Hi, I’m Sasha.

My family has a large wheat farm in Gull Lake, Saskatchewan. That’s in the Interior Plains. This region of Canada is often called the “Big Sky Country.” It has that nickname because there are lots of flat, open areas with low hills, so the sky seems to go on forever.

My family earns money from an oil company because we have an oil pump at the back of our property.

We’re so lucky. God has given this region so many gifts to use, like fertile soil for farming and oil for drilling. Sometimes, I wonder if we are using these gifts in a way that shows we care for the environment.

Our Faith

In a speech about the environment, Pope Francis called for...

respect and protection of the entire creation which God has entrusted to humans.
What Are the Physical Features and Climate of the Region?

Physical Features

The physical features of this region include plains, rolling prairie grasslands, foothills, large lakes, long rivers, and wetlands. **Plains** are flat, or low, gently rolling lands. **Foothills** are rolling hills that rest at the base of a mountain system. **Wetlands** are swampy areas of land that are partially flooded all year.

### Did You Know?

Millions of years ago, dinosaurs roamed the Interior Plains. Thousands of dinosaur fossils have been found in Drumheller Valley in Alberta. This area is also known as Dinosaur Valley.

Hoodoos, like the ones in this photo, are a unique physical feature that can be found throughout Drumheller Valley. Over a very long time, the forces of wind and water shaped these rock formations. In the Cree and Niitsitapi traditions, hoodoos are giants who come alive at night and throw rocks at any intruders.
Climate Zones of the Interior Plains

Climate

Think back to how the climate in the Cordillera is affected by the Pacific Ocean. In the Interior Plains, there are no massive bodies of water to affect the climate.

The climate of the Interior Plains is affected by dry westerly winds that have dropped most of their moisture while crossing the Cordillera. In winter in southern Alberta, sometimes westerly winds are strong enough to push warm air over the Rocky Mountains. These warm winds are called chinooks. Chinooks bring warm, dry air to the region.

In the northern part of the region, north winds bring cold air south from the Arctic. There are no mountains to block the cold air. This makes winters in this part of the region very cold.

Catholic Connection

In the Bible, winds can symbolize, or mean, many things, including change, violence, destruction, warmth, or speed.

Explore and Apply

1. Compare the climate zones of the Interior Plains with those of the Cordillera.

2. Imagine you are a TV weather reporter. Choose a city and month from the climate graphs above. Create a weather report for one day.
Who Are the People of the Region?

First Nations peoples and Inuvialuit were the first people to live in this region. Today, Alberta, Manitoba, and Saskatchewan have some of the largest First Nations populations in Canada. First Nations peoples in these provinces include Nêhiyawak, Niitsitapi, Dakota, and Lakota.

Around 500 years ago, Europeans came to this region. They came for many reasons, including farming and trading goods for furs with First Nations peoples. Some European men married First Nations women. Their children are called Métis. More than 96,000 Métis live in Alberta. This makes Alberta home to the largest number of Métis in Canada.

Today, people from all over the world and other parts of Canada come to live in this region. In recent years, many immigrants from the Philippines and China have been making this region their home. Immigrants are people who leave their home countries to live permanently in other countries. Many immigrants are drawn by the jobs in the mining and oil industries.

Explore and Apply

1. List some of the benefits of living in this region. Next, list some of the challenges.

2. Create a poster to attract people to this region. Be sure to include the reasons they should consider moving.

Faith in Action

Catholic schools in Hamilton–Wentworth participate in Newcomer Orientation Week, or NOW. This project matches newcomers with peer leaders. The project helps newcomers feel at home in their new schools.

Many people in the Interior Plains work in tourism. For example, every July, tourism workers organize the Canadian Badlands Passion Play in Drumheller, Alberta. The play re-enacts the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. The outdoor stage was chosen because of how similar the land looks to the hills of Judea, the land that Jesus walked.
How Do People Use the Gifts from God?

The Interior Plains is rich in natural resources, such as oil, minerals, and fertile soil. These resources have helped this region develop mining, farming, and other primary industries. A primary industry is a business, trade, or operation that makes use of natural resources.

Mining

Drilling for oil and natural gas and mining potash are important primary industries in the Interior Plains. Potash is a mineral used in fertilizers to help crops grow.

In order to drill for oil, companies need to get permission from the Canadian government. Before making a decision, the government uses environmental reports to determine how a drilling project will affect the land, water, plants, and animals.

One way companies reach the oil in the ground is with oil pumps. Open-pit mining is another method. First, miners use machines to dig a huge hole in the ground. Then, they dig out the oil-soaked earth. The oil must be separated from the earth, which is a complicated process that uses a lot of hot water. Some of the water can be cleaned and reused, but some of it is full of toxic waste.

In recent years, better methods have been developed to reach the oil and improve the impact of mining on the environment. For example, oil companies can reuse water in the separation process.
Farming and Ranching

Farming is an important primary industry in the Interior Plains. Crops such as wheat, barley, oats, and corn are grown here. These grains are all used to make different types of flour. Processing wheat into flour is a secondary industry. Secondary industries process natural resources to manufacture, or make, products.

Some people in this region raise cattle for meat. Raising animals, such as cattle, is called ranching. Alberta produces nearly half of all Canadian beef. Producing beef creates many types of jobs in the Interior Plains, from ranching and meat processing to cooking and serving in restaurants. Restaurants and grocery stores are examples of tertiary industries. Tertiary industries provide services, including transportation and banking.

People are always researching ways to improve farming and produce new and stronger varieties of crops. These are quaternary industries. Quaternary industries are information based and include education and research.

Catholic Connection

In the past, Communion wafers were made by a baker chosen by each local church. Only that person was allowed to touch the wheat used for the hosts. A special oven was also used. Today, large companies carefully produce Communion wafers in bulk for most churches in Canada. A group of nuns, the Sisters Adorers of the Precious Blood, also make Communion wafers.

Explore and Apply

1. What is similar about all primary industries? What is the difference between secondary and tertiary industries? What role do you think quaternary industries can play in taking care of the environment?

2. Create a chart that shows how one resource in the Interior Plains is a part of primary, secondary, tertiary, and quaternary industries.
When you start a research project, it’s important to think about the questions you want answered about your topic. There are different types of questions.

**Fact questions** receive straightforward answers based on obvious facts or knowledge. For example: Where can oil be found in Canada?

**Opinion questions** are personal and may have more than one answer. The response to an opinion question should be supported with reasons. For example: Do you think drilling for oil is good for Canada?

**Critical questions** require you to make a reasoned judgment. Critical questions help you identify, understand, and solve problems. For example: What are the pros and cons of drilling for oil?

Read the text below and on the next page. Examine the images on this page. Think about the questions you could ask about oil in Alberta.

### To Drill or Not to Drill?

Alberta has one of largest reserves of oil in the world. The province’s largest deposit is in the Athabasca oil sands. The Athabasca River flows through this area.

Oil sands contain sand, clay, and water mixed with very heavy oil. Most of the oil is deep underground. Oil is pumped to the surface by drilling methods that use steam or heat. The oil is then separated from the sand and clay using hot water.

Major benefits from developing the oil sands are the jobs and prosperity it creates. However, it also greatly affects the environment and the people who live nearby.

This is Tsimshian Elder Terry McKay. He is at a public meeting, expressing his concerns about drilling for oil along the banks of the Athabasca River. Why is it important for First Nations Elders to be involved in resource development in their communities? Who else should be involved in making decisions?
For example, chemicals, waste, and oil spills have polluted the Athabasca River. Pollution has impacted people living along the river. Roxanne Marcel, chief of Mikisew Cree First Nation from 2005 to 2011, speaks about how drilling for oil affects the Athabasca River and her people.

“When water levels are down, we can no longer access our traditional lands by boat, which limits our fishing, trapping, and hunting. Our members have been stranded. We no longer drink the water. We see our rights along with our river deteriorating before us.”

Don Thompson, president of the Oil Sands Developers Group, speaks about why drilling for oil is important.

“The oil sands currently support 75 000 jobs in Canada, with this growing to over 900 000 by 2035. Do the math. That’s 825 000 more jobs; 825 000 people with work, and there is nothing that gives an individual more dignity and self-respect than a job.”

Sample Fact Question
Where are the oil sands?

Sample Opinion Question
Who should be responsible for deciding about oil-sands development—governments, communities, or companies?

Sample Critical Question
What challenges do First Nations groups face in protecting their traditional lands?

Did You Know?
Drilling for oil in the oil sands often creates lakes containing toxic water. These lakes can be the size of a city. Migrating birds can become stuck in these lakes and die. This happened to a flock of ducks in April, 2008. The company that created these toxic lakes was fined $3 million.

Explore and Apply
1. What three questions would you ask an oil company about environmental issues? Label each question as fact, opinion, or critical.
2. The two quotations above give you different viewpoints about the oil sands. With a partner, role-play a conversation between Roxanne Marcel and Don Thompson.
Most of the Interior Plains is located in Alberta and Saskatchewan. Alberta and Saskatchewan are both provinces. There are many different cities in these two provinces. Cities provide many services, such as libraries, museums, swimming pools, community centres, and public transportation.

Edmonton is the capital of Alberta. What do you think makes this city an attractive place to live?
Explore and Apply

1. Examine the photos in this chapter. Why do you think Saskatchewan has “Land of Living Skies” and wheat stalks on its licence plate?

2. Design a postage stamp that celebrates one of the industries in Alberta or Saskatchewan.

Regina (shown here) is the capital of Saskatchewan, but Saskatoon is the largest city in the province. Why do you think many people choose to live in cities?
Pulling It Together

Father Mike Explains ...

As Catholics, we need to ask ourselves: When people extract oil, are they serving true human “needs” or are they increasing human “wants” for the sake of making money?

How Can We Be Good Stewards?

My aunt and uncle work in the Athabasca oil sands and live in Fort McMurray, Alberta. My aunt says that these oil sands produce almost 2 million barrels of oil a day.

Oil gives us many great things, such as plastic, clothing, and fuel for cars, planes, and boats. I can’t imagine life without these things.

But I’m worried that using the oil sands harms our wildlife, water, and air. Oil is a wonderful gift from God. I’m wondering if we are using this resource in a way that will be good for people and the planet. What do we do if the oil runs out?

Sasha

See

What do you think Sasha sees as the good things about the oil industry? What is she concerned about?

Reflect

“For everyone to whom much is given, of him shall much be required.” (Luke 12:48, NRSV) How does this passage connect to the use of the gift of oil?

Act

Think about ways in which we can be responsible stewards of the gift of oil. Create and present a radio or TV ad to share your ideas.

This photo is of an open-pit mine in the oil sands near Fort McMurray.
Summarizing

Write a haiku to summarize one section in this chapter. First, record some of the facts and ideas you learned in that section. Next, create the haiku. Remember, a haiku is structured in the following way: 5 syllables in the first line, 7 syllables in the second line, 5 syllables in the third line. As well, haikus often describe something in the natural world. Finally, share your haiku with others. Talk about what you found rewarding or challenging about summarizing in this way.

Making Connections

Review the diagram called “products made from oil and natural gas” on page 32. Create a similar diagram to show how we use another natural resource from this region. Under your diagram, record some questions you have about that natural resource.

Chapter Inquiry

Creating effective questions can help you find out more about important issues. For example, concerned citizens may ask questions about how primary industries, such as mining, farming, and ranching, might harm the environment.

Develop three questions to help you investigate how a primary industry affects the environment. Make sure you include one question for each category.

In a speech about the environment, Pope Francis called for ...

respect and protection of the entire creation which God has entrusted to humans.

Question | Type of Question
--- | ---
 | fact
 | opinion
 | critical