Moving the Capital

Trace Alabama's path from territory to state

SS24.AS.9 "Outline the chronology of Alabama's path to statehood in the early nineteenth century, including the shifting of capital locations."

NAME _____ DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

YOUR JOB Circle each year, underline each capital city at its first mention, and number the cities in the order they served, adding T beside the territorial capital to track how the seat of government changed.

Alabama's Changing Seat of Government

1 In 1798, the United States created the Mississippi Territory, which included land that would become Alabama. Its eastern settlements grew rapidly after the Creek War. In 1814, the Treaty of Fort Jackson forced the Creek Nation to give up vast lands, opening more land to U.S. settlement. Settlers moved in, while enslaved people were forced to work on expanding cotton farms. In 1817, Congress divided the Mississippi Territory. Its western section would become the state of Mississippi later that year, while its eastern section became the Alabama Territory. St. Stephens, a town on the Tombigbee River, became its territorial capital.

2 Alabama Territory lasted only about two years. In July 1819, delegates met in Huntsville to write a state constitution, setting rules for the proposed state government. Their meeting was one step toward admission to the Union, not the moment Alabama became a state. Congress admitted Alabama on December 14, 1819, as the twenty-second state. Huntsville served as the temporary state capital while officials prepared a permanent seat of government. In 1820, the state government moved to Cahaba, a planned town near the meeting of the Alabama and Cahaba Rivers. Unlike St. Stephens, Cahaba was a state capital, not a territorial one.

3 Cahaba did not remain the capital. River flooding and concerns about the town's location helped prompt another move. In 1826, state lawmakers began meeting in Tuscaloosa, farther north along the Black Warrior River. As Alabama's population and political influence shifted, leaders again debated where the government should meet. In 1846, lawmakers voted to move the capital to Montgomery, and they first met there in 1847. Montgomery's position on the Alabama River made travel and trade easier for many communities. The sequence of capitals shows two different stages: Alabama had a territorial capital before statehood and several state capitals afterward.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. How did the 1814 treaty fit between the creation of the Mississippi Territory and its division?

2. What happened in Huntsville in July 1819, and what happened later that year?

3. Name the capitals that served before and just after Alabama became a state. When did the government move to its first permanent state capital?

4. After Cahaba, where and when did state lawmakers next meet? Where and when did they meet after that?

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

Write a 75- to 100-word museum label tracing Alabama's changing capitals. Include all five capital cities and at least four dates, distinguish the territorial capital from the state capitals, and explain one reason for a move.

ANSWER KEY

Moving the Capital

HIGH SCHOOL · SS24.AS.9

PART 1 · READ AND MARK

Circle each year, underline each capital city at its first mention, and number the cities in the order they served, adding T beside the territorial capital to track how the seat of government changed. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 · ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	How did the 1814 treaty fit between the creation of the Mississippi Territory and its division?	**The territory was created in 1798. The treaty forced the Creek Nation to give up land in 1814, before Congress divided the territory in 1817.**
2	What happened in Huntsville in July 1819, and what happened later that year?	**Delegates wrote a state constitution in Huntsville in July. Alabama entered the Union on December 14, 1819.**
3	Name the capitals that served before and just after Alabama became a state. When did the government move to its first permanent state capital?	**St. Stephens was the territorial capital. Huntsville was the temporary state capital after statehood, and the government moved to Cahaba in 1820.**
4	After Cahaba, where and when did state lawmakers next meet? Where and when did they meet after that?	**They began meeting in Tuscaloosa in 1826 and first met in Montgomery in 1847.**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

In 1817, the new Alabama Territory placed its government in St. Stephens. After delegates wrote a constitution in Huntsville in July 1819, Alabama entered the Union that December, with Huntsville serving as its temporary state capital. Officials moved to Cahaba in 1820, making it the first permanent state capital. Flooding and concerns about Cahaba's location helped lead lawmakers to Tuscaloosa, where they began meeting in 1826. They voted in 1846 to move again, and Montgomery hosted lawmakers in 1847. This sequence began with a territorial capital and continued through four state capitals.

Accept labels that place St. Stephens before statehood and order the state capitals Huntsville, Cahaba, Tuscaloosa, and Montgomery. A reason for a move may be Cahaba's flooding or location, or Montgomery's access to river travel and trade.