Willard Vandiver was a U.S. congressman from Missouri. One night in 1899, he attended a dinner. There he spoke up.

“I come from a state that raises corn and cotton and cockleburs and Democrats,” he declared. “Frothy eloquence [fancy talk] neither convinces nor satisfies me. I am from Missouri. You have got to show me!”

Ever since then, Missouri has been called the Show Me State. At least, that’s what legends say. Missourians are very down-to-earth. They find it’s useful to say, “Show me!”

Missouri sits just west of the Mississippi River. It was the gateway to the American West. Many westward-bound pioneers started out from or passed through Missouri. Missouri was also a crossroads for river traffic. The Mississippi and Missouri rivers come together there.

People of many cultures came together in Missouri, too. They brought their foods, festivals, and music.

Today, millions of visitors enjoy Missouri’s mountains and lakes. The Show Me State shows them all a great time!
Missouri is a “neighborly” state. It has eight other states as neighbors. Iowa is north of Missouri. Arkansas is to the south. To the east are Illinois, Kentucky, and Tennessee. To the west are Nebraska, Kansas, and Oklahoma. Only Tennessee shares borders with that many states.

Missouri is a north central state. Sometimes it’s called a Midwestern state. It lies between the Atlantic Ocean and the Rocky Mountains.

Two mighty rivers helped open up Missouri. One is the Mississippi, the nation’s longest river. It runs along Missouri’s eastern border. The other is the Missouri River. It flows into the Mississippi near Saint Louis. Many other rivers empty into the Mississippi and Missouri.
Missouri’s biggest lakes were formed by humans. People built dams on rivers to create these lakes. The largest are Lake of the Ozarks and Harry S. Truman Reservoir.

Northern Missouri is the Glacial Plains region. Huge glaciers, or ice sheets, once covered it. The glaciers smoothed the land into rolling plains. They also left rich soil that’s great for farming. The Osage Plains cover southwest Missouri. They are fairly flat. Tall prairie grasses once waved across these plains.

Bagnell Dam is located on Lake of the Ozarks, one of Missouri’s many human-made lakes.

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The plains of northern Missouri provide rich farmland.
The Ozark Mountains stretch across southern Missouri. Thick forests cover these rugged hills. Swift rivers rush through their deep valleys. Many caves, lakes, and springs are scattered through the region.

Southeastern Missouri is called the Southeastern Low-lands. High levees, or walls, stand along the shore. They keep the Mississippi River from flooding the land. One town in this region is New Madrid (pronounced MAD-rid). It sits atop a fault, or crack in Earth’s crust. This fault is the center of many powerful earthquakes.

Missouri’s southeast corner sticks down like a boot heel. A farmer named John Hardeman Walker once lived there. He begged for his land to belong to Missouri. When Missouri became a state, Walker got his wish.