

Maps Tell Why

Compare land features and human patterns to explain regional history.

SS.8.G.1.1 "Use maps to explain physical and cultural attributes of major regions throughout American history."

NAME _____

DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK _____ Read it twice

YOUR JOB Underline every physical attribute and circle every cultural attribute in the passage. In paragraph 1, write 1 beside the sentence that connects the two map types, then do the same with 2 in paragraph 2 and 3 in paragraph 3.

Reading Two Layers of History

- ① Maps can tell a story when readers compare what the land offers with what people build. Consider the Mississippi River valley in the early 1800s. A physical map shows the Mississippi and its tributaries, broad floodplains, and rich soil. A cultural map of the same region can show river ports, Indigenous homelands, and roads. Reading both maps together helps explain why travel, trade, settlement, and conflict clustered along waterways rather than spreading evenly across the land.
- ② By the mid-1800s, maps of the Great Plains revealed a different relationship between place and people. A physical map identifies wide grasslands, few trees, and long stretches with limited rainfall. A cultural map may trace trails, forts, railroad lines, and growing towns. These details explain regional change: trails and railroads followed workable routes, while towns often grew where transportation met water or other resources. The two map types answer different questions, but their evidence can be combined.
- ③ Map readers also pay attention to dates, titles, legends, and scale. A map titled "Cotton Production, 1860" gives cultural evidence about an economic activity at one time. If its symbols concentrate in the Southeast, a reader can compare that pattern with a physical map showing warm temperatures, long growing seasons, and fertile lowlands. The comparison supports an explanation, not a guess: environmental conditions influenced where cotton was grown, while farms, roads, and cities show human choices within that environment.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE _____ Use the passage

1 Use the map descriptions in paragraph 1. Which physical evidence and which cultural evidence could explain why settlement clustered along waterways in the Mississippi River valley?

2 Use paragraph 2 to explain how physical and cultural map evidence together could help a historian explain the growth of Great Plains towns.

3 A map titled “Cotton Production, 1860” shows many cotton symbols in the Southeast. What physical map evidence should you compare with it, and what conclusion could you make?

4 Which four map features should you check before comparing maps, and how can they make your explanation more accurate?

3 YOUR TURN _____ Your own words

Use an atlas, textbook, or class maps to investigate an American region and time period different from those in the passage. Complete both rows with paired physical and cultural map evidence, then explain how each pair helps explain a settlement or economic pattern.

REGION AND TIME PERIOD	PHYSICAL MAP EVIDENCE	CULTURAL MAP EVIDENCE	EXPLANATION OF THE PATTERN

PART 1 • READ AND MARK

Underline every physical attribute and circle every cultural attribute in the passage. In paragraph 1, write 1 beside the sentence that connects the two map types, then do the same with 2 in paragraph 2 and 3 in paragraph 3. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 • ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	Use the map descriptions in paragraph 1. Which physical evidence and which cultural evidence could explain why settlement clustered along waterways in the Mississippi River valley?	Physical evidence includes the Mississippi River, tributaries, floodplains, and rich soil. Cultural evidence includes river ports, Indigenous homelands, and roads.
2	Use paragraph 2 to explain how physical and cultural map evidence together could help a historian explain the growth of Great Plains towns.	Physical maps show grasslands, few trees, and limited rainfall. Cultural maps show trails, railroads, and towns, supporting the explanation that towns often grew where transportation met water or other resources.
3	A map titled "Cotton Production, 1860" shows many cotton symbols in the Southeast. What physical map evidence should you compare with it, and what conclusion could you make?	Compare it with warm temperatures, long growing seasons, and fertile lowlands. These conditions influenced where cotton was grown.
4	Which four map features should you check before comparing maps, and how can they make your explanation more accurate?	Check dates, titles, legends, and scale. They show when the map applies, what it shows, what symbols mean, and the size or distance represented.

PART 3 • YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

REGION AND TIME PERIOD	PHYSICAL MAP EVIDENCE	CULTURAL MAP EVIDENCE	EXPLANATION OF THE PATTERN
Colonial New England, 1700s	Rocky coastline and deep natural harbors	Port towns and shipping routes	Harbors supported trade and the growth of port towns.
Colonial New England, 1700s	Thin, rocky soil	Small farms and inland villages	Difficult large-scale farming encouraged smaller farms.

Accept equivalent physical and cultural evidence that is accurately connected to a regional pattern. Railroads, roads, towns, farms, and ports are cultural features, while rivers, soil, climate, grasslands, and landforms are physical features.