

# A Level Geography Transition Work - Prisoners of Geography

Read page the extract attached. Highlight:

- One example of physical geography influencing human activity.
- One example of geography influencing political decisions.
- One piece of evidence that links to a topic you already know from GCSE

Answer these questions.

1. Why does the author describe Russia as "vast"?
2. What natural features of Russia are mentioned?
3. Why has Russia historically been concerned about invasion?
4. Explain how physical geography can influence political decisions. Use examples from the extract.
5. Does physical geography give Russia advantages or disadvantages?
6. Why might understanding geography help explain conflicts such as the war in Ukraine?



Identify which A Level topic evidence from the chapter links to: *Power and Borders, Climate Change, Global Migration, Glaciated Landscape, Earth's Life Support Systems, Hazardous Earth, Changing Places*. This will form the basis of a class discussion in our first lesson. Challenge: find more evidence of links to A Level topics

Evidence from the text	A Level Topic	Why it links
Russia is the world's largest country and spans eleven time zones.	Power and Borders	Size creates challenges for governance, defence and control.
Russia has few natural barriers and fears invasion from the west.		Physical geography influences geopolitical decisions and buffer states.
The North European Plain provides a route towards Moscow.		Landforms influence military strategy and perceptions of security.
Russia contains vast forests, tundra and taiga.		These are major biomes and carbon stores that regulate Earth's systems.
Siberia has poor soils, swamps and harsh climates.		Environmental conditions shape ecosystems and human activity.
Siberia is sparsely populated and difficult to live in.		Environment influences population distribution and migration patterns.
The Ural Mountains separate Europe and Asia.		Physical geography contributes to regional identity and perceptions of place.
The cameraman says, "I am Russian."		Identity and sense of place are socially constructed and not purely physical.
Chinese migration into Siberia is increasing.		Population movements can alter economic and geopolitical relationships.

**Final Task:** "Geography is destiny" Using evidence from the extract, write one paragraph explaining whether you agree with this statement.

*Think: To what extent does physical geography shape the identity, opportunities and challenges of a country?*

[You Tube: Russia's Geography Problem](#)

# Human Geography – Changing Spaces, Making Places

One of the units you will be studying in Year 12 is **Changing Spaces, Making Places** which looks at how people perceive places differently and how peoples place perceptions change over time.

**Task** – Your task is to understand how places can be represented differently depending on the source and viewpoint.

**Step 1** – Review the different sources below and complete the table to review how Cambridge has been represented differently through each source.

- *Link 1 – Cambridge Census Data (formal representation) - [Cambridge \(E07000008\) - ONS](#). Consider reviewing the indicators e.g. Population, Housing, Environment.*
- *Link 2 – News Article 1 - [Cambridge aims to double its number of ‘unicorns’ by 2035](#)*
- *Link 3 – News Article 2 - [Green light for Greater Cambridge development corporation - BBC News](#)*
- *Link 4 – Visit Cambridge - <https://www.visitcambridge.org>*
- *Link 5 – Cambridgeshire Constabulary - [Cambridge City Centre & West | Police.uk](#)*

**Step 2** – Complete the following table to compare the sources and viewpoints

Source	Key message about the place e.g.	Positive, negative or mixed view?
1 – Census		
2 – Article 1		
3 – Article 2		
4 – Tourist Information		
5 – Constabulary Data		

**Task 3** – Answer the following question to evaluate the perception of Cambridge

1. Which source illustrates the most positive perception of Cambridge? Why may this be?
2. Which source is most reliable for place representation? Explain your reasoning.
3. How may different groups e.g. youth/older, residents vs. tourists) view Cambridge differently?

**What to Bring in September:** Your **completed written work** (typed or handwritten)

Be ready to discuss your thoughts and findings in small groups

## **EXTRACT: Prisoners of Geography: Chapter 1 - Russia by Tim Marshall**

RUSSIA IS VAST. IT IS VASTEST. IMMENSE. IT IS SIX MILLION square miles vast, eleven time zones vast; it is the largest country in the world. Its forests, lakes, rivers, frozen tundra, steppe, taiga and mountains are all vast. This size has long seeped into our collective consciousness. Wherever we are, there is Russia, perhaps to our east or west, to our north or south – but there is the Russian Bear. It is no coincidence that the bear is the symbol of this immense nation. There it sits, sometimes hibernating, sometimes growling, majestic, but ferocious. Bear is a Russian word, but the Russians are also wary of calling this animal by its name, fearful of conjuring up its darker side. They call it medved, ‘the one who likes honey’. At least 120,000 of these medveds live in a country which bestrides Europe and Asia. To the west of the Ural Mountains is European Russia. To their east is Siberia, stretching all the way to the Bering Sea and the Pacific Ocean. Even in the twenty-first century, to cross it by train takes six days. Russia’s leaders must look across these distances, and differences, and formulate policy accordingly; for several centuries now they have looked in all directions, but concentrated mostly westward. When writers seek to get to the heart of the bear they often use Winston Churchill’s famous observation of Russia, made in 1939: ‘It is a riddle wrapped in a mystery inside an enigma’, but few go on to complete the sentence, which ends, ‘but perhaps there is a key. That key is Russian national interest.’ Seven years later he used that key to unlock his version of the answer to the riddle, asserting, ‘I am convinced that there is nothing they admire so much as strength, and there is nothing for which they have less respect than for weakness, especially military weakness.’ He could have been talking about the current Russian leadership, which despite now being wrapped in the cloak of democracy, remains authoritarian in its nature with national interest still at its core. When Vladimir Putin isn’t thinking about God, and mountains, he’s thinking about pizza. In particular, the shape of a slice of pizza – a wedge. The thin end of this wedge is Poland. Here, the vast North European Plain stretching from France to the Urals (which extend 1,000 miles south to north, forming a natural boundary between Europe and Asia) is only 300 miles wide. It runs from the Baltic Sea in the north to the Carpathian Mountains in the south. The North European Plain encompasses all of western and northern France, Belgium, the Netherlands, northern Germany and nearly all of Poland. From a Russian perspective this is a double-edged sword. Poland represents a relatively narrow corridor into which Russia could drive its armed forces if necessary and thus prevent an enemy from advancing towards Moscow. But from this point the wedge begins to broaden; by the time you get to Russia’s borders it is over 2,000 miles wide, and is flat all the way to Moscow and beyond. Even with a large army you would be hard-pressed to defend in strength along this line. However, Russia has never been conquered from this direction, partially due to its strategic depth. By the time an army approaches Moscow it already has unsustainably long supply lines, a mistake that Napoleon made in 1812, and that Hitler repeated in 1941. Likewise, in the Russian Far East it is geography that protects Russia. It is difficult to move an army from Asia up into Asian Russia; there’s not much to attack except for snow, and you could only get as far as the Urals. You would then end up holding a massive piece of territory, in difficult conditions, with long supply lines and the ever-present risk of a counter-attack. You might think that no one is intent on invading Russia, but that is not how the Russians see it, and with good reason. In the past 500 years they have been invaded several times from the west. The Poles came across the North European Plain in 1605, followed by the Swedes under Charles XII in 1708, the French under Napoleon in 1812, and the Germans twice, in both world wars, in 1914 and 1941. Looking at it another way, if you count from

Napoleon's invasion of 1812, but this time include the Crimean War of 1853–6 and the two world wars up to 1945, then the Russians were fighting on average in or around the North European Plain once every thirty-three years. At the end of the Second World War in 1945, the Russians occupied the territory conquered from Germany in Central and Eastern Europe, some of which then became part of the USSR, as it increasingly began to resemble the old Russian Empire. In 1949 the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) was formed by an association of European and North American states, for the defence of Europe and the North Atlantic against the danger of Soviet aggression. In response, most of the Communist states of Europe – under Russian leadership – formed the Warsaw Pact in 1955, a treaty for military defence and mutual aid. The Pact was supposed to be made of iron, but with hindsight by the early 1980s was rusting, and after the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 it crumbled to dust. President Putin is no fan of the last Soviet President, Mikhail Gorbachev. He blames him for undermining Russian security and has referred to the break-up of the former Soviet Union during the 1990s as 'a major geopolitical disaster of the century'. Since then the Russians have watched anxiously as NATO has crept steadily closer, incorporating countries which Russia claims it was promised would not be joining: the Czech Republic, Hungary and Poland in 1999, Bulgaria, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Romania and Slovakia in 2004 and Albania in 2009. NATO says no such assurances were given. Russia, like all great powers, is thinking in terms of the next 100 years and understands that in that time anything could happen. A century ago, who could have guessed that American armed forces would be stationed a few hundred miles from Moscow in Poland and the Baltic States? By 2004, just fifteen years from 1989, every single former Warsaw Pact state bar Russia was in NATO or the European Union. The Moscow administration's mind has been concentrated by that, and by Russia's history. Russia as a concept dates back to the ninth century and a loose federation of East Slavic tribes known as Kievan Rus', which was based in Kiev and other towns along the Dnieper River, in what is now Ukraine. The Mongols, expanding their empire, continually attacked the region from the south and east, eventually overrunning it in the thirteenth century. The fledgling Russia then relocated north-east in and around the city of Moscow. This early Russia, known as the Grand Principality of Muscovy, was indefensible. There were no mountains, no deserts and few rivers. In all directions lay flatland, and across the steppe to the south and east were the Mongols. The invader could advance at a place of his choosing, and there were few natural defensive positions to occupy. Enter Ivan the Terrible, the first Tsar. He put into practice the concept of attack as defence – i.e., beginning your expansion by consolidating at home and then moving outwards. This led to greatness. Here was a man to give support to the theory that individuals can change history. Without his character of both utter ruthlessness and vision, Russian history would be very different. The fledgling Russia had begun a moderate expansion under Ivan's grandfather, Ivan the Great, but that expansion accelerated after the younger Ivan was crowned Tsar and Grand Prince of all Russia in 1547. It encroached east on the Urals, south to the Caspian Sea and north towards the Arctic Circle. It gained access to the Caspian, and later the Black Sea, thus taking advantage of the Caucasus Mountains as a partial barrier between it and the Mongols. A military base was built in Chechnya to deter any would-be attackers, be they the Mongol Golden Hordes, the Ottoman Empire or the Persians. There were setbacks, but over the next century Russia would push past the Urals and edge into Siberia, eventually incorporating all the land to the Pacific coast far to the east. Now the Russians had a partial buffer zone and a hinterland – strategic depth – somewhere to fall back to in the case of invasion.

***Wider Reading: If you enjoy the Prisoners of Geography task you can buy the book on Kindle for £4.99.***