Who Gets the West?

Trace how competition for land and resources changed the western United States.

6-12.US1.44 "Identify how continued land and natural resource competition affected political, cultural, and economic development of the western United States, including..."

NAME _____ DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

YOUR JOB In each paragraph, underline one claim to land or a natural resource, circle one economic effect, and draw a box around one political or cultural effect. Use your marks to trace how competition changed the West.

Land, Resources, and Change

1. Long before settlers called the West a frontier, Native nations lived on and governed its lands. In the early 1800s, fur traders sought beaver pelts, which were sold to make hats. Trading posts brought goods and money into the region, but trapping and new travel routes also put outsiders in closer contact and conflict with Native communities. In 1862, the Homestead Act offered many applicants 160 acres of public land if they lived on and improved it for five years. The law encouraged farms and towns, while federal claims to that land challenged Native land rights and ways of life.

2. Completed in 1869, the transcontinental railroad connected western markets to the eastern United States. It carried settlers and farm goods, helped towns grow along its tracks, and increased demand for land. Hunters supplying railroad crews with meat and commercial markets with hides killed bison in huge numbers. By the late 1800s, bison herds had fallen from millions to a tiny fraction of their former size. Many Plains Native nations relied on bison for food, shelter materials, and cultural practices, so the loss was devastating. Federal policies and military campaigns also pushed Native peoples onto reservations, making more land available to settlers.

3. After the Civil War, cattle drives moved Texas herds north to railheads, where ranchers could sell cattle to distant buyers. For a time, cattle grazed on unfenced public land called open range. As farms spread, ranchers fenced pastures, and conflicts over grass and water grew. Barbed wire and harsh winters helped end the open-range era. In 1889, the federal government opened the Unassigned Lands in what is now Oklahoma to a land rush. Thousands raced to claim plots, creating new settlements. Earlier federal removal and land policies had stripped Native nations of control over land in the region. Who controlled land shaped laws, livelihoods, and communities.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. How did the fur trade and the Homestead Act each increase competition for western land or resources?

2. How did the railroad support western economic growth, and how was bison hunting connected to a cultural loss?

3. How did competition for grass and water change ranching during the end of the open-range era?

4. How did the Land Rush of 1889 change settlement, and what earlier actions had affected Native control of land?

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

Write a three-sentence museum label that links two developments from the passage through competition for land or resources. Explain one economic effect and one political or cultural effect, using a combination of developments not paired in a Part 2 question.

ANSWER KEY

Who Gets the West?

GRADES 6-12 · 6-12.US1.44

PART 1 · READ AND MARK

In each paragraph, underline one claim to land or a natural resource, circle one economic effect, and draw a box around one political or cultural effect. Use your marks to trace how competition changed the West. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 · ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	How did the fur trade and the Homestead Act each increase competition for western land or resources?	**Fur traders sought beaver pelts and brought outsiders into closer contact and conflict with Native communities. The Homestead Act encouraged settlers to claim land for farms, challenging Native land rights.**
2	How did the railroad support western economic growth, and how was bison hunting connected to a cultural loss?	**The railroad carried settlers and farm goods and helped towns grow. Hunters supplied railroad crews and commercial markets with bison; the herds' collapse harmed Plains Native nations that relied on bison for food, materials, and cultural practices.**
3	How did competition for grass and water change ranching during the end of the open-range era?	**As farms spread and conflicts over grass and water grew, ranchers fenced pastures instead of relying on unfenced open range.**
4	How did the Land Rush of 1889 change settlement, and what earlier actions had affected Native control of land?	**Thousands claimed plots and created new settlements. Earlier federal removal and land policies had stripped Native nations of control over land in the region.**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

The Homestead Act brought more farms onto western land, while cattle drives brought herds north to sell. As farms spread, competition for grass and water pushed ranchers to fence pastures. Federal land claims that favored settlement also challenged Native nations' control of land.

Accept other passage-supported links between two developments if the three-sentence label identifies both an economic effect and a political or cultural effect. The sample pairs the Homestead Act with cattle drives, a combination not paired in Part 2.