Ridges and Rivers

How physical features shaped travel, trade, and settlement

8.G.2 "Identify the major mountain ranges and river systems of the United States and explain the importance of these physical features in the development of America."

NAME _____ DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

YOUR JOB Underline each named mountain range and circle each named river or river system. Number each underlined or circled feature, then write the same number beside one way it shaped travel, trade, or settlement.

Paths Across a Continent

1 In the 1800s, a merchant east of the Appalachian Mountains might look west and see a wall of ridges. The Appalachians made overland travel difficult, but gaps and roads helped settlers cross them. The Ohio River, flowing west from the Appalachian region, offered a different path: boats carried people and goods toward the Mississippi River. The Mississippi and its tributaries, including the Ohio and Missouri, formed a vast river system linking inland farms to the Gulf of Mexico. River ports grew where cargo could be loaded and sold.

2 Farther west, the Rocky Mountains rise across the interior West. Their steep slopes and high passes slowed wagon travel, so routes through the mountains mattered to migrants and traders. Mining towns grew near deposits of gold and silver in the Rockies, drawing workers and businesses. The Missouri River, a major branch of the Mississippi system, carried traffic across the Great Plains toward the Rocky Mountain region. Yet a river was not a perfect highway: shallow water, shifting channels, and seasonal changes could delay boats and make trade uncertain.

3 Beyond the Rockies, the Sierra Nevada range presented another barrier to travel into California. In the 1860s, railroad builders laid tracks through mountain passes and tunnels, helping connect California to eastern markets. Farther north, the Columbia River system supported shipping and, later, dams that produced electricity for growing communities and industries. In the Southwest, dams on the Colorado River supplied water for farms and cities in a dry region. These projects also changed river habitats and reduced the water flowing downstream, showing that using a physical feature can bring both benefits and costs.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. How did the Appalachian Mountains affect travel west, and how did people respond?

2. How did the Mississippi River system help inland farms reach markets? Name two tributaries mentioned in the passage.

3. How did the Rocky Mountains and Sierra Nevada each shape development in the West?

4. How did people use the Columbia and Colorado river systems differently? What cost of river projects does the passage describe?

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

Imagine you are planning an 1800s trading town near the Appalachians. Choose a river system from the passage and propose where to place the town. Explain how the river and mountains would affect trade, then describe one travel obstacle and how the town could respond.

ANSWER KEY

Ridges and Rivers

GRADE 8 · 8.G.2

PART 1 · READ AND MARK

Underline each named mountain range and circle each named river or river system. Number each underlined or circled feature, then write the same number beside one way it shaped travel, trade, or settlement. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 · ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	How did the Appalachian Mountains affect travel west, and how did people respond?	**The ridges made overland travel difficult. Settlers used gaps and roads to cross them.**
2	How did the Mississippi River system help inland farms reach markets? Name two tributaries mentioned in the passage.	**The system carried people and goods from inland farms toward river ports and the Gulf of Mexico. The Ohio and Missouri are tributaries.**
3	How did the Rocky Mountains and Sierra Nevada each shape development in the West?	**High passes in the Rockies slowed travel, while gold and silver deposits drew mining towns. Sierra Nevada passes and tunnels allowed railroads to connect California to eastern markets.**
4	How did people use the Columbia and Colorado river systems differently? What cost of river projects does the passage describe?	**The Columbia supported shipping and dams that produced electricity. Colorado River dams supplied water to farms and cities. River projects changed habitats and reduced downstream flow.**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

I would place the town near the Ohio River, close to a road through a gap in the Appalachians. Boats could carry farm goods down the Ohio toward the Mississippi River and the Gulf of Mexico. Wagons crossing the mountains could bring other goods to the river port. Mountain roads might be slow after heavy rain. The town could build a warehouse to store goods until wagons arrive.

Accept other plausible town sites if the response correctly connects a named river system and the Appalachians to trade. The obstacle and response should fit the proposed location.