Growth and Its Costs

Coal, cattle, and the stories told about work in Indian Territory

OKH.C.3.2 "Evaluate the lasting effect of early industries on economic growth. Describe the economic and environmental effects of commercial extraction of Indian Territory's coal deposits on the development of regional communities..."

NAME _____ DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

YOUR JOB As you read, underline two ways industries helped communities grow, circle two costs or hardships, and number the cattle trails 1 and 2. Use your marks to weigh what each industry brought to the region.

What Built the Towns?

1. In the late 1800s, coal beneath the Choctaw Nation drew investors to southeastern Indian Territory. Entrepreneur James J. McAlester obtained rights to mine coal on Choctaw land and promoted the area's deposits. The Missouri, Kansas and Texas Railway reached the area in 1872, carrying coal to distant buyers. Mines helped towns such as McAlester and Krebs grow as workers, stores, and rail services arrived. Coal sales brought wages, business, and payments to the Choctaw Nation. Yet mining also left waste piles, disturbed land, and polluted streams. Burning coal added smoke. The growth of these towns came with costs that lasted beyond the first sales.

2. Cattle created another route to growth. After the Civil War, Texas ranchers drove herds north because cattle could sell for higher prices beyond Texas. The Chisholm Trail crossed central Indian Territory on its way to railheads in Kansas, including Abilene. Farther west, the Western Trail crossed western Indian Territory toward Kansas rail towns such as Dodge City. Railroad cars then carried cattle to distant markets. Drives brought trade to some communities along the routes, while rail shipping made large-scale sales practical. Over time, new rail lines and fenced land shortened or redirected drives. Ranching continued even when the long trail drive became less common.

3. The trail also produced a story that traveled farther than the cattle. Dime novels, later paintings, and motion pictures often pictured the cowboy as a lone white hero who settled disputes with a gun. Actual crews included Black, Mexican, and Indigenous cowhands as well as white workers. They spent long days moving animals, guarding herds at night, and coping with storms, dust, and low pay. These workers supplied a growing market, but popular images often erased their teamwork and diversity. A town might celebrate a heroic cowboy statue while overlooking the workers who made its cattle trade possible.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. How did coal mining help towns grow while leaving an environmental cost? Give one example of each.

2. Compare the routes of the Chisholm Trail and the Western Trail through Indian Territory. Why did their connections to Kansas rail towns matter?

3. How did railroads both expand cattle sales and help change the long trail drive over time?

4. How might a person who knew cowboys only from dime novels or motion pictures misunderstand the work? Use two contrasts from the passage.

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

Write a 65 to 90 word label for a town museum exhibit called “Who Built Our Economy?” Include coal and cattle, name two groups of workers whose experiences the exhibit should show, and explain one benefit, one lasting cost, and one way popular cowboy stories differ from the work.

ANSWER KEY

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HIGH SCHOOL · OKH.C.3.2

PART 1 · READ AND MARK

As you read, underline two ways industries helped communities grow, circle two costs or hardships, and number the cattle trails 1 and 2. Use your marks to weigh what each industry brought to the region. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 · ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	How did coal mining help towns grow while leaving an environmental cost? Give one example of each.	**Mines brought workers, wages, and stores to towns such as McAlester and Krebs. Mining also left waste piles and polluted streams.**
2	Compare the routes of the Chisholm Trail and the Western Trail through Indian Territory. Why did their connections to Kansas rail towns matter?	**The Chisholm Trail crossed central Indian Territory toward railheads such as Abilene; the Western Trail crossed farther west toward rail towns such as Dodge City. Railroads carried cattle from those towns to distant markets.**
3	How did railroads both expand cattle sales and help change the long trail drive over time?	**Railcars made large-scale sales to distant markets practical. Later, new rail lines shortened or redirected drives, making long drives less common.**
4	How might a person who knew cowboys only from dime novels or motion pictures misunderstand the work? Use two contrasts from the passage.	**The person might imagine lone white gunfighters, rather than diverse crews working together to move and guard cattle. The stories also hid long hours, harsh weather, and low pay.**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

Coal miners and cattle hands both helped build this region's economy. The exhibit should show miners near McAlester and the diverse cowhands who moved Texas herds through Indian Territory. Mines brought wages and stores to growing towns, while railroads carried both coal and cattle to distant buyers. Mining also left disturbed land and polluted streams, costs that could outlast a mine's profits. Dime novels made cowboys look like lone gunfighters. In reality, crews worked together through long days and dangerous weather.

Accept other passage-based benefits and costs. For the museum label, look for both industries, two worker groups, an economic benefit, a lasting cost, and a supported contrast between cowboy stories and work.