Why the West Fell

Trace the connected causes of Rome's division and western collapse.

SS24.7.16c "Summarize the economic, political, and social factors that led to the split and eventual fall of the Western Roman Empire."

NAME _____ DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

YOUR JOB Underline economic pressures, circle political decisions or struggles, and put a star beside social changes. Use your marks to trace how these factors divided the empire and weakened the West.

An Empire Under Pressure

1. Imagine trying to govern an empire stretching from Britain to Egypt. Messages and soldiers took weeks to cross it. By the late 300s, Rome's rulers faced costly armies and repeated struggles for the throne. Taxes paid for defense, but heavy demands strained farmers and merchants. As fighting damaged roads and markets, trade became less reliable in some areas. Rich landowners could often protect themselves better than poorer neighbors. When officials failed to keep people safe, some communities trusted local leaders more than distant emperors. These pressures made a single government harder to manage.

2. Emperors had divided administrative duties before, but in 395, after Emperor Theodosius I died, his two sons ruled separate eastern and western halves. The division helped rulers respond to problems across such a large territory. Constantinople, the eastern capital, was near wealthy cities and important trade routes. The western government, based at different times in Milan and Ravenna, had fewer resources to pay troops. The two halves did not always agree on how to share help. Division did not immediately destroy the West, but it exposed differences in their ability to meet threats.

3. During the 400s, groups including the Visigoths and Vandals entered and fought within western territory. As the western government lost land, it collected less tax money and struggled to support its army. Rival leaders also fought for power, making steady defense harder. In some places, people looked to local rulers for protection rather than the emperor. In 476, a military leader named Odoacer removed the last western emperor, Romulus Augustulus. This ended the western imperial office, not Roman life everywhere. The eastern empire continued for many centuries.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. Summarize how the cost of defense and problems with trade put pressure on the empire before 395.

2. Why was ruling the empire in two halves useful, and how did the halves differ in resources?

3. How did political fighting and changing loyalties make western defense harder?

4. Summarize the chain linking lost territory to the end of the western imperial office in 476.

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

Imagine you advise a western Roman city council in the early 400s. Write five sentences that connect an economic, a political, and a social pressure to the division and the West's weakness, then propose one realistic action your council could take.

ANSWER KEY

Why the West Fell

GRADE 7 · SS24.7.16c

PART 1 · READ AND MARK

Underline economic pressures, circle political decisions or struggles, and put a star beside social changes. Use your marks to trace how these factors divided the empire and weakened the West. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 · ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	Summarize how the cost of defense and problems with trade put pressure on the empire before 395.	**Paying for armies required heavy taxes that strained farmers and merchants, while damage to roads and markets made trade less reliable.**
2	Why was ruling the empire in two halves useful, and how did the halves differ in resources?	**Separate rulers could respond to problems across the large empire. The East had wealthy cities and important trade routes, while the West had fewer resources to pay troops.**
3	How did political fighting and changing loyalties make western defense harder?	**Rival leaders fought for power instead of providing steady defense, and some people trusted local rulers more than the emperor.**
4	Summarize the chain linking lost territory to the end of the western imperial office in 476.	**Losing territory reduced western tax income, which made it harder to support the army. The weakened government faced further threats, and Odoacer removed the last western emperor in 476.**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

Since the empire divided in 395, our western government has fewer resources than the East. Heavy taxes and unreliable trade make it harder for families to help pay for defense. When rival leaders fight for power, the army cannot defend our lands steadily. If neighbors trust local leaders more than imperial officials, the West may lose even more support. Our council should collect supplies fairly and organize local defenses so people have reason to cooperate.

Accept other accurate causal summaries grounded in the passage. For Part 3, the proposed council action should be realistic for a city and connected to at least one pressure the student describes.