Land and Livelihoods

How Alabama's geography shaped work, industry, and tourism

SS24.AS.21 "Explain the interrelationship among geography, natural resources, and the development of Alabama's economy from the early nineteenth century into the early twentieth century..."

NAME _____ DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

YOUR JOB Underline two places where land or water helped an industry grow, and circle one place where people's choices affected who benefited. Number one example of present-day tourism and one example of present-day resource-based work.

What the Land Makes Possible

1. In the early 1800s, a bale of cotton grown in Alabama's Black Belt might travel by boat down a river toward the Gulf of Mexico. The region's fertile soil supported cotton farming, while navigable waterways connected inland farms to distant buyers. Cotton brought wealth to some landowners, but that wealth depended heavily on the forced labor of enslaved people. After the Civil War, many farmers remained tied to cotton through sharecropping, a system that often left them in debt. Geography helped create a profitable export economy, but who controlled land and labor determined who benefited from it.

2. By the late 1800s, Alabama's mineral deposits supported a different kind of growth. Coal, iron ore, and limestone lay close together near Birmingham. Furnaces used coal to help turn iron ore into iron, while limestone helped remove impurities. Rail lines carried raw materials to factories and finished products to customers. This combination made Birmingham a center of iron and steel production. Elsewhere, forests supplied timber for sawmills, and by the early 1900s, rivers provided power for some factories. These industries created jobs beyond farming, although they did not erase the unequal working conditions that shaped the state's economy.

3. Today, geography still shapes how Alabamians earn money, but the economy is more varied. Gulf Coast beaches draw visitors who spend money on lodging and food. In northern Alabama, hills, caves, and rivers attract hikers, cave visitors, and anglers. Farms produce poultry and crops, while forests supply timber, so agriculture and natural resources still support jobs, especially in rural areas. Yet health care, automobile manufacturing, and other services also employ workers; farming and resource extraction no longer define the entire state economy. Tourism depends on keeping beaches, waterways, and natural areas appealing, which can make conservation an economic choice as well as an environmental one.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. How did the Black Belt's soil and Alabama's waterways work together to support the cotton economy? Who did not share equally in its wealth?

2. Why could Birmingham become an iron and steel center? Explain how both nearby resources and transportation mattered.

3. Compare how two different parts of Alabama use their geography to attract visitors today.

4. To what extent do agriculture and natural resources still shape Alabama's economy? Support your judgment with evidence from the passage.

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

Imagine you advise an Alabama county with forests and a river. In five sentences, propose one way to earn income from tourism and one way to earn income from a natural resource, compare a proposed use of the river with its earlier economic use in the passage, and explain one trade-off the county should consider.

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PART 1 · READ AND MARK

Underline two places where land or water helped an industry grow, and circle one place where people's choices affected who benefited. Number one example of present-day tourism and one example of present-day resource-based work. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 · ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	How did the Black Belt's soil and Alabama's waterways work together to support the cotton economy? Who did not share equally in its wealth?	**Fertile soil supported cotton farming, and waterways carried cotton to buyers. Enslaved people whose forced labor produced cotton did not share equally in the wealth.**
2	Why could Birmingham become an iron and steel center? Explain how both nearby resources and transportation mattered.	**Nearby coal, iron ore, and limestone supplied materials for production. Rail lines moved those materials to factories and carried finished products to customers.**
3	Compare how two different parts of Alabama use their geography to attract visitors today.	**Gulf Coast beaches attract visitors for the coast, while northern Alabama's hills, caves, and rivers attract hikers, cave visitors, and anglers.**
4	To what extent do agriculture and natural resources still shape Alabama's economy? Support your judgment with evidence from the passage.	**They remain significant, especially in rural areas, through poultry, crops, and timber. They do not define the whole economy because health care, automobile manufacturing, and services also employ workers.**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

Our county could offer guided river fishing trips that bring visitors to local shops and inns. It could also sell timber from carefully managed forests to support jobs in harvesting and processing. These plans would give the county more than one source of income. The river could attract visitors today, while waterways once carried cotton from inland farms toward buyers. Logging too close to the river might damage water quality, so the county should leave trees along its banks.

Accept other passage-supported links between geography and economic activity. For the open task, look for two distinct income sources, an accurate historical comparison, and a plausible trade-off.