Information that could be used during the North American Geography block:

LUMBERING ACROSS AMERICA

Almost 400 years ago, a brave group of people left the shores of England to venture across the Atlantic Ocean in search of a new home. Some left because they wished to own and work their own land, which was impossible in England, since all of the fertile land was owned by the aristocracy. Others sought a new home, where they would be free to practice their religious beliefs, without the interference or prosecution by the Church of England, the King’s religion.

After months of sailing the ocean, sometimes in turbulent weather, these brave men, women and children caught their first glimpse of the rocky coast of the land that would become known as “New England”. But, unlike the cultivated, well manicured land they had left behind, where the only trees existed in small groves, this new land was covered with immense forests. As far North as they could see and as far South as they could see, the land was covered with trees.

At first the pilgrims were afraid of the wild animals and spirits which occupied the deep, dark forests. However, little by little they began to cut the forests away, to clear the land for their farms. At first, they built their homes and barns from the fallen trees, but after awhile, many farmers had more lumber than they could use. As word spread back to England of this land rich in lumber, the King sent emissaries over to buy up all excess lumber. The lumber was then loaded onto ships and sent back to England. Especially selected were the tall, straight, white pines, which were used to build new ships for the Royal Navy. Thus, lumbering became the first industry of this new land.

As the years passed, and more and more people arrived from Europe to settle in what became the United States of America, the farming families began to leave the rocky, poor soil of New England with its bitter cold winters. They moved west towards the rich, fertile land of the Great Lake States, as well as the milder climates found in the South. And wherever they went, as they pressed west towards the great Mississippi River, they encountered huge forests of trees. In fact, it was said that a squirrel could climb to the top of a tree on the coastline of Virginia and travel all the way to the banks of the Mississippi without ever having to touch the ground!
As this new country grew, so did its need for lumber. House builders, furniture makers, paper producers—all needed wood. By the end of the 19th Century most of the land east of the Mississippi had been logged. This was done to make the land useable for farming and to meet the growing need for lumber. Unfortunately, the lumbering practices at that time were very wasteful, with only one third of each tree actually being used. By the year 1900, the eastern part of the United States was in jeopardy of destroying this magnificent resource.

In response to this crisis, President Theodore Roosevelt created a National Parks and Forest Department. These institutions began to purchase large areas of wilderness and forest land in order to protect and manage them.

As the logging industry ran out of forests in the east, it turned toward California, Oregon and Washington. For in this area could be found the most magnificent trees on earth. The great Sequoias of the Southern Sierra Nevada range in California, were the largest living things on earth and the giant Coastal Redwoods, the tallest. Logging among the mountains and craggy northwestern coast, however, was not to be as easy as it was in the gently rolling hills of the Southern U.S. or in the fertile basin of the Great Lake states. For the coastal range had deep ravines and steep mountain slopes along with lots of rain and fog.

At first loggers used teams of large draft horses to pull out fallen logs on skids (platforms). In the winter, a watering wagon would go out at night and spray the road with water. This coating would freeze, as the evening temperatures dropped, thereby making a smooth surface over which the horses could pull the logs. Sometimes in very steep areas, they would build slide-like sluices down the mountainside, fill them with water and float the logs down to a river below. There a few of the bravest loggers would ride the logs to the mill. This “ride” consisted of walking across the logs, as they floated downstream, and using a long pole to break up any jams that might occur. Logging was a very dangerous job and only the toughest of men were able to do it successfully.

Loggers lived in logging camps which were set up near the areas to be worked. There was no drinking of alcohol or women allowed in these camps—for both were felt to be distracting and a logger could not afford to have his mind on anything but his job. Often there was a rule that there was to be no talking during breakfast or lunch. This kept the eating time shorter and the working time longer.
Today the logging business has been helped by growing technology and computerization. There are new machines which can cut down as many as 25 cords of wood per day (a cord is a stack of logs 8' long, 4' wide and 4' tall) as opposed to the 4-6 cords per day that an individual logger could cut down. Also, almost 100% of every tree is used. Computers are able to scan each individual log, as it goes through the mill, and determine the best places to cut for maximum usage. Industry has also found uses for the bark, branches, and all those parts of the tree that used to be left behind on the forest floor.

Large lumber companies are also leading the way to reforest the land by establishing tree farms, which will serve as sources for future lumber.

Below are some of the products that come from our forests:

- chewing gum
- perfumes
- soaps
- printing ink
- Shoe polish
- drugs
- paper
- rayon
- sponges
- shatterproof glass
- molded plastics
- explosives

*Note: I chose not to go into the pollution related issues around the lumber industry in Fifth grade.*