

Pressure Points

Trace how connected forces weakened classical societies.

9.3d "Political, socioeconomic, and environmental issues, external conflicts, and nomadic invasions led to the decline and fall of Classical empires."

NAME _____

DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK _____ Read it twice

YOUR JOB Underline causes of decline. Label them P (political), S (socioeconomic), E (environmental), or X (external conflict). A cause may fit more than one category.

Why Powerful States Weakened

- ① The western Roman government fell in 476 CE after many pressures had weakened its authority. Struggles over succession brought civil wars, while officials competed for power. Large landowners held wealth and influence, and taxes burdened many farmers. Conflicts with Germanic groups demanded soldiers and money. Some groups crossed Roman borders seeking safety or opportunity. Visigoths sacked Rome in 410. Internal divisions and external pressures reinforced one another; the eastern Roman Empire continued after the western government fell.
- ② China's Han Dynasty also faced connected pressures. Court factions competed for influence, while powerful landowners reduced their tax burdens and peasants faced heavy demands. Floods and droughts could damage harvests and worsen hardship. The Yellow Turban Rebellion began in 184 CE amid discontent with living conditions and government. Frontier conflicts also consumed resources. Regional military leaders gained power as central authority weakened. The dynasty ended in 220 CE, and rival states emerged.
- ③ Many Maya cities in the southern lowlands lost population or political power between about 800 and 950 CE. This was not the fall of one united empire. Rival rulers fought wars and demanded labor and goods. Environmental stresses, including drought and pressure on soils and forests, may have worsened problems in some places. The timing and mix of causes varied by city and remain subjects of research. Many people moved, but Maya communities continued elsewhere and Maya peoples live today.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE Use the passage

1 What political problem weakened the western Roman Empire, and what was one result of this problem?

2 How did environmental problems and socioeconomic problems combine to increase unrest during the Han Dynasty?

3 Why is it inaccurate to say that the Maya civilization simply disappeared when southern lowland cities declined?

4 Name one pressure shared by Rome and Han China in the passage. What environmental pressure is described for Maya cities but not for Rome?

3 YOUR TURN Your own words

Choose the Roman Empire, the Han Dynasty, or the Maya city-states. Write 3 or 4 sentences explaining how at least two different forces combined to weaken that society, using specific evidence from the passage.

PART 1 • READ AND MARK

Underline causes of decline. Label them P (political), S (socioeconomic), E (environmental), or X (external conflict). A cause may fit more than one category. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 • ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	What political problem weakened the western Roman Empire, and what was one result of this problem?	Succession struggles caused civil wars and weakened authority.
2	How did environmental problems and socioeconomic problems combine to increase unrest during the Han Dynasty?	Floods and droughts could damage harvests, while peasants faced heavy demands. Together these pressures could worsen hardship and unrest.
3	Why is it inaccurate to say that the Maya civilization simply disappeared when southern lowland cities declined?	Many southern lowland cities were abandoned or lost population, but Maya communities continued elsewhere.
4	Name one pressure shared by Rome and Han China in the passage. What environmental pressure is described for Maya cities but not for Rome?	Both faced internal power struggles and external conflicts. The Maya account includes drought and pressure on soils and forests; the Roman account does not.

PART 3 • YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

Han China faced political and socioeconomic pressures. Court factions competed for influence while peasants faced heavy demands. Hardship contributed to unrest. As military leaders gained power, central authority weakened.

Accept accurate explanations that connect at least two categories of forces, rather than listing unrelated causes. Students may choose any of the three societies and should use evidence from the passage.