Why the West Fell

Trace how pressures combined to weaken the western Roman Empire.

AWH.C.7.8 "Explain how internal forces (e.g., the rise of autonomous military powers, political corruption, and economic and political instability) and external forces (e.g., shrinking trade, attacks…"

NAME _____ DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

YOUR JOB Underline internal pressures, circle external pressures, and write 1 and 2 beside two sentences that show how one pressure made another problem worse.

Pressures on the Western Empire

(1) In the late western Roman Empire, a general could command soldiers who trusted him more than the emperor. Some generals used their armies to demand power or install new rulers. As emperors rose and fell, officials had little time to plan defenses or collect taxes fairly. Some officials took money meant for public needs, making government less effective and harder to trust. The western empire still had roads, cities, and experienced leaders, but these strengths depended on a government that could pay troops and keep order across distant provinces.

(2) Money troubles made each military crisis harder to meet. Wars and insecurity disrupted farming and trade in parts of the western empire. When fewer goods moved through markets, merchants and farmers could have less income, and the government could collect less tax. Yet emperors needed money to supply soldiers and maintain roads and forts. To raise funds, officials sometimes demanded heavier taxes from people who could barely pay. People who lost land or income had less reason to support the government. Economic strain and political instability fed each other: weak rule made trade less safe, while falling revenue weakened rule.

(3) External threats tested this weakened system. Groups including the Goths crossed Roman frontiers, sometimes seeking safety or land, and sometimes fighting Roman forces. The Huns' advance pushed other groups toward Roman territory. In 410, Visigothic forces sacked Rome; in 455, Vandal forces did the same. These attacks damaged Rome's prestige, but no single sack ended the empire. In 476, a Germanic military leader removed the last western emperor, Romulus Augustulus. Western imperial rule had already lost territory and tax income, limiting its ability to resist invasions. The eastern Roman Empire continued for nearly a thousand years.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. How could a general's control of loyal soldiers weaken the western government's ability to defend its provinces?

2. Explain how disrupted trade could make it harder for emperors to maintain forts.

3. How did the Huns' advance add to the western empire's external pressures?

4. Why does the sack of Rome in 410 not, by itself, explain the end of western imperial rule?

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

Imagine you advise a western Roman emperor before 410. In four or five sentences, propose one policy aimed at an internal pressure, explain how it might change the empire's response to an external pressure, and identify one limit of your plan.

ANSWER KEY

Why the West Fell

HIGH SCHOOL · AWH.C.7.8

PART 1 · READ AND MARK

Underline internal pressures, circle external pressures, and write 1 and 2 beside two sentences that show how one pressure made another problem worse. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 · ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	How could a general's control of loyal soldiers weaken the western government's ability to defend its provinces?	**Generals could use loyal troops to demand power or install rulers. Frequent changes of emperor left officials less able to plan defenses.**
2	Explain how disrupted trade could make it harder for emperors to maintain forts.	**With fewer goods moving through markets, people could earn less and the government could collect less tax. That left less money to maintain forts.**
3	How did the Huns' advance add to the western empire's external pressures?	**It pushed other groups toward Roman territory, where some crossed the frontiers and fought Roman forces.**
4	Why does the sack of Rome in 410 not, by itself, explain the end of western imperial rule?	**Western rule continued after 410. Lost territory and tax income weakened its ability to resist later invasions before the last western emperor was removed in 476.**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

I would limit each general's command to a fixed term, then assign that general to another region. Soldiers might become less dependent on one leader, reducing struggles over who ruled. A steadier government could send supplies to frontier forts when groups crossed into Roman territory. This policy would not stop the Huns from pushing other groups toward the frontier, and powerful generals might refuse to obey.

Accept other passage-supported causal links in the short answers. For the open task, look for a plausible policy, a clear link from an internal pressure to an external challenge, and a realistic limit.