Rivers and Settlements

How land and water shaped two Indigenous societies

SS24.8.6a "Analyze how geographic and environmental factors led to the location and growth of Indigenous societies."

NAME _____ DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

YOUR JOB Underline two environmental features near each society, circle one way people used their surroundings at each site, and number one risk at each site. These marks will help you explain how geography shaped where communities lived and how they grew.

Two Places, Two Ways to Grow

1 About 1,000 years ago, Cahokia grew beside the Mississippi River near today's St. Louis. Several major rivers met nearby, making it easier for people and goods to travel between distant communities. The broad floodplain offered rich soil for growing maize. With food to support a larger population, people built homes, plazas, and huge earthen mounds. The same river setting also brought danger: floods could damage fields and homes. Cahokia's location offered both opportunities and risks, rather than a perfect place to live.

2 Far southwest, Hohokam communities grew in the Salt River valley of present-day Arizona. Rainfall there was too low and unreliable for many crops to thrive without extra water. People dug canals that carried river water to fields, where they raised crops such as maize and cotton. Water from the river and the work of maintaining canals helped farming support larger settlements. Yet canals needed regular care, and changes in river flow could threaten harvests. Living beside a river did not mean facing the same conditions as Cahokia.

3 These societies did not simply settle wherever a river appeared. At Cahokia, fertile land and connected waterways encouraged farming and exchange. In the Salt River valley, communities had to move water across dry land before farming could expand. In both places, people changed their surroundings as their settlements grew, building mounds at Cahokia and canals in the Southwest. Geography shaped what was possible, but choices and shared labor shaped what people made of each place. Different environments led to different ways of supporting large communities.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. Why did Cahokia's location help it grow? Explain how both land and waterways mattered.

2. How did rainfall and the Salt River shape the growth of Hohokam communities?

3. Both societies lived near rivers. Why did they use their river settings differently?

4. How could changes in river conditions limit growth at each site?

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

Imagine a new Indigenous community choosing a site beside a sheltered bay with rocky soil. In four sentences, explain how both features could shape its location and growth, describe one choice people could make, and connect your reasoning to one idea from the passage.

ANSWER KEY

Rivers and Settlements

GRADE 8 · SS24.8.6a

PART 1 · READ AND MARK

Underline two environmental features near each society, circle one way people used their surroundings at each site, and number one risk at each site. These marks will help you explain how geography shaped where communities lived and how they grew. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 · ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	Why did Cahokia's location help it grow? Explain how both land and waterways mattered.	**The fertile floodplain supported maize farming and a larger population. Nearby rivers made travel and exchange with distant communities easier.**
2	How did rainfall and the Salt River shape the growth of Hohokam communities?	**Low, unreliable rainfall made farming difficult without extra water. Canals carried Salt River water to fields, helping farming support larger settlements.**
3	Both societies lived near rivers. Why did they use their river settings differently?	**Cahokia had fertile floodplain soil and connected waterways that aided farming and exchange. In the drier Salt River valley, Hohokam communities built canals to bring water to fields.**
4	How could changes in river conditions limit growth at each site?	**Floods at Cahokia could damage homes and fields. Changes in river flow in the Salt River valley could threaten harvests supplied by canals.**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

A community might settle near the sheltered bay because boats could move people and goods between coastal places. Rocky soil might limit farming, so the settlement could rely more on fishing or trade for food. People could choose a protected landing place and work together to store supplies. Like the river communities in the passage, its growth would depend on both local resources and people's choices.

Accept other plausible effects of the bay and rocky soil if students explain how each could affect location or growth. For the open task, look for a practical community choice and a clear connection to the passage's idea that people adapt to their environment.