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Introduction

Fact: There is a country that breaks a spelling rule that every child learning English has been taught. In its name, a *u* does not follow a *q*. In this country, nighttime temperatures are sometimes 50° lower than daytime temperatures.

Fact: People who live in the country where the world’s largest river originates have to watch out for the dreaded tsetse fly, a fly whose bite can infect one with sleeping sickness.

Fact: There is a country where once the king tried to ban any young lady over the age of 16 from making lace.

Unfortunately, there are many students today who are deficient in geography skills. Ask them to place countries—sometimes just to the continent—and they are woefully unsure. Africa, a continent, is sometimes mistakenly thought of as a single country; yet this enormous landmass holds over 50 separate nations. It is more than “filled with lions and elephants.” It contains the world’s largest desert and a diversity of cultures.



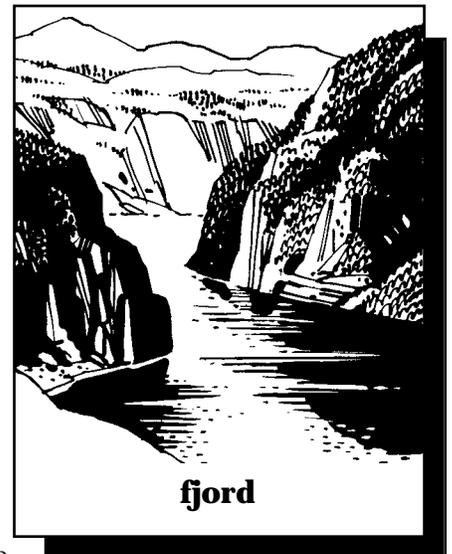
Europe

Skiing originated here, in this land of over 150,000 islands and 160,000 lakes. However, only about 2,000 of the islands are inhabited. The lemming lives here, a small rodent with a population surge every few years. When this happens, the crowded lemmings start to migrate. The myth is that the lemmings march to cliffs and purposefully jump off to drown in the ocean below. The truth is that many lemmings do die during the migration, providing a feast for hungry fish and birds of prey, but they don't purposely drown. They try to avoid water if they can't see the other side, but many drown while swimming because they run out of energy before they reach the opposite shore. *Where on Earth are you? Can you find your place?*

Norway

With one-third of its area lying north of the Arctic Circle, Norway is a land created by ice. Together, Norway, Sweden, and Denmark, are sometimes referred to as Scandinavia. Scandinavia was the name for this area during the time of the ancient Norsemen or Vikings. Norway is filled with fjords. **What are fjords?** Fjords are narrow inlets in which the sea penetrates the land between steep cliffs. Created by glaciers, some of the fjords are deeper than the sea from which their water flows.

Norway is at about the same latitude as Greenland, but Greenland has a permanent ice sheet covering all but its coastal fringes. **What makes Norway different?** The Gulf Stream is a huge current of warm water that crosses the Atlantic from the Caribbean Sea. Because the air above the current is also warmer, Norway has warmer weather along the coast than one would expect at that latitude.



King Olav V ruled Norway from 1957 to 1991. King Olav V believed in setting an example. He was a Resistance hero during WWII, and during the oil crisis in 1972, the king rode the trolley and insisted on paying his fare. Instead of hiding his handicap—dyslexia, a condition that often interferes with reading—King Olav simply explained to his people that he might have trouble when he gave speeches. **How do you think people reacted to King Olav?** The king was admired and is remembered fondly as “the people’s king.” Because of the way the king was so forward about his handicap, people saw him as a symbol of human strength.

It was a race to the South Pole! The Norwegians beat the English. Yet because the Englishman died, many people remember his party better than the Norwegian one! **Who knows the name of the Norwegian and the English explorers?** On December 14, 1911, Roald Amundsen became the first man to reach the South Pole. Robert Scott arrived there a month after Amundsen, and he and his party perished on the way back. A master planner, Amundsen was first because of his work beforehand. Amundsen trained with the Inuit, people accustomed to living and thriving in Arctic conditions. He learned how to use dogs (Scott used ponies) and what type of clothes to wear.



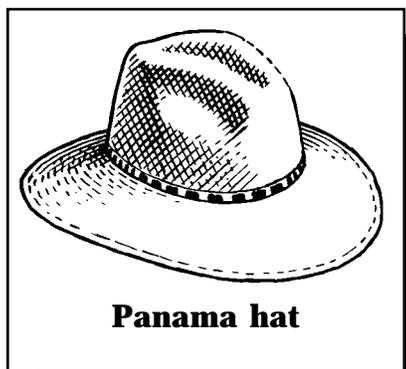
South America

Named for its location, this country is famous for its Galapagos Islands, one of the world's most famous wildlife sanctuaries. During thousands of generations of isolation, finches on these islands adapted to fill specific needs. For example, two finch species use tools. They take cactus spines to probe for grubs. A scientist named Charles Darwin recorded his observations about these islands, and his ideas made people think about adaptations and how life evolves. You were impressed by the giant 440 pound (200kg) tortoises on the islands, but now you want to go to the mainland to see if you can spot an Andean condor, the largest flying bird in the Americas. *Where on Earth are you? Can you find your place?*

Ecuador

Ecuador's name comes from its location: the country straddles the Earth's equator. The diversity of life found on the Galapagos Islands is amazing, but so too is the ecological diversity found on the mainland. With the Andes Mountains as the backbone of the country, there is Amazonian jungle on one side and coastal lowlands, mountains, and river valleys on the other. Spain colonized Ecuador around the 1530s, replacing the ruling Incas. To escape Spanish subjugation, nearly one-fourth of the native population fled to the jungles. With the help of "The Great Liberator," Simon Bolivar, Ecuador gained independence in 1830.

The Andean condor was the choice of the Ecuadorians for their national bird. **How large is the condor, and is it an eagle or a vulture?** From wingtip to wingtip, the Andean condor can easily reach 10 feet (3.3 meters). A vulture, meaning it eats carrion (dead animals and fish), the condor breeds every other year at altitudes above 10,000 feet (3333 meters).



Panama hat

The Panama hat is an indigenous product of Ecuador. **How did it get so misnamed?** (Hint: think gold rush and trade centers.) During the California gold rush in the mid-1800s, exports from the west coast of South America were transported across the Isthmus of Panama for shipment to North America and Europe. Gold miners, traveling from the east coast to the west coast of the United States via Panama, brought the hats to the United States. They erroneously thought the hats were from Panama since they purchased them there. Panama hats range in quality from coarse to superfine. The finest can hold water, with a weaver spending as many as 15 days on the first six inches and three weeks on the crown. **Can you think of anything else that is misnamed?**

Malaria is a disease that can be contracted by humans when bitten by mosquito carriers. Powdered bark from an Amazonian rain forest tree helps to prevent malarial attacks. When the Europeans were introduced to this powder (called *quinine*), it became in great demand, especially in tropical areas where malaria was rampant. Entire plantations in India were planted from seeds gathered from the Amazon to produce quinine. Synthetic alkaloids have been produced to replace natural quinine, but natural quinine is still needed because some organisms in malaria have become resistant to the synthetics. **How does this example show why it is necessary to protect the rainforest?**