Three Threads, One Town

Trace the traditions that shaped a medieval European town

9-12.WC.2 "Explain how Western civilization is distinct from other cultures and civilizations and arose primarily from a synthesis of cultures, including, but not limited to classical Greco-Roman civilization, Judeo-Christian influence..."

NAME _____ DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

YOUR JOB Underline details linked to Roman learning, circle details linked to Christian institutions, and number details linked to Frankish customs. Use your marks to explain how the town combined traditions rather than simply preserving one.

A Town Shaped by Many Traditions

1 Imagine entering a town in northern France around 1200. At the market gate, a clerk records a dispute over a shipment of cloth. He uses Latin, a language preserved in Western churches and schools, and refers to legal ideas studied from ancient Roman texts. The town's stone roads and public buildings do not mean Roman government still rules here. Rather, people have adapted parts of a Roman inheritance to new needs. Even the idea of a written town charter joins older legal habits to the practical demands of merchants who need rules they can appeal to.

2 Nearby, a church runs a shelter for poor travelers, drawing on Christian teachings about care for neighbors. Its calendar also shapes when markets close for religious observances. Yet town life is not simply Roman law plus Christianity. Northern European peoples, including the Franks, brought customs of sworn loyalty and local judgment when they settled in lands once ruled by Rome. Over centuries, rulers and towns adapted such customs alongside written law. A council of residents might hear witnesses under oath before settling a quarrel. No single community created this whole arrangement at once; practices changed as people negotiated power and shared space.

3 Now picture a visitor arriving from Baghdad around 1200. Its scholars also studied ancient Greek works, and its residents also supported religious charities and debated legal questions. But Islamic legal scholarship and institutions shaped Baghdad's public life in ways different from a western European town's mix of Roman legal learning, Christian organizations, and Frankish customs. The contrast is not between a "civilized" West and everyone else. Both places drew from earlier traditions and exchanged knowledge through trade and translation. Western civilization developed a distinctive historical blend, not a set of ideas found only in the West or shared by every European town identically.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. How could the cloth dispute reveal both Roman and Frankish influences on the town's way of settling disagreements?

2. How did Christian institutions shape both a service for travelers and the town's market schedule?

3. What details show that learning, charity, and law were not found only in the western European town?

4. Despite those similarities, how did the traditions shaping public life in the town differ from those shaping public life in Baghdad?

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

Write a five-sentence museum label for a proposed hospital in this town. Invent one rule or practice inspired by each of the three traditions in the passage, then explain how this combination differs from Baghdad's without claiming Baghdad lacked charity or law.

ANSWER KEY

Three Threads, One Town

HIGH SCHOOL · 9-12.WC.2

PART 1 · READ AND MARK

Underline details linked to Roman learning, circle details linked to Christian institutions, and number details linked to Frankish customs. Use your marks to explain how the town combined traditions rather than simply preserving one. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 · ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	How could the cloth dispute reveal both Roman and Frankish influences on the town's way of settling disagreements?	**The clerk refers to legal ideas studied from Roman texts, while a council may hear witnesses under oath, a practice linked to Frankish customs of local judgment and sworn loyalty.**
2	How did Christian institutions shape both a service for travelers and the town's market schedule?	**The church ran a shelter for poor travelers, and its calendar affected when markets closed for religious observances.**
3	What details show that learning, charity, and law were not found only in the western European town?	**Baghdad's scholars studied ancient Greek works, its residents supported religious charities, and people there debated legal questions.**
4	Despite those similarities, how did the traditions shaping public life in the town differ from those shaping public life in Baghdad?	**The town's public life combined Roman legal learning, Christian organizations, and Frankish customs. Islamic legal scholarship and institutions shaped Baghdad's public life.**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

This proposed hospital records each gift in a written agreement using Roman legal ideas. It provides beds for poor travelers because Christian teaching calls neighbors to care for them. Residents serving on a local council swear an oath before judging disputes, drawing on Frankish customs. These three practices join traditions that arose in different times and places. Baghdad also supported religious charities and legal learning, but Islamic institutions shaped its public life differently from this town's particular blend.

Accept other plausible hospital practices if the label connects one to each tradition and identifies the town's combination without treating charity, law, or learning as exclusive to Western civilization.