EPISODE 357

State Name Stories: Midwest

Full transcript · point of view · vocabulary review

Hi! I'm Georgiana, and I'm back with a new episode of the Speak English Now podcast—the podcast that helps you speak English fluently, with no grammar and no textbooks.

This is the third episode of our **state** names series. This time, we're traveling to the **Midwest**.

Let's quickly list all the states in the Midwest:

They are: Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Kansas, Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri, Nebraska, North Dakota, Ohio, South Dakota, and Wisconsin.

That's twelve states in total! I'll just focus on a few of the most representative ones: Michigan, Ohio, Illinois, Wisconsin, and Minnesota.

Here, many names come from Native American languages, rivers, and the land itself.

So, let's discover the hidden **stories** of the **Midwest**!

The **Midwest** is famous for friendly people, farms, big lakes, and very cold winters. (So yes, bring your warmest coat for this trip! 🧥❄️

But as always, we're here for the names — and the Midwest has some really interesting ones.

🌊 Michigan

Let's start with Michigan.

The name comes from a Native American word (Ojibwe): Mishigami, which means "great water" or "large lake."

And it makes sense, right? Michigan is surrounded by the **Great Lakes**.

Love water? Then Michigan is perfect — except in winter, when everything freezes!

🏞️ Ohio

Next stop: Ohio.

This name comes from another Native American language, the Seneca. It means "good river."

The Ohio River was very important in the past — for travel, fishing, and **trade**.

That's why they called it the "good river."

Today, Ohio is known for cities like Cleveland and Columbus, and also for the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame. Yes, music again!

🌽 Illinois

Now let's go to Illinois.

The name comes from a French version of a Native American word. It means "the people" or "tribe of superior men."

The French explorers changed the spelling and pronunciation.

So now we have Illinois — with a silent "s."

Don't say Illinoissss. It's Illi-noy.

Can you try it? Illi-noy.

Americans will notice immediately if you say the "s." So here's a little pronunciation secret for you!

🌲 Wisconsin

Okay, Wisconsin.

This name also comes from a Native American language. It probably means “river running through a red place.”

French explorers wrote it down, and the spelling changed over time.

Today, Wisconsin is famous for cheese. Yes, cheese! 🧀

Rivers, red land… and cheese. Lots and lots of cheese.

❄️ Minnesota

And finally, Minnesota.

The name comes from the Dakota Sioux language. It means “sky-tinted water” or “cloudy water.”

Beautiful, right? It makes you imagine lakes with reflections of the sky.

And that’s perfect, because Minnesota is called “The Land of 10,000 Lakes.” Honestly, I think they stopped counting at 10,000 — there are even more.

In winter, those lakes freeze, and people even drive cars on the ice. Crazy but true!

✨ Wrap-up

So, what did we learn today in the Midwest?

Michigan: means “great water,” Great Lakes.

Ohio: means “good river.”

Illinois: means “the people,” “tribe of superior men.”

silent “s.”

Wisconsin: means “river through a red place,” and today, cheese.

Minnesota: means “sky-tinted water,” and “The Land of 10,000 Lakes.”

The Midwest shows us how Native American languages shaped the US map. Almost every **state** name here comes from those languages — and now you know what they mean.

Now, let’s practice.

Point of View

Past & Future

Read the same story in two different points of view and notice how the grammar changes naturally.

First version

Future Tense - First Person

Next winter, I will take a trip to the Midwest of the United States.

My first stop will be Michigan. I’ll imagine beautiful lakes. But they’ll be **frozen solid**, and instead of swimming, I’ll slip on the ice.

“Great water?” I’ll mutter. “More like great **skating rink**.”

Then, I will go to Ohio. I’ll want to see the “good river.” But it will be brown and muddy after a storm. I’ll laugh and say: “Good river? Maybe not today.”

Next, I’ll visit Illinois. I’ll carefully practice: “Illinoisss…” But people will correct me right away: “It’s Illi-noy! The ‘s’ is silent!” I’ll think: “Why are silent letters everywhere?”

After that, I'll arrive in Wisconsin. I'll expect rivers and forests. But the first thing I'll see is cheese — cheese shops, cheese hats, cheese everywhere. I'll shake my head: "Forget the rivers. This is definitely Cheese-consin."

Finally, I'll reach Minnesota. I'll imagine 10,000 beautiful lakes. But of course, it will be winter, and the lakes will be frozen. People will drive cars on the ice. I'll gasp: "Are these lakes or parking lots?"

When I return home, my friends will ask:

"So, how was your trip to the Midwest?"

I'll smile and say:

"Well, Michigan will freeze me, Ohio will disappoint me, Illinois will embarrass me, Wisconsin will feed me, and Minnesota will shock me.

But hey… at least I'll never forget the **state** names!"

Second version

Past Tense - First Person Plural

Last winter, we took a trip to the Midwest of the United States.

Our first stop was Michigan. We imagined beautiful lakes. But they were frozen solid. Instead of swimming, we slipped on the ice.

"Great water?" we muttered. "More like great skating rink."

Then, we went to Ohio. We wanted to see the "good river." But it was brown and muddy after a storm. We laughed and said: "Good river? Maybe not today!"

Next, we visited Illinois. We carefully practiced: "Illinoisss…" But people corrected us: "It's Illi-noy! The 's' is silent!" We thought: "Why are silent letters everywhere?"

After that, we drove to Wisconsin. We expected rivers and forests. But the first thing we saw was cheese — cheese shops, cheese hats, cheese everywhere. We shook our heads: "Forget the rivers. This should be named Cheese-consin."

Finally, we reached Minnesota. We imagined 10,000 beautiful lakes. But it was winter, and the lakes were frozen. People drove cars on the ice. We gasped: "Are these lakes or parking lots?"

When we returned home, our friends asked:

"So, how was your trip to the Midwest?"

We smiled and said:

"Well, Michigan froze us, Ohio disappointed us, Illinois embarrassed us, Wisconsin fed us, and Minnesota shocked us.

But hey… we'll never forget the state names!"

Thanks for listening, and I'll see you in the next episode.

Review

Vocabulary from This Episode

Review the most useful words and expressions before listening again.

01 Midwest the north-central region of the United States.	**05 frozen solid** completely changed into hard ice.
02 Great Lakes five large connected lakes in North America.	**06 trade** the buying and selling of goods.
03 Native American origin a name derived from an Indigenous American language.	**07 cheese hat** a novelty hat associated with Wisconsin sports fans.
04 silent letter a letter that is written but not pronounced.	**08 skating rink** a prepared surface used for ice skating.

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