

When Sharing Strained

Trace why some early shared-resource systems became difficult to maintain.

SS.6.HC.1 "Explain the failures of ancient communal systems."

NAME _____

DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK _____ Read it twice

YOUR JOB Underline each pressure on a communal system, and circle the result that pressure caused.

Challenges of Shared Resources

- ① Many early farming villages organized work and resources communally. Families planted fields, repaired irrigation ditches, and stored grain in shared places. This system could help neighbors survive droughts or poor harvests because food was pooled. As villages grew, however, leaders faced harder choices. They had to decide who would work, how much grain each family would receive, and who would guard supplies. A system based on small-group trust became more difficult to manage when hundreds of people, including strangers, depended on the same storehouse.
- ② Shared systems also depended on people believing that rules were fair. If a family worked long hours but received the same ration as a family that worked less, resentment could grow. Leaders needed records to track grain, labor, and debts, but record keeping gave some officials more control over decisions. In southern Mesopotamian cities, temples and palaces collected and distributed goods. These institutions organized large projects, yet they also concentrated power. Many communities moved away from equal sharing toward ranked social groups and different levels of wealth.
- ③ Pressure on land and water made communal decisions even more difficult. A growing village might need more fields, while herders needed grazing land and families needed wood. When several groups used the same resource, one group could take too much unless the community enforced limits. Disputes over access sometimes led to conflict. Communal systems did not all collapse at once, and sharing continued in many places. Still, population growth, unequal effort, scarce resources, and concentrated power weakened systems built on broad, equal cooperation. New rules, private property, and stronger governments often replaced older arrangements.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE _____ Use the passage

1 Why did shared storehouses become harder to manage as villages grew?

2 How could unequal work and equal rations weaken a communal system?

3 Explain how keeping records could lead to concentrated power.

4 How could competition for land, water, or wood lead to conflict?

3 YOUR TURN _____ Your own words

Imagine a growing river village that shares food, water, and work. Write exactly three sentences that explain two problems the village might face and one rule or change that could help it.

PART 1 • READ AND MARK

Underline each pressure on a communal system, and circle the result that pressure caused. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 • ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	Why did shared storehouses become harder to manage as villages grew?	Leaders had to manage work, grain shares, and security for many people, including strangers, instead of a small group built on trust.
2	How could unequal work and equal rations weaken a communal system?	Families that worked more could feel the rules were unfair and become resentful.
3	Explain how keeping records could lead to concentrated power.	Officials who tracked grain, labor, and debts gained more control over decisions. Temples and palaces that collected and distributed goods could also hold power.
4	How could competition for land, water, or wood lead to conflict?	Different groups needed the same limited resources. If one group took too much and limits were not enforced, disputes could occur.

PART 3 • YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

At Riverbend, more families want water for crops, but herders also bring animals to the riverbank. Some workers stop repairing the canal because every family receives identical grain, so resentment grows. The village could assign water turns and record each family's canal work before sharing grain.

Accept equivalent cause-and-effect explanations supported by the passage. Students should explain that communal systems faced pressures, rather than claiming that every shared system completely disappeared.