

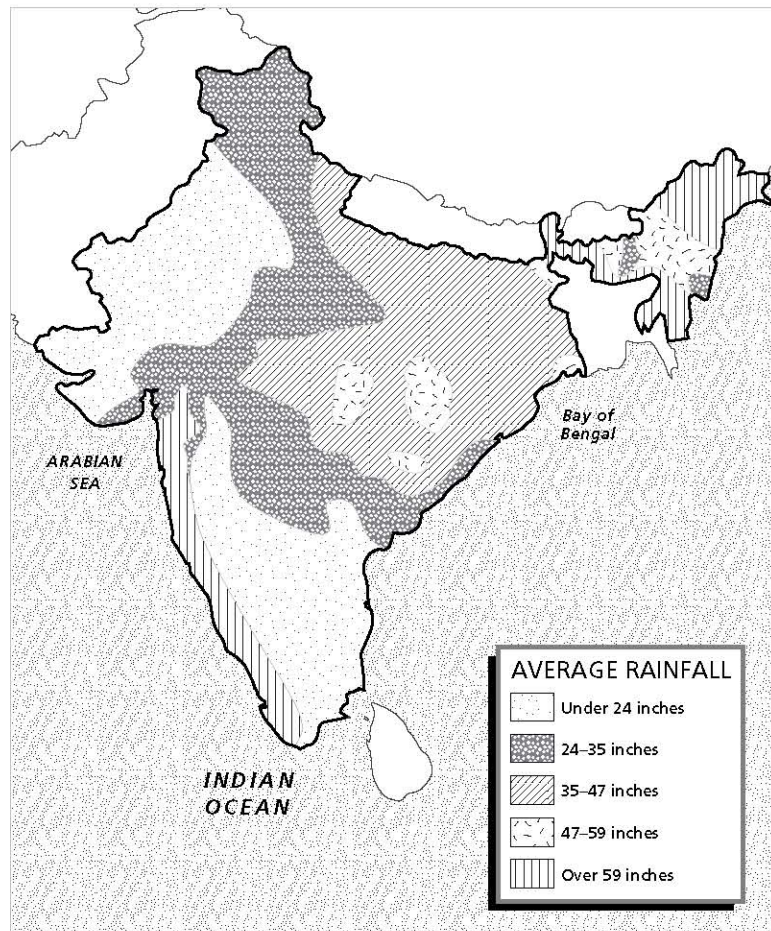
The Indian Subcontinent

Critical Thinking

Monsoon

Most of India's rain falls during the monsoon season, which occurs from June through September. To learn about this life-giving geographic force, study the passage and map below and answer the questions that follow.

The term "monsoon" is from the Arabic word *mausim*, or "season." It originally referred to the prevailing winds on the Arabian Sea, which blew toward the northeast during half the year and to the southwest during the other half. Arab traders used these winds to move southward along the East African coast during the winter months, returning home with the reversal of the winds in the summer. Monsoons occur across the globe, from Australia to the United States. A monsoon season exists in Arizona, for example. However, the Indian monsoon is probably the most important, for it provides the water needed to sustain Indian agriculture.



In June each year, as the sun moves directly overhead, the Indian landmass warms more quickly than the surrounding water. As the air over the land heats up, it expands. This causes it to become less dense and to rise. The low pressure that results pulls in cooler, moist air off the Arabian Sea, Bay of Bengal, and Indian Ocean. This movement of air masses results in monsoon winds and rain. As these winds blow north onto the subcontinent, Earth's rotation pushes them eastward, giving them a southwest to northeast direction. Eventually they are stopped by the Himalayan mountain range, where the peaks average 20,000 feet.

In the fall and winter, the process is reversed. The land cools more quickly than the water, causing winds to blow southwest from the subcontinent out to sea. By then, however, Indian farmers have had another bountiful year thanks to the life-giving rains of the summer monsoon.

- 1.** Why is the term “monsoon” appropriate for the type of wind described in the passage?

- 2.** Why do monsoon winds always blow inland in the summer?

- 3.** Why is rain always associated with the summer monsoon?

- 4.** Does Mumbai, Kolkata, or New Delhi get the most monsoon rain? How much does it get? (Use an atlas or your textbook to help you answer this question.)

- 5.** Why does western India generally get less rain in the summer monsoon than eastern India does?

- 6.** What geographical feature explains why the west coast of the Deccan gets more rain than almost any other part of the country during the summer monsoon? What is the reason for this?
