

**CHAPTER****11****Critical Thinking Activity****Central America and the Caribbean****The Panama Canal**

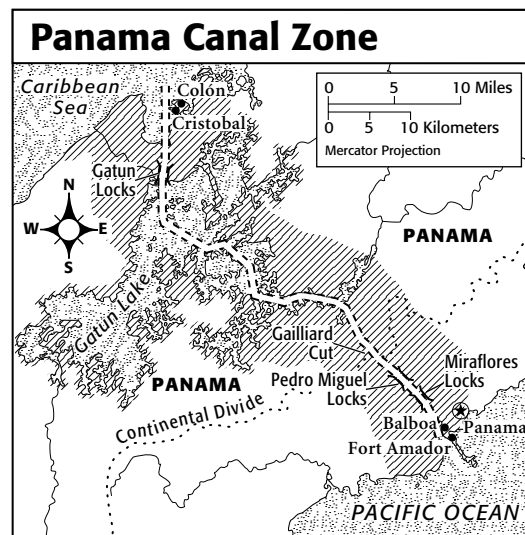
*Read the information and study the map below, then answer the questions that follow.*

In 1513 Vasco Núñez de Balboa was the first European to sight the Pacific Ocean. It is believed that he was also the first to think of digging a canal to unite the two vast oceans. As a result, King Charles I of Spain later sent a party to survey a possible canal route, but the obstacles seemed insurmountable at the time.

In 1880 a French company organized by Ferdinand de Lesseps, the builder of the Suez Canal, began work in Panama. From the start, the project was plagued by difficulties. Rain, landslides, escalating costs, fraud, inadequate machinery, and the dread plagues of yellow fever and malaria doomed the project. All work stopped in 1889.

In 1904 the United States began the task of carving a canal through the isthmus. The engineering difficulties involved in cutting through the Isthmus of Panama were enormous. After years of digging and construction, and the expenditure of more than \$300 million, the Panama Canal was officially opened in 1914.

With the completion of the Panama Canal, a whole new world of trade was opened. Instead of making the 10,000-mile (16,000-km) voyage around Cape Horn, which takes several weeks, a ship can now go from the Atlantic to the Pacific through the 52-mile (82-km)-long canal in about eight hours.



**Chapter 11, Critical Thinking Activity, continued**

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**1.** What cities are located near the path of the canal?

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**2.** In what direction would a ship on route to Cristobal from Balboa travel?

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**3.** What military and economic benefits does the canal provide?

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**4.** If you enter the Panama Canal from the Caribbean Sea on the Atlantic side, which direction will you travel to exit to the Pacific Ocean?

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**5.** Using classroom reference sources, find out which country is in charge of the Panama Canal today. How did this change come about?

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**6.** What characteristics of the physical geography of the Isthmus of Panama made the construction of the canal so difficult?

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**7.** Why did it take so much time and effort to construct the canal?

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