Ships and Signs

Trace Mediterranean sea trade and the alphabet across cultures

AWH.C.4.2 "Identify the Phoenicians as the successors to the Minoans in dominating maritime trade in the Mediterranean and describe the value of the Phoenician writing system as ancestor of the Latin alphabet."

NAME _____ DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

YOUR JOB Underline evidence showing when Minoans and Phoenicians led sea trade, and circle the names of the peoples who adapted Phoenician writing on its path to the Latin alphabet.

From Cargo to Letters

1. Imagine a ship crossing the Mediterranean with jars of oil and bundles of cloth. In the second millennium BCE, Minoan traders from Crete connected islands and coasts by sea. Their palaces stored goods, and their ships helped make Crete a center of maritime exchange. Minoan power declined after about 1450 BCE. Other groups traded at sea in the centuries that followed, so no single fleet took over immediately. By about 1200 BCE, the Phoenician cities along the eastern Mediterranean coast were beginning to expand their seaborne trade. Their later reach would extend far beyond their home ports.

2. Phoenician sailors crossed to Cyprus, North Africa, and the western Mediterranean. Their cities, including Tyre and Sidon, were independent ports, not a single empire. Merchants exchanged purple-dyed cloth, timber, glass, and metal goods for products from other shores. They also founded trading settlements that linked distant markets. Like the Minoans before them, Phoenicians came to dominate important Mediterranean trade routes through ships and commercial connections. Calling them successors in maritime trade means they later played a similar leading role, not that they conquered Crete or inherited a Minoan state. The gap between their periods of greatest influence matters when telling this story.

3. Phoenician writing used 22 signs, each of which stood mainly for a consonant sound rather than a whole word. A merchant could use these signs to record names, shipments, and agreements, making records easier to share across ports. Greeks adapted the Phoenician system around the eighth century BCE and used some signs for vowels. Greek letters later influenced Etruscan writing in Italy, and Romans adapted letters from that tradition into the Latin alphabet. The letters used in English today descend from Latin letters. The Phoenician system mattered not because its letters stayed unchanged, but because its alphabetic approach traveled and was reshaped by later writers.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. Which people led Mediterranean sea trade earlier, and which led it later? Why was the change not immediate?

2. What two details show that Phoenicians succeeded Minoans in sea trade, rather than taking over a Minoan state?

3. How could Phoenician writing support trade between distant ports?

4. Trace the path from Phoenician writing to the Latin alphabet. What changed along the way?

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

Write a 65 to 85 word museum label for a display holding an imagined Minoan cargo jar and a later Phoenician shipping record. Explain how the objects show succession in sea trade, and trace how the writing system behind the record eventually shaped Latin letters, including one change made along the way.

ANSWER KEY

Ships and Signs

PART 1 · READ AND MARK

Underline evidence showing when Minoans and Phoenicians led sea trade, and circle the names of the peoples who adapted Phoenician writing on its path to the Latin alphabet. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 · ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	Which people led Mediterranean sea trade earlier, and which led it later? Why was the change not immediate?	**Minoans led earlier and Phoenicians later. Other groups traded during the centuries between Minoan decline and Phoenician expansion.**
2	What two details show that Phoenicians succeeded Minoans in sea trade, rather than taking over a Minoan state?	**Phoenicians dominated important trade routes and linked distant markets through trading settlements. Their cities were independent ports, and they did not conquer Crete or inherit a Minoan state.**
3	How could Phoenician writing support trade between distant ports?	**Merchants could use its signs to record names, shipments, and agreements that could be shared across ports.**
4	Trace the path from Phoenician writing to the Latin alphabet. What changed along the way?	**Greeks adapted Phoenician writing and used some signs for vowels. Greek letters influenced Etruscan writing, from which Romans adapted letters into the Latin alphabet.**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

This Minoan cargo jar represents an earlier age when traders from Crete carried goods across the Mediterranean. The imagined Phoenician shipping record points to later merchants who connected ports from the eastern coast to the western sea. These traders succeeded the Minoans in maritime trade, not as rulers of Crete. Phoenician consonant signs helped record transactions. Greeks adapted them, adding vowel letters; Etruscans then passed related forms to Romans, whose Latin letters remain in use.

Accept descriptions of succession that distinguish a later leading role in sea trade from direct political inheritance. For the writing path, look for Greek adaptation, the addition of vowel letters, Etruscan influence, and Roman development of the Latin alphabet.