Routes and Rifts

How transportation changed trade and relationships in the United States

6-12.US1.33 "Explain how the development of various modes of transportation increased economic prosperity, promoted national unity, and contributed to disunity."

NAME _____ DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

YOUR JOB Underline each mode of transportation, circle one economic gain in each paragraph, and write U beside a detail about national unity or D beside a detail about disunity.

What New Routes Changed

1. In 1825, a boat loaded with flour could travel from the Great Lakes to the Hudson River through the new Erie Canal. Before the canal, moving bulky goods over land cost more and took longer. The canal helped western farmers sell crops in eastern cities, while eastern merchants sold tools and cloth farther west. Roads, including the National Road, also carried people and goods across the Appalachian Mountains. As travel became easier, people in distant places bought and sold from one another more often. These links helped many Americans see distant states as parts of one growing country.

2. Steamboats made travel on major rivers faster, especially when moving upstream against the current. Farmers near the Mississippi River could send crops to ports, and merchants could return with manufactured goods. Later, railroads carried freight and passengers in many directions, including places far from rivers. Faster trips gave businesses access to more customers and helped families exchange news and visit relatives across state lines. The first transcontinental railroad, completed in 1869, connected rail lines in the eastern United States with the Pacific coast. It strengthened trade and communication across a vast distance, though its benefits were not shared equally.

3. New routes also sharpened conflicts. Before the Civil War, improved river travel moved cotton from Southern plantations to markets. That trade made money for plantation owners, but it also strengthened an economy built on enslaved labor. As railroads pushed west, settlers and companies sought land that Native nations already lived on and used. Federal policies forced many Native people from their homelands, and railroad building added pressure on their communities. At the same time, new western territories raised arguments over whether slavery would expand there. Transportation linked markets and people, but struggles over land and slavery divided the country.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. How did the Erie Canal and the National Road help trade and help people feel part of one country?

2. How did steamboats and railroads expand trade, and how did faster travel help connect people across state lines?

3. Why could improved river travel bring wealth to some plantation owners while deepening a division in the country?

4. How could westward railroad construction connect the country and also cause conflict? Use two details from the passage.

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

Imagine a new rail line from a made-up farming town to a distant city. In 4 to 5 sentences, explain how it could increase trade and bring people together, but also cause a conflict over land. Do not reuse a place or route named in the passage.

ANSWER KEY

Routes and Rifts

GRADES 6-12 · 6-12.US1.33

PART 1 · READ AND MARK

Underline each mode of transportation, circle one economic gain in each paragraph, and write U beside a detail about national unity or D beside a detail about disunity. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 · ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	How did the Erie Canal and the National Road help trade and help people feel part of one country?	**They made it easier to move goods and people between distant places. More trade between states helped some Americans see those states as parts of one country.**
2	How did steamboats and railroads expand trade, and how did faster travel help connect people across state lines?	**Steamboats carried crops and goods along rivers, while railroads reached places far from rivers and gave businesses more customers. Faster travel helped families visit and exchange news across state lines.**
3	Why could improved river travel bring wealth to some plantation owners while deepening a division in the country?	**It helped plantation owners sell cotton, making them money, but it also strengthened an economy built on enslaved labor, a source of national conflict.**
4	How could westward railroad construction connect the country and also cause conflict? Use two details from the passage.	**The transcontinental railroad strengthened trade and communication between the eastern United States and the Pacific coast. Westward building also added pressure on Native communities whose lands settlers and companies sought.**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

A new rail line from Pine Hollow to a distant city lets farmers sell wheat to more buyers. Lower shipping costs bring more money to the town. Passengers carry letters and news between communities, helping people feel connected. But the rail company plans to cross land used by a Native nation without its consent, causing a dispute over the route.

Accept other passage-based explanations that link a transportation mode to trade, connection, or conflict. For the open task, look for a plausible economic gain, a way people become connected, and a specific land conflict.