of volcanoes. I also have glaciers . . . and some peninsulas!

Teacher's Guide: **European Peninsulas (The Little Closets of Europe)**

Overview: One goal of this lesson is to review cardinal and intermediate directions. The basic task is to identify the directions from central Europe to various peninsulas that were important in history. The lesson is NOT about memorizing facts about those peninsulas, but mentioning the facts now may make it more likely that students will learn them better later, when studying history.

Grade: 3-8, review in higher
Related Discipline: Mapping
CC Standard: precise language
Time: ½ to 1 class period

Setup: Ask students where it is more fun to play hide-and-seek – in one big empty room, or in a house or apartment that has many small rooms and closets.

Historic background: This, in fact, is a big part of the story of European history. Europe is less than one third the size of Africa, but it has many bays and peninsulas. In fact, Europe has more miles of coastline than Africa, Australia, and South America put together. Early in history, people were able to “hide” on a small peninsula (easy to defend, because it is like a room with only one door). Later, when people had invented seaworthy ships, they could start from a sheltered bay and venture forth to attack other people – a story that was repeated many times, starting with the Greeks and Romans and continuing with the Picts, Scots, Vikings, Normans, Dutch, and Iberians (Spanish and Portuguese). It's also no accident that three of the most famous military encounters in history occurred on European peninsulas during the world wars – Gallipoli, Anzio, and Normandy.

Procedure: The activity can be run as a teacher-led read-aloud with younger children or as a reading and writing activity with older ones. With Version 1, remember to keep the focus on directions – the historic details are just there to add interest and “plant the seed” for future history classes. Versions 2 and 3 provide more historic detail for students in higher grades. One can also link this activity with stories or videos about Greeks at Thermopylae, Hannibal crossing the Alps, Vikings, Columbus, etc.

Answers: Putting the Compass Rose roughly in southern Germany or western Austria gives us simple directions to several peninsulas with outsized roles in European history – Greece to southeast, Rome to south, Scotland northeast, Vikings almost due north in Jutland (Denmark) and southern Sweden, Normans to the west, and Spain and Portugal far to the southwest.

Debrief: Remember, Version 1 is about directions, not memorizing a lot of facts about European history. One does not, therefore, have to “cover” all the people mentioned. Choose people you can tell good stories about, tell the stories, and link them to the direction lesson.

Vocabulary: direction cardinal intermediate north northeast east southeast etc.

Extension: If your focus is on direction-words, it is easy to make a parallel activity that uses Native American color names – doing an image search with keywords “Native, American, direction, color” will get a large number of sites. Two things strike me when I look at these images:

First, many nations had stories about colors and directions, and most used the same four colors (red, black, yellow, white, all easy to make with rock and plant dyes). Direction stories were important parts of their oral traditions, but they did NOT all assign the same colors to the same directions. A visit to the spectacular Native American museum in Washington, DC, leads to the same conclusion. To help persuade you to schedule this on your visit to the capital, see

<http://www.americanindiannews.org/2009/10/museum-celebrates-20th-anniversary-reaches-for-the-future/>

Second, many artists seem to claim “authentic” Indian traditions as a selling point for their art.

Somewhere in all this is a useful message about authenticity in art, which is especially interesting in view of the fact that much of the art is of high quality and would be attractive even without the claims. This, of course, is a topic for discussion among philosophy majors, postmodernist art critics, and sophomores of all ages, not elementary-school students! Still, it is a caution about telling some kinds of “direction-stories” in a way that primary-school students might take as literally true.