Two Capitals, Two Needs

How the Confederacy's capital choices reflected changing priorities

SS24.AS.11b "Explain the significance of Montgomery as the first capital of the Confederate States of America, and summarize reasons for moving the capital to Richmond."

NAME _____ DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

YOUR JOB Underline two details that show why Montgomery mattered as the first capital. Circle three reasons for choosing Richmond, then number them 1 for politics, 2 for industry, and 3 for transportation.

From Montgomery to Richmond

1 In February 1861, delegates from six states that had declared secession gathered in Montgomery, Alabama. They formed a provisional Confederate government there and chose Jefferson Davis as its president. At Montgomery's state capitol, Davis took the oath of office on February 18. The city became the first capital of the Confederate States of America, a place where leaders set up offices, drafted a constitution, and began organizing an army. Its role mattered because secession was no longer only a set of state decisions: Confederate leaders now claimed to speak and act for a separate national government. The United States did not recognize that claim.

2 Montgomery's time as capital was brief. After Confederate forces fired on Fort Sumter in April 1861, the war began, and more states in the Upper South moved toward secession. Virginia joined the Confederacy in May, bringing a large population and political influence. Its capital, Richmond, offered Confederate officials a way to honor Virginia's support and strengthen its commitment to the new government. Choosing Richmond also placed the capital closer to Washington, D.C., the United States capital. That location gave the choice symbolic force, but it put Confederate leaders closer to a likely front of the war.

3 Richmond offered more than a political message. Its rail connections could carry officials, soldiers, and supplies across parts of the Confederacy. The city's factories, including the Tredegar Iron Works, made iron products that could support the war effort. Confederate leaders voted to move the capital in May 1861, and Davis arrived in Richmond before the month ended. The move linked the government to an important industrial center and to Virginia, but it did not make the government safe. Richmond's closeness to Union territory made it a target, and defending the city became a major Confederate priority.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. Why was Montgomery more than a meeting place for Confederate leaders?

2. How could moving the capital to Richmond strengthen the Confederacy's political support?

3. How did Richmond's rail connections and factories each support the decision to move?

4. What benefit and danger came from placing the capital closer to Washington, D.C.?

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

Write a 75 to 100 word museum label explaining why Montgomery mattered, giving two distinct reasons for moving to Richmond, and describing one cost of that move. End with your own conclusion about what the two capital choices reveal about Confederate priorities.

ANSWER KEY

Two Capitals, Two Needs

HIGH SCHOOL · SS24.AS.11b

PART 1 · READ AND MARK

Underline two details that show why Montgomery mattered as the first capital. Circle three reasons for choosing Richmond, then number them 1 for politics, 2 for industry, and 3 for transportation. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 · ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	Why was Montgomery more than a meeting place for Confederate leaders?	**Leaders established a provisional government there, chose and inaugurated a president, and began creating the institutions of a claimed separate nation.**
2	How could moving the capital to Richmond strengthen the Confederacy's political support?	**Choosing Virginia's capital honored its decision to join and could strengthen the influential state's commitment to the Confederacy.**
3	How did Richmond's rail connections and factories each support the decision to move?	**Rail connections could move officials, soldiers, and supplies. Factories, including the Tredegar Iron Works, could produce iron products for the war effort.**
4	What benefit and danger came from placing the capital closer to Washington, D.C.?	**The location had symbolic force, but its closeness to Union territory made Richmond a target near a likely war front.**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

Montgomery was the Confederacy's first capital, where leaders created a provisional government and Jefferson Davis took office. That beginning turned separate states' secession decisions into a claim to national authority. Richmond served a different need after Virginia joined: choosing its capital reinforced support from an influential state. Richmond's rail links and ironworks also helped officials plan and supply the war. Yet its position near Union territory made it vulnerable to attack. Together, the two capitals show how leaders balanced building a government, gathering support, and fighting a war.

For the museum label, accept any two distinct, passage-supported reasons for moving to Richmond. The conclusion should connect both capital choices to Confederate priorities, not just repeat the names of the cities.