# Learning About Latitude Lines

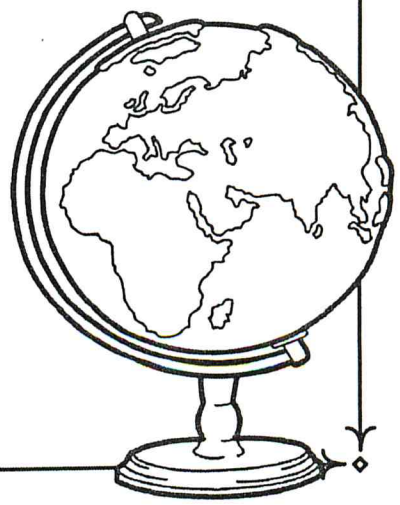
The lines that run from east to west around the world are called **latitude lines** or **parallels**, because they never meet. They measure distances north and south in measurements called degrees (°) and minutes (´). There are 60 minutes in each degree.

The most important latitude line is the **equator** (located at 0°). The equator gets its name from the Latin word for "equalizer." It divides the world into two equal parts, the northern hemisphere and southern hemisphere. Countries located along this line have an even 12 hours of day and 12 hours of night, and virtually no change in seasons.

From the equator, latitude lines run all the way north and south to 90° N (the North Pole) and 90° S (the South Pole). Between the equator and the North Pole, you will find the **Tropic of Cancer** (23° 30´ N) and the Arctic Circle (66° 30´ N). Between the equator and the South Pole, you will find the **Tropic of Capricorn** (23° 30´ S) and the Antarctic Circle (66° 30´ S).

The area between the **Tropic of Cancer** and the **Tropic of Capricorn** is known as "the tropics." The Tropic of Cancer is the furthest northern latitude where the sun can be directly overhead, and the Tropic of Capricorn is the furthest southern latitude where the sun can be directly overhead. Their names come from the constellations Cancer and Capricorn.

You can remember latitude lines run east to west, measuring the distances between the equator and North and South Poles, by remembering that latitude starts with "la," just like the words "lay" (because the lines lay on their side) or "ladder" (because latitude lines are like rungs on a ladder, going higher and higher).



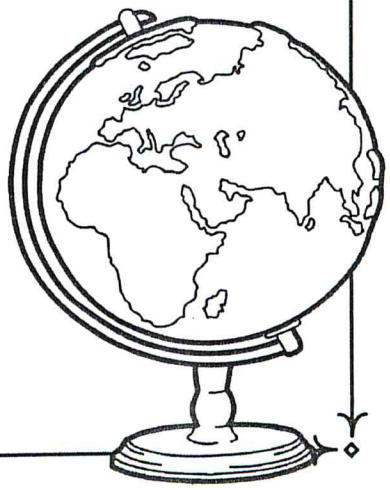
# Learning About Longitude Lines

The lines that run from north to south around the world are called **longitude lines** or **meridians**. Unlike latitude lines, which are parallel, longitude lines all meet at the north and south poles. They measure distances east and west in measurements called degrees (°) and minutes (´). There are 60 minutes in each degree.

The most important longitude line is the **Prime Meridian** (located at 0°). It divides the world into two equal parts, the eastern hemisphere and western hemisphere. It was officially designated the main meridian worldwide in 1884. Before that, each country chose its own, which made it difficult to share precise directions and locations with people from other countries!

From the Prime Meridian, longitude lines run east and west up to 180°. On the opposite side of the world from the Prime Meridian, you will find the **International Date Line.** The International Date Line runs through the middle of the Pacific Ocean, and (with a few exceptions) follows the 180° longitude line.

The International Date Line's name comes from its "job," which is to mark the beginning of a new day. How is this possible? Approximately every 15°, a new time zone begins. Each "zone" you move west is an hour earlier, and each zone you move east is an hour later. When you cross the International Date Line, it marks a change in day. (In other words, if it is Monday on the west side of the International Date Line, it is Sunday on the east side.)



You can remember longitude lines run north to south, measuring the distance from east to west because the word longitude starts with "long." Remember that longitude lines are "long and tall."