Coal and Community

How mining shaped towns in Indian Territory

OKH.C.3.2.A "Describe the economic and environmental effects of commercial extraction of Indian Territory's coal deposits on the development of regional communities, including the role of entrepreneur James J. McAlester."

NAME _____ DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

YOUR JOB Underline two economic effects and circle two environmental effects in the passage. Write 1 beside an action McAlester took and 2 beside its effect on coal shipping.

Coal Beneath the Town

1 In the 1870s, a steam locomotive needed coal to pull cars across long distances. In the Choctaw Nation of Indian Territory, underground coal deposits offered a chance to supply that fuel. Entrepreneur James J. McAlester recognized the value of coal near his trading post. He helped promote mining and railroad connections in the area that became McAlester. Rail access made it practical to ship heavy coal to distant buyers instead of selling it only nearby. Mines, rail lines, and a growing town became linked: trains carried coal away and brought workers, tools, and goods into the region.

2 As mines expanded, companies hired miners and railroad crews. Wages supported households, while stores and boardinghouses gained customers. Coal shipments also earned money for mine operators and railroads. Mining companies paid royalties on coal taken from tribal lands, bringing revenue to the Choctaw Nation, but that money did not reach everyone equally. The work could be dangerous: underground miners faced cave-ins, gas, and explosions. A family might earn wages yet also face the loss of a wage earner. These mixed effects shaped who moved to mining towns and how secure life there felt.

3 Digging coal changed more than the local economy. Mine entrances, waste rock piles, and rail construction disturbed soil and vegetation. Cutting trees for mine supports reduced nearby forest cover. Rain could wash loose sediment from disturbed ground into streams, making water muddier; drainage from coal mines could also carry pollutants into waterways. Homes and businesses grew near the mines because people needed jobs and transportation, but residents lived close to dust and damaged land. When coal production slowed, the disturbed ground did not simply return to its former condition. The region's growth brought lasting environmental costs alongside jobs and trade.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. How did McAlester's actions help turn local coal deposits into a source of growth for the area?

2. Describe one economic effect of mining on workers and a different economic effect on the Choctaw Nation.

3. Describe two ways commercial coal extraction could change the local environment.

4. Why might a family in a growing mining town view coal production as both an opportunity and a cost?

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

Imagine you advise a mining town considering another coal mine. In four sentences, recommend a decision using McAlester's example, two economic effects on different groups, one environmental cost, and one practical way to reduce that cost.

ANSWER KEY

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HIGH SCHOOL · OKH.C.3.2.A

PART 1 · READ AND MARK

Underline two economic effects and circle two environmental effects in the passage. Write 1 beside an action McAlester took and 2 beside its effect on coal shipping. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 · ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	How did McAlester's actions help turn local coal deposits into a source of growth for the area?	**He promoted mining and railroad connections. Rail access let mines ship coal to distant buyers and helped the town grow.**
2	Describe one economic effect of mining on workers and a different economic effect on the Choctaw Nation.	**Mining provided wages for workers. Royalties on coal taken from tribal lands brought revenue to the Choctaw Nation.**
3	Describe two ways commercial coal extraction could change the local environment.	**Mine work and rail construction disturbed soil and vegetation. Runoff from disturbed ground could make streams muddier.**
4	Why might a family in a growing mining town view coal production as both an opportunity and a cost?	**Mining could provide wages, but families faced dangers such as mine accidents and lived near dust or damaged land.**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

I would allow another mine only if the company protects nearby streams. As McAlester's example shows, rail access could help the town sell coal to distant buyers. Mining could provide wages to workers and new customers for store owners, but disturbed soil could wash into streams. The company should cover bare soil and contain waste rock to limit runoff.

Accept other passage-supported economic and environmental effects. For Part 3, accept either a recommendation for or against expansion if the four sentences include all requested evidence and a practical way to reduce the named cost.