Remaking Roman Power

Trace why Roman leaders changed the empire and what followed.

9-12.WC.15 "Analyze the causes and consequences of Diocletian's reforms and Constantine the Great's establishment of "New Rome" (Constantinople) and the recognition of Christianity as a legal religion."

NAME _____ DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

YOUR JOB Underline problems or aims that led to reforms, circle three major decisions, and give each circled decision and one of its consequences the same number.

An Empire Changes Course

1 By the late third century, Rome's emperors faced invasions, civil wars, and the problem of governing a huge territory from one center. Rival generals often claimed the throne, so a single ruler could not easily defend every frontier. Diocletian, emperor from 284, divided imperial rule among two senior emperors and two junior partners. This system, called the tetrarchy, placed leaders nearer threatened borders and aimed to make succession orderly. He also reorganized provinces and strengthened tax collection to pay for the army. These changes increased state control, but taxes and administrative demands weighed heavily on many people.

2 Diocletian's attempt to steady the empire also exposed a limit of tighter control. In 303, his government began a severe persecution of Christians, ordering churches destroyed and sacred writings surrendered. Officials hoped religious unity would help secure imperial loyalty, but the campaign did not eliminate Christianity. After Diocletian stepped down in 305, rival claimants fought for power despite his plan for succession. Constantine emerged from these struggles as a dominant ruler. In 313, Constantine and Licinius agreed to allow Christians and followers of other religions to worship freely and to restore confiscated Christian property. This reversed the earlier policy of persecution and gave Christian communities room to grow.

3 Constantine also looked east. In 330, he dedicated Constantinople on the site of Byzantium, beside a waterway linking the Black Sea and the Mediterranean. The location offered access to trade routes and to the empire's wealthier eastern provinces, while strong defenses helped guard the city. Establishing this "New Rome" gave the emperor a powerful base closer to eastern frontiers. It did not immediately replace Rome or split the empire into two independent states. Over time, however, Constantinople became the eastern empire's political center. Constantine's decisions reshaped imperial power and religious life, even as conflict over rule continued.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. How did the problems Diocletian faced help explain his decision to share imperial rule?

2. What happened after Diocletian stepped down, and what does it show about his plan for succession?

3. How did the agreement made by Constantine and Licinius reverse Diocletian's treatment of Christians, and what changed for Christian communities?

4. Why was the site of Byzantium useful for Constantine's new capital, and what political change followed over time?

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

Imagine advising a Roman senator in 330 who claims these changes solved the empire's troubles. Write a 90 to 110 word assessment that weighs a benefit against a limitation and connects at least two decisions through cause and effect.

ANSWER KEY

Remaking Roman Power

HIGH SCHOOL · 9-12.WC.15

PART 1 · READ AND MARK

Underline problems or aims that led to reforms, circle three major decisions, and give each circled decision and one of its consequences the same number. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 · ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	How did the problems Diocletian faced help explain his decision to share imperial rule?	**Invasions, civil wars, and distant frontiers were difficult for one ruler to manage. Sharing rule placed leaders nearer threatened borders and was meant to make succession orderly.**
2	What happened after Diocletian stepped down, and what does it show about his plan for succession?	**Rival claimants fought for power after 305. The fighting shows that the tetrarchy did not secure an orderly succession.**
3	How did the agreement made by Constantine and Licinius reverse Diocletian's treatment of Christians, and what changed for Christian communities?	**Diocletian's government persecuted Christians, but the 313 agreement allowed them to worship freely and restored confiscated property. Christian communities had room to grow.**
4	Why was the site of Byzantium useful for Constantine's new capital, and what political change followed over time?	**It offered trade access, strong defenses, and proximity to eastern provinces and frontiers. Constantinople eventually became the eastern empire's political center.**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

I would not tell the senator that the empire's troubles were solved. Diocletian put rulers near threatened borders, which could help them respond to invasions, but his succession plan failed when rivals fought after 305. Those struggles helped Constantine rise to power. Constantine then based his rule in Constantinople, where trade routes and strong defenses offered advantages. His agreement with Licinius also reversed persecution, giving Christian communities space to grow. Together these choices changed where authority operated and how it treated Christians. Yet a better capital and a new religious policy could not guarantee peaceful succession.

Accept assessments that use accurate passage evidence, explain a cause-and-effect connection between at least two decisions, and weigh a benefit against a limitation. Students may reach different judgments about how much the changes helped the empire.