Walls and Turning Points

Trace decisions and events that reshaped the Cold War.

SS24.US2.17c "Trace the series of events during Reagan's presidency leading to the emergence of the United States as the sole superpower, the fall of the Berlin Wall, and the collapse of the Soviet Union."

NAME _____ DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

YOUR JOB Underline five turning points in the passage and number them from earliest to latest. Circle phrases that explain how one event helped lead to another.

From Rivalry to a New World Order

1 In 1981, Ronald Reagan entered office as tensions with the Soviet Union rose. The rivals held vast nuclear arsenals, and Soviet troops had invaded Afghanistan in 1979. Reagan expanded U.S. defense spending, proposed a missile defense system, and called the Soviet Union an "evil empire." These choices added to the rivalry as Soviet leaders faced an economy already burdened by military costs and deep internal problems. Yet pressure alone did not end the Cold War. Soviet leaders also faced weak production, shortages, and demands for change. Decisions made in both countries would affect events far beyond their borders.

2 When Mikhail Gorbachev became Soviet leader in 1985, he tried to repair the system through perestroika, or economic restructuring, and glasnost, or greater openness. These reforms allowed more public criticism but did not solve shortages. Reagan and Gorbachev shifted from confrontation toward negotiation. In 1987, they signed the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty, which eliminated an entire class of U.S. and Soviet missiles. Gorbachev also reduced Soviet forces and signaled that Moscow would no longer use force to keep communist governments in power across Eastern Europe. Without that expected military backing, reformers and protesters had more room to challenge those governments.

3 In 1989, thousands of East Germans fled through newly opened routes in Eastern Europe, while crowds protested at home. After East German officials announced eased travel rules on November 9, crowds pressed to cross into West Berlin, and border guards opened the Berlin Wall's checkpoints. The wall's opening symbolized the end of Europe's Cold War division, but Reagan had left office that January. Germany reunited in 1990. In 1991, a failed coup weakened Gorbachev, republics declared independence, and the Soviet Union dissolved in December. With its main geopolitical rival gone, the United States stood as the world's sole superpower, though it did not control every nation.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. How did Reagan's early policies and his later talks with Gorbachev mark two different stages of the Cold War's final years?

2. Trace the link between Gorbachev's policy toward Eastern Europe and the opening of the Berlin Wall.

3. Put the Berlin Wall's opening, German reunification, and the Soviet Union's collapse in order. What does that order show about how the Cold War ended?

4. Why did the Soviet Union's collapse change the United States' global position, and why would it be inaccurate to say Reagan was president when it happened?

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

Write a museum label of five or six sentences responding to this claim: “Reagan alone brought down the Berlin Wall and the Soviet Union.” Trace at least four events in order, include choices by both Reagan and Gorbachev, and explain what happened after Reagan left office.

ANSWER KEY

Walls and Turning Points

GRADE 11 · SS24.US2.17c

PART 1 · READ AND MARK

Underline five turning points in the passage and number them from earliest to latest. Circle phrases that explain how one event helped lead to another. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 · ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	How did Reagan's early policies and his later talks with Gorbachev mark two different stages of the Cold War's final years?	**Reagan first expanded defense spending and proposed missile defense during a period of heightened rivalry. Later, he negotiated with Gorbachev, and they signed a treaty eliminating a class of missiles in 1987.**
2	Trace the link between Gorbachev's policy toward Eastern Europe and the opening of the Berlin Wall.	**Gorbachev signaled that Moscow would not use force to keep Eastern European communist governments in power. Protesters gained room to challenge those governments; after East German flight, protests, and a travel announcement, border guards opened the Wall's checkpoints.**
3	Put the Berlin Wall's opening, German reunification, and the Soviet Union's collapse in order. What does that order show about how the Cold War ended?	**The Wall opened in 1989, Germany reunited in 1990, and the Soviet Union dissolved in 1991. The Cold War ended through a series of events, not a single moment.**
4	Why did the Soviet Union's collapse change the United States' global position, and why would it be inaccurate to say Reagan was president when it happened?	**The collapse removed the United States' main geopolitical rival, leaving it the sole superpower. Reagan left office in January 1989, before the Soviet Union dissolved in December 1991.**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

Reagan's defense buildup added to Cold War pressure as the Soviet system struggled with internal problems. After Gorbachev took power in 1985, his reforms opened public criticism, and both leaders negotiated a missile treaty in 1987. Gorbachev's decision not to enforce communist rule in Eastern Europe gave protesters more room to act. East German flight and demonstrations preceded the Berlin Wall's opening in November 1989. The Soviet Union dissolved in December 1991 after republics declared independence. Reagan had left office before both events, so the claim overlooks Soviet decisions and popular action.

Accept other accurate causal links supported by the passage. Responses should distinguish events during Reagan's presidency from the Wall's opening and Soviet collapse, which occurred afterward.