Changing Skies

How sources, impacts, and responses to air pollution have changed

S.9.2 "Describe how social problems have changed over time."

NAME _____ DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

YOUR JOB Underline one source of air pollution from each period: 1900, the mid-twentieth century, and today. Circle two phrases showing who is affected, then number two government responses in time order to help you track what changed.

Who Breathes the Air?

1 In 1900, a walk through many U.S. cities could leave soot on your collar. Homes, factories, and trains burned coal, and their smoke darkened the sky. Breathing dirty air was a public problem because a single chimney affected neighbors who did not choose to burn coal. Smoke was especially hard to escape in crowded working-class districts near factories and rail yards. Cities tried rules limiting thick smoke, but enforcement varied, and coal remained central to heating and industry. The problem was not just a matter of personal choices: where people lived and worked shaped what they breathed.

2 By the middle of the twentieth century, another pattern stood out in places such as Los Angeles. Growing car use added exhaust, and sunlight helped turn vehicle emissions and other pollutants into smog. Factories still polluted, but the sources of dirty air had changed. In 1970, Congress passed the Clean Air Act, which gave the federal government stronger tools to set air-quality standards and control pollution. Later rules and cleaner vehicle technology helped lower many common pollutants, even as driving increased. The change showed that laws and technology could reduce harm without making the problem disappear.

3 Today, air pollution is still uneven. People living near busy roads, warehouses, or industrial sites may face more exposure than people farther away. Wildfire smoke can also spread across states, bringing unhealthy air to places far from the flames. As climate change increases heat and drying in many regions, it can raise wildfire risk, though land management and other conditions matter too. Compared with coal smoke over one neighborhood, some current threats travel much farther, while others remain concentrated around specific streets. Communities now use air monitors, pollution limits, and public alerts, but deciding who gets protection remains a social question.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. How did the sources of urban air pollution change from 1900 to the middle of the twentieth century?

2. How can the reach of wildfire smoke today differ from the reach of coal smoke described in 1900?

3. How did government responses develop from the city smoke rules of 1900 to the Clean Air Act of 1970?

4. What has stayed the same about who faces dirty air, even though pollution sources have changed?

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

Imagine that your town faces a new air pollution problem in 2040. In four or five sentences, compare its cause and who it affects with one earlier problem in the passage, then propose a response suited to the new problem.

ANSWER KEY

Changing Skies

HIGH SCHOOL · S.9.2

PART 1 · READ AND MARK

Underline one source of air pollution from each period: 1900, the mid-twentieth century, and today. Circle two phrases showing who is affected, then number two government responses in time order to help you track what changed. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 · ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	How did the sources of urban air pollution change from 1900 to the middle of the twentieth century?	**Coal burned in homes, factories, and trains was a major source in 1900. By mid-century, growing car use added exhaust that helped form smog, while factories continued to pollute.**
2	How can the reach of wildfire smoke today differ from the reach of coal smoke described in 1900?	**Coal smoke could affect neighbors near its source, while wildfire smoke can travel across states and affect people far from the flames.**
3	How did government responses develop from the city smoke rules of 1900 to the Clean Air Act of 1970?	**Cities tried to limit thick smoke, but enforcement varied. The Clean Air Act gave the federal government stronger tools to set air-quality standards and control pollution.**
4	What has stayed the same about who faces dirty air, even though pollution sources have changed?	**Exposure is still uneven. In 1900, people in working-class districts near factories and rail yards had difficulty escaping smoke; today, people near busy roads, warehouses, or industrial sites may face more pollution.**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

In 1900, coal burned in homes, factories, and trains spread smoke near the people who lived and worked beside them. In my imagined town in 2040, cargo ships at a new port release exhaust that reaches nearby homes, especially when the wind blows inland. Both problems expose neighbors to pollution they did not choose to create, but the new source is tied to shipping rather than coal used across the city. My town could require cleaner ships at the port and monitor air near homes to see whether the rule works.

Accept comparisons that accurately distinguish time periods and identify a change or continuity supported by the passage. For the open task, accept a plausible imagined problem and a response that addresses its stated cause.