You know that the United States comprises 50 states, from Alabama to Wyoming. We sometimes forget about U.S. territories, though. A territory is land that may be treated as part of the United States in some ways, but not in others. For instance, it may have a separate, organized government that was approved by the U.S. Congress.

The United States has five territories where people live permanently. They are Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands in the Caribbean Sea; Guam and the Northern Mariana Islands in the Northern Pacific Ocean; and American Samoa in the South Pacific Ocean.

Together, these territories are home to about 3.6 million people. Let’s learn more about our country’s territories.

Puerto Rico

The Commonwealth of Puerto Rico became a U.S. territory in 1897. Puerto Ricans came from many different backgrounds. The Spaniards who landed there in the late 1800s founded thousands of native people. The Taíno (tah-EE-noh) Indians lived in villages and raised sweet potatoes and corn, among other foods. They became slaves to the Spanish conquerors.

Many of the Taínos died from starvation or disease. Later, as more Spaniards arrived, African people were brought to the island to work on sugar plantations. Puerto Ricans speak Spanish, and many speak English. People on the island work in manufacturing, tourism, real estate and other services. Farmers grow many fruits and vegetables, including bananas, grapefruit, lemons, onions, pumpkins, beans and herbs.

U.S. Virgin Islands

The three main Virgin Islands are St. Thomas, St. Croix (CROY) and St. John. The people who originally lived there were probably related to the Taíno people of Puerto Rico. In the 1500s and 1600s, European settlers began to arrive, and in 1754, Denmark took control of the islands. The United States bought the territory from the Danes in 1917 so that naval warships could dock there while fighting in World War I.

Most of the citizens of the USVI are Black people who are descended from enslaved African people. Guam’s population is a mixture of indigenous people, or native, Chamorro people probably arrived on the island by boat more than 3,000 years ago from Southeast Asia.

American Samoa

American Samoa is a group of five islands. Most of the people who live there are descendants of Pacific Islanders.

The U.S., the United Kingdom and Germany fought over the islands in the 1800s until reaching an agreement to divide them between the United States and Germany. American Samoa became an official territory in 1900.

Tuning in to U.S. Territories

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Resources

On the Web:

• bit.ly/3Territories

At the library:

• “A Kid’s Guide to Puerto Rico” by Jack L. Roberts and Michael Owens

Try ’n’ Find

Words that remind us of U.S. territories are hidden in this puzzle. Some words are backward.

AFRICAN, BASE, CARIBBEAN, CHAMARRO, COMMONWEALTH, EUROPEAN, GUAM, GUINEAN, INDIGENOUS, ISLANDS, LANGUAGE, NATIVE, OCEAN, PACIFIC, SEPARATE, TAINO, TERRITORY

Cook’s Corner

Winter and Summer* Fruit Tarts

You’ll need:

• 1 (9-inch) refrigerated piecrust
• 2 cups peeled, cored and diced Macintosh apples
• 3 tablespoons sugar
• 1 tablespoon 1/2 teaspoon ground cinnamon

What to do:

1. Preheat oven to 375 degrees. Divide piecrust into 8 equal pieces and press pieces into muffin cups, filling about 3/4 full.
2. Bake for 25 to 30 minutes, until apples are tender and crust is golden brown. Serves 8.

* Use any fruits you want; in summer, peaches, plums or nectarines taste great!

Jokes

Patsy: What did one flag say to the other flag? Pedro: Nothing! It waved!

Eco Note

Summer in the Southern Hemisphere has brought some of the hottest weather on record to northern Argentina and parts of western Australia. The Argentine heat wave caused the power grid around Buenos Aires to collapse, leaving 700,000 people without electricity as temperatures approached the hottest ever recorded in South America. A temperature of 123 degrees Fahrenheit in Pilbara, Western Australia, tied for the hottest ever recorded in Australia, and the entire Southern Hemisphere, since 1960.

For later:

Look in your newspaper for articles about one or more of our U.S. territories.

Teachers:

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Founded by Betty Debnam

Guam became property of the U.S. in 1899, at the end of the Spanish-American War. For many years, the U.S. Navy used it as a military base. In 1950, it became a territory.

The Chamorro language is spoken on the island, although English is widely used also.

Northern Mariana Islands

The 14 islands of the Northern Marianas are very close to Guam, and the people there have similar histories. In 1944, Japan took control of the islands, but in a 1944 battle during World War II, the United States captured them. They did not become an official territory until 1975.

American Samoa

Further south in the Pacific Ocean is American Samoa, a group of five islands. Most of the people who live there are descendants of Pacific Islanders.

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