When Rome Fractured

Trace the pressures that ended western imperial rule.

WH.2.4 "Analyze the causes, conditions, and consequences of the decline and fall of the western part of the Roman Empire."

NAME _____ DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

YOUR JOB Underline two developments that weakened the western government, circle two conditions that made it harder to respond, and number two consequences of its decline. Use your marks to trace how pressures led to changes in western rule.

The Western Empire Under Pressure

1. In 410 CE, troops led by the Visigothic king Alaric entered Rome and took its wealth. The city was no longer the western empire's capital, but the sack exposed a serious weakness: imperial leaders could not reliably defend even this famous city. The trouble had built over decades. Rival generals fought for control, while emperors struggled to pay soldiers and maintain roads and forts. Tax collection was uneven, and some powerful landowners escaped heavy payments. These problems did not mean that every province was collapsing. They did, however, leave the western government with fewer resources when new threats arrived.

2. Groups including Goths and Vandals moved into Roman territory for different reasons, including pressure from the Huns and the search for safety or land. Some fought Roman forces; others served as allies under agreements with imperial officials. In 439, the Vandals captured Carthage in North Africa, a province that had supplied grain and tax revenue to the western government. Losing that income made it harder to fund an army. Western rulers increasingly relied on commanders whose troops owed loyalty to them rather than to the emperor. Fighting rivals and negotiating with newcomers at the same time stretched a government already short of money.

3. By 476, a military commander named Odoacer removed the young western emperor Romulus Augustulus. No new western emperor took his place. This event is often used to mark the end of the western empire, but it was not the sudden end of Roman life. Local people still farmed, traded, and used Roman law and Latin in many places. Former imperial territories came under different rulers, including leaders of Germanic kingdoms. The eastern Roman Empire continued from Constantinople for centuries. In the west, the combined effects of lost revenue, struggles for power, and shifting military loyalties had broken the central government's ability to rule its provinces.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. How did fighting among Roman leaders make it harder to defend the western empire?

2. Why does the passage show that groups moving into Roman territory were not all simply attacking the empire?

3. Trace how the loss of Carthage could weaken the western government's ability to hold other provinces.

4. How do events after 476 challenge the idea that all Roman life and government ended that year?

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

Suppose the western government had kept Carthage after 439. In one paragraph of 80 to 105 words, explain two ways this might have changed its ability to survive and one reason it still might have fallen. Use at least three details from the passage, and make clear which claims are your predictions.

When Rome Fractured

PART 1 · READ AND MARK

Underline two developments that weakened the western government, circle two conditions that made it harder to respond, and number two consequences of its decline. Use your marks to trace how pressures led to changes in western rule. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 · ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	How did fighting among Roman leaders make it harder to defend the western empire?	**Rival generals fought for control while emperors struggled to pay soldiers and maintain defenses, leaving the government less able to meet threats.**
2	Why does the passage show that groups moving into Roman territory were not all simply attacking the empire?	**Some groups fought Roman forces, but others served as allies under agreements with imperial officials. They moved for different reasons, including pressure from the Huns and the search for safety or land.**
3	Trace how the loss of Carthage could weaken the western government's ability to hold other provinces.	**Losing Carthage cut off tax revenue from North Africa. With less income, the government had more difficulty funding an army to defend its provinces.**
4	How do events after 476 challenge the idea that all Roman life and government ended that year?	**Roman law and Latin remained in use in many western places, and the eastern Roman Empire continued from Constantinople for centuries.**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

If the western government had kept Carthage after 439, it might have continued collecting taxes from North Africa. That income could have helped pay soldiers, making it easier to defend other provinces. It might also have kept grain supplies more secure, reducing one problem for leaders who already faced conflict. These are predictions, not events described in the passage. The empire could still have lost control because rival generals fought for power, tax collection was uneven, and some troops were more loyal to commanders than to the emperor. Holding one province would not automatically have repaired those weaknesses.

Accept other supported links between internal conflict, reduced revenue, military loyalty, and the loss of western central rule. For Part 3, look for two plausible effects of keeping Carthage, one continuing weakness, and a clear distinction between passage evidence and prediction.