Walls Under Pressure

Trace the causes and consequences of Constantinople's fall.

9-12.WC.36 "Analyze the causes and consequences of the fall of Constantinople."

NAME _____ DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

YOUR JOB Underline two conditions that weakened Byzantine defenses, circle two Ottoman siege tactics, and number two changes that followed the conquest. Use your marks to trace how the city fell and what changed afterward.

The Fall of Constantinople

1. In 1453, Constantinople stood at the narrow waterway between Europe and Asia. Its walls had protected the Byzantine capital for centuries, but walls could not replace soldiers, money, or allies. The empire had lost most of its territory and tax base to wars and Ottoman expansion. Ottoman lands now surrounded the city on its European and Asian sides. Emperor Constantine XI sought help from western Christian rulers, yet disputes between Orthodox and Catholic churches and rival political interests limited that aid. Meanwhile, Sultan Mehmed II wanted the city as a capital and a way to secure Ottoman control of the straits.

2. Mehmed prepared for a long siege rather than relying on one assault. Ottoman forces used large cannons to batter the land walls, although the guns fired slowly and defenders repaired damage at night. Ottoman ships faced a chain that blocked the Golden Horn, the inlet beside the city. Mehmed had vessels hauled overland into the inlet, forcing defenders to guard another stretch of wall. With too few troops to cover every position, the Byzantines struggled to replace losses. On May 29, after weeks of attacks, Ottoman troops broke into Constantinople. Constantine XI died during the fighting, and Byzantine rule ended.

3. Mehmed made the city the Ottoman capital, repaired buildings, and encouraged people to settle there. Hagia Sophia, long a major Christian church, became a mosque, showing the shift in political and religious authority. Ottoman control of the straits strengthened the empire's position between the Black Sea and the Mediterranean. European merchants continued trading through Ottoman lands, but rulers and merchants also sought other ways to reach Asian goods. Portuguese voyages around Africa had already begun before 1453, so the conquest did not single-handedly cause ocean exploration. Greek scholars and texts also reached Italy before and after the conquest, contributing to Renaissance learning without starting it.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. How did the loss of territory make it harder for the Byzantines to defend Constantinople?

2. Why did moving ships into the Golden Horn help the Ottomans during the siege?

3. How did the conquest change both the city's religious role and Ottoman power in the region?

4. Why would it be inaccurate to say that the conquest alone began European ocean exploration?

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

Imagine that western rulers sent a large relief force before the final assault. In four sentences, explain how this might have changed the siege and identify one consequence of the conquest that might have been delayed. Make clear what the passage states and what you are inferring.

ANSWER KEY

Walls Under Pressure

HIGH SCHOOL · 9-12.WC.36

PART 1 · READ AND MARK

Underline two conditions that weakened Byzantine defenses, circle two Ottoman siege tactics, and number two changes that followed the conquest. Use your marks to trace how the city fell and what changed afterward. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 · ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	How did the loss of territory make it harder for the Byzantines to defend Constantinople?	**Losing territory reduced the empire's tax base, leaving fewer resources for soldiers and defense.**
2	Why did moving ships into the Golden Horn help the Ottomans during the siege?	**It forced the Byzantines to guard another stretch of wall when they already had too few troops.**
3	How did the conquest change both the city's religious role and Ottoman power in the region?	**Hagia Sophia became a mosque, reflecting a shift in religious authority. Control of the straits strengthened Ottoman power between the Black Sea and the Mediterranean.**
4	Why would it be inaccurate to say that the conquest alone began European ocean exploration?	**Portuguese voyages around Africa had begun before 1453, although rulers and merchants also sought other ways to reach Asian goods after the conquest.**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

The passage states that religious disputes and rival interests limited western aid to the Byzantines. If a large relief force had arrived, it might have helped defend positions left exposed when Ottoman ships entered the Golden Horn. This could have delayed the Ottoman capture of Constantinople, although the Ottoman cannons would still have threatened the walls. As a result, the conversion of Hagia Sophia into a mosque might also have been delayed.

Accept other plausible counterfactuals that connect a relief force to a specific siege difficulty and a stated consequence. Students should distinguish evidence in the passage from what they infer might have happened.