

# Landscape Literacy

## Avocabo Word List 8



ARABLE, ARCHIPELAGO,  
BAYOU, CALDERA, ECUMENE,  
ESCARPMENT, ESTUARY, FEN,  
FLOODPLAIN, ISTHMUS,  
KARST, MESA, PASTURE,  
PENINSULA, PLATEAU,  
SAVANNA, STEPPE, SUBURBIA,  
TAIGA, TUNDRA

### Why Landscape Literacy?

Winston Churchill once said of our relations with architecture - that while we shape our buildings, they in turn shape us. What is demonstrably true of one component of the landscape is surely that much truer of our visible surroundings as a whole. How else do we account for the centrality of scenery as a subject of the art of painting down through the ages? How else can we explain the meticulous attention paid to setting in most of the great and not so great works of literature? How else to make sense of the location of our settlements, our patterns of land use as well as our individual and collective paths of travel to work, to shop, to play? If we wish to understand any of these and a myriad of other instances of our links with the landscapes we live in, then, like a book or a painting or a map, we must learn to read their meanings. This, in turn, begins with building a vocabulary of terms coined to identify, with some precision, the characteristic form of the diverse works of nature and humankind, which constitute the surface of the earth. By the time you complete the exercises in this unit, you will have laid a firm foundation for enlightening yourself and others concerning the mysteries of the landscapes, real or imagined, you encounter in the future.

### Exercise 8-1:

For each of the following list words, circle or highlight the one alternative provided that is its closest match in meaning.

#### 1. *arable*

- a. cultivatable    b. field    c. meadow

#### 2. *archipelago*

- a. islands    b. sea monster    c. stone circle

#### 3. *bayou*

- a. delta    b. distributary    c. sound

#### 4. *caldera*

- a. crater    b. sinkhole    c. vent

#### 5. *ecumene*

- a. household    b. non-denominational  
c. settlement

#### 6. *escarpment*

- a. slope    b. mountain    c. thicket

#### 7. *estuary*

- a. rivermouth    b. strait    c. tidal

#### 8. *fen*

- a. money    b. plateau    c. wetland

#### 9. *floodplain*

- a. levee    b. spate    c. valley

#### 10. *isthmus*

- a. atoll    b. land bridge    c. summit

#### 11. *karst*

*Area of irregular:*

- a. wetness    b. limestone    c. weathering

#### 12. *mesa*

- a. cornfield    b. hill    c. table

#### 13. *pasture*

*A field suitable for:*

- a. grazing    b. retirement    c. silage

#### 14. *peninsula*

- a. beach    b. narrows    c. promontory

#### 15. *plateau*

- a. high plain    b. prairie    c. platform

#### 16. *savanna*

- a. fruit orchard    b. grassy plain    c. coral reef

17. *steppe*

- a. ice mass      b. prairie      c. stair-like slope

18. *suburbia*

- a. edge-city      b. mall      c. subdivision

19. *taiga*

- a. evergreen forest      b. deciduous trees  
c. muskeg

20. *tundra*

- a. treeless Arctic region      b. Arctic icecap mass  
c. sandy desert

### Exercise 8-2: Discriminating Appropriate / Inappropriate Usage

Indicate whether the sentences below use the list word correctly  or incorrectly  by circling or highlighting the appropriate icon. You will find explanations for incorrect usage in the answer portion of this workbook.

1. Most farms in southern Ontario are mixed farms, which is to say they raise both animals and crops. Acreage devoted to the latter is known as **arable** land which, in this part of the world, is given over, typically, to the production of corn.

2. The great Russian writer, Aleksandr I. Solzhenitsyn, set a book in the repressive labour camp system of the Stalin period in the Soviet Union which he called The Gulag Archipelago. Solzhenitsyn's metaphorical use of the term, **archipelago**, in the title of this novel was most appropriate given that the geographical distribution of these camps bore a startling resemblance to a sea with many islands. The sea was the vast stretch of boreal forest extending through eleven time zones in the far north of the country. The islands were the hundreds of prison camps strewn across this wilderness landscape.

3. To most North Americans, the term **bayou** conjures up images of alligator-infested swamps, shrimp boats, catfish, Cajun music, corrupt parish politics, and the city known as 'The Big Easy'.

4. The Nickel Belt centred on Sudbury is a good example of **caldera**, a natural landscape feature thought to have been formed as a result of an ancient asteroid colliding with the earth.

5. **Ecumene** is a word of Ancient Greek origin and refers to the settled or inhabited zone of a region, country or continent.

6. The long ridge running more or less uninterrupted from Queenston to Tobermory in southern Ontario is perhaps the finest example of an **escarpment** anywhere in the world. It is certainly the most striking topographic feature in a region otherwise characterized by rather unspectacular scenery.

7. The distinguishing feature of a river's **estuary** is its tidal nature.

8. A **fen** is a former wetland which has been artificially drained for agricultural use.

9. All but two of the six centres of ancient civilization came into being in and around the **floodplain** of a major river. These were the Tigris-Euphrates, the Nile, the Indus and the Hwang Ho.

10. One of John Le Carré's recent books, The Tailor of Panama, is set in the most strategically important part of the **isthmus** connecting the North and South American continents.

11. You know you're in **karst** country when your field trip guide starts pointing out features called moraines, kames, eskers and outwash fans.

12. Watch an old western movie starring somebody like John Wayne or Gary Cooper and you're sure to see many a **mesa** in the background.

13. Québec farmers produce a disproportionate fraction of Canada's output of dairy goods. It's not surprising then that so much of the St. Lawrence River valley is given over to green grassy **pasture**.

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☑ ☒ 14. Southern Ontario could be described geographically as a *peninsula* of peninsulas. It is, after all, surrounded by water on three sides - Georgian Bay on the north; Lakes Huron, St. Clair and the Detroit River to the west; and on the southern flank, Lakes Erie and Ontario. And look at the bits that stick out like Bruce County and the Region of Niagara.

☑ ☒ 15. If you're travelling through high country but the landscape is flat chances are you're on a *plateau*.

☑ ☒ 16. The tropical equivalent of the prairies, the *savanna* lands of Africa are today the last remaining refuge of many of our favourite wild animals - lions, elephants, giraffes, zebras etc. And, if the physical anthropologists are correct, they are the first home of humankind also.

☑ ☒ 17. From the perspective of the American government, the Russian President Putin's endorsement of the War against Terrorism in Afghanistan and elsewhere must clearly be seen as a *steppe* in the right direction as far as relations between the two countries are concerned.

☑ ☒ 18. Today, most Canadians are residents of neither cities nor the countryside. They are instead creatures of that much reviled habitat called *suburbia*.

☑ ☒ 19. The best place to observe the myriad life forms of the tropical forest biome known as the *taiga* is Amazonia.

☑ ☒ 20. The circumpolar *tundra* biome is perhaps the world's only climatic desert where in the summertime it is constantly wet underfoot.

**Exercise 8-3: Fill in the Blanks**

Complete each of the following statements by filling in the blanks with the most appropriate term selected from the word list.

1. Once the road was built on the esker which formed an \_\_\_\_\_ snaking its way across the lake-strewn landscape, the journey to the cottage took about half an hour less.

2. Madeleine developed a taste for Cajun cooking through watching her favourite chef from a Louisiana \_\_\_\_\_ do his thing on the Food Channel.

3. There is often a connection between environment and war. This much is clear in the case of the Eurasian grassland or \_\_\_\_\_ home of the domesticated horse and the cavalry charge.

4. Flying in to anywhere in the British Isles for the first time, North Americans are usually struck by the extraordinary emerald shade of the countryside. This of course is a function of the damp, mild weather which so typifies the region and which has led to the predominance of animal husbandry and its associated \_\_\_\_\_ lands in the rural economy.

5. Looking for an example of a country that is an \_\_\_\_\_? Then get out an atlas and flip through it till you come to The Bahamas, in the Americas; Greece, in Europe; or Indonesia, The Philippines and Japan in Asia.

6. If you're into spelunking, then your favourite places will be those pockmarked with the diagnostic features of \_\_\_\_\_ country - namely - disappearing surface drainage, sinkholes, stalactites, stalagmites and the like.

7. The asymmetrical form of the \_\_\_\_\_, with one very steep slope and another much gentler incline makes this feature an ideal defensive position in time of war. Not an impregnable position, however, as the case of the Canadian army's victory over a well entrenched German force in 1917 at Vimy Ridge clearly illustrates.

The longest place name in Canada is this Newfoundland community:

**Cape St. George-Petit Jardin-Grand Jardin-De Grau-Marches Point-Loretto** (66 characters!)

8. The \_\_\_\_\_ biome is to be found in tropical climates. In the absence of human occupation, various and sundry species of grass constitute the predominant land cover. The scarcity of trees in these grasslands reflects seasonal rainfall deficits as well as the prevalence of the agency of fire.
9. The existence of a \_\_\_\_\_, a collapsed volcanic crater, may be taken as evidence of a clear and present danger of potentially deadly and damaging explosive volcanic eruption in the area in question.
10. If you live on a \_\_\_\_\_ chances are you will experience the climatically ameliorating effects of its bordering water bodies. The geographical distribution of Ontario's wine grape production in Niagara, Point Pelee and Prince Edward County is proof positive of this assertion.
11. A \_\_\_\_\_ is one of the most hazardous places on the planet to locate. Yet because of the fertility of its soils, the easy availability of water and the abundant supply of flat land for building, it is among the most densely developed and settled types of landforms in the world.
12. The type of natural plant cover which typifies the \_\_\_\_\_ biome, found at high latitudes beyond the tree-line, is morphologically identical to, but genetically different from, that found at high altitudes above the tree line.
13. A butte is a landform which in an earlier stage of its development is known as a \_\_\_\_\_.
14. It's the land that's ploughed and harrowed and watered and fertilized and planted and weeded and harvested, that we call \_\_\_\_\_.
15. The Russian sable fur monopoly is no accident given that country's near monopoly of \_\_\_\_\_, the creature's primary habitat.
16. A number of classic English murder mysteries have a chase scene through a foggy \_\_\_\_\_ where the villain gets his comeuppance by falling into quicksand.
17. Of all the world's very high altitude plains none is higher, more isolated nor more strategically important than the Tibetan \_\_\_\_\_.
18. By preserving the Oak Ridges moraine in perpetuity, the Ontario government has struck a blow against the seemingly unstoppable advance of low density urban sprawl that distinguishes the landscapes of \_\_\_\_\_.
19. The waters and mudflats of an \_\_\_\_\_ are nutrient rich in the extreme. This makes it a favoured habitat for myriad species of crustaceans and birds for example. As it is also an attractive environment to people for many purposes, controversy over its state of ecological health is a common phenomenon the world over.
20. Glance at a map of the Canadian \_\_\_\_\_ and it is immediately apparent from its fragmented pattern why national unity is such a difficult thing to achieve in this country.

#### ***Exercise 8-4: Research***

**5.4.1** If you are still not sure of the meaning of any of the list words in this unit, then get out your dictionary and look them up. If they are not to be found there, try looking for them in specialized reference sources - on and/or off-line - from the field of Geography.

**5.4.2** Research the meaning of any *three* of the *six* additional Landscape terms provided below. Show you have mastered the meaning of these terms by using them correctly in a sentence of your own making.

#### ***Supplementary Word List***

CANYON, CHOKE POINT, EPICENTRE, GORGE, MEGALOPOLIS, TOPOGRAPHY

**Exercise 8-6: Reading**

**“May the force of office and banking towers be with you” by William Thorsell**

And where do we find solace? Elizabeth knew where I would be within two hours of returning to Toronto on that luminescent Sunday after the infamous events in New York, Washington and Pennsylvania. I zoomed up the hills north of the city to the eternally comforting embrace of the meadow and the woods and the sky. And that is where we hung out for a time, squirrelling away packs of carrot and rutabaga seeds in our paranoia about what might go wrong - more wrong.

We had our land. We had our woods. We had our water. And the market value of rural assets was rising ... after the horrors of 9/11 in New York, which had made a bad thing of density and interdependence. Anthrax only drove the point home.

And so we found solace in the opposite of Manhattan in nature - until last week, when solace came from a more authoritative source: its kin.

It was one of those tender autumn days in Toronto before a brawling Alberta Clipper winged into town and knocked our assumptions about the placid weather on its head ... We were standing at King and Bay, which mirrors in its modest way the precinct around New York's World Trade Center. And there it was.

The most beautiful and serene public room in Toronto sits at that corner - the main banking hall of the Toronto-Dominion Centre. It was designed by Mies van der Rohe as part of the complex that includes elegant, muscular black towers for offices, and the most successful urban square in the city facing onto Wellington Street.

The one-storey banking hall is a masterpiece of light and space, perfectly proportioned and balanced across an enormous column-free span. The granites, marbles and woods that create a sublime palette of textures and hues, exquisitely knit together. Still placed on the counters where Mies said they should stay are goldfish-bowl flower vases, filled with bright yellow blooms. The room is a triumph of discipline and taste that make for a soft and gentle beauty.

Standing in the square outside, you can see the CN Tower tightly framed by the verticals of Mies's wonderful towers. To the east rises the shimmering stainless steel of I. M.

Pei's Commerce Court, a confident foil to the pride of Mies's black.

Here are the two greatest gifts from the private sector to the public benefit in downtown Toronto - structures of grace and power created by financial institutions in the form of office towers and banking halls.

Just such facilities were the targets in New York, and these in Toronto give solace, not only because of their excellence, but because of their kinship to what the terrorists would destroy. They are unrepentant expressions of freedom in thought and commerce, innovation in art and faith in progress.

One block south, slicing through the unremarkable BCE Place office complex, is the other sustaining public space in Toronto's financial core - the great court designed by Santiago Calatrava. It is ebullient in the way that Mies van der Rohe's TD banking hall is serene - coherently. If you meditate with Mies, you celebrate with Calatrava, whose white light commercial cathedral contains a lively market for food and drink. Here again, we embrace precisely what the terrorists would destroy in an environment of frank capitalist pride. Openness to change. Individuality. Interest in diversity. Faith in the future.

The flight to the countryside for solace was instinctual and genuine, but the solace available in the heart of the financial district offers much more hope. It testifies to the wonderful core values of our culture, compared with the repressive, authoritarian and deeply reactionary values of the fundamentalists whose fanatic attacks on modernity are causing such immediate grief ... (*The Globe and Mail*, Monday, October 29, 2001)

**1. Landscape Word List**

2. Brief Notes On

Mies van der Rohe:

I.M. Pei:

Santiago Calatrava:

3. Central Theme and Quote