

1. Mountains and volcanoes often form at subduction zones, where the edge of one tectonic plate plunges below the edge of another. What are some of the ways in which tectonic activity affects the lives of people in Middle and South America? What role does unpredictability play?
2. The conquest of Middle and South America by the Spanish and Portuguese transformed life in the region. Identify some of the lingering effects (social, economic, environmental, and political) of the conquest and colonization.
3. Rural-to-urban migration has fed the rapid growth of cities in the twentieth century. Do you see any parallels to rural-to-urban migration in the United States? For both regions, identify several environmental and social effects of this migration on both the places the migrants leave and the places to which they move.
4. The extended family is the basic social institution of Middle and South America. Discuss the likelihood that this type of family structure will persist in the future. What forces are pushing for change? What are the strengths of the extended family that have helped it persist so far?
5. Religion has played a role in this region since precolonial times and was of special importance during the conquest. Often, religion reinforces the status quo in a society. Would you say that the present rise in various kinds of religious activity in Middle and South America is likely to bring social stability or change?
6. In the twentieth century, the countries of the region have experimented with various economic development strategies. Describe these efforts and explain some of the unforeseen side effects of each.
7. After a history of authoritarian and military rule, democracy is much more widely practiced in the region now than previously. What do you see as the chief reasons that democratic institutions remain fragile?
8. The region of Middle and South America was one of the first to alert the world to the dangers of environmental deterioration. What types of strategies now being tried in this region to address environmental issues do you see as the most effective? Might these strategies be transferable to other world regions?