Land and the Rush

How a land law shaped migration to Oklahoma

OKH.C.3.3.A "Explain opportunities provided by the Homestead Act of 1862 and its impact on mass migration to the region."

NAME _____ DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

YOUR JOB Underline two opportunities the Homestead Act offered and circle two requirements or costs of making a claim. Number one sentence that explains why migrants came and one sentence that describes an effect of their arrival.

A Claim Was Just the Beginning

1. In 1862, Congress passed the Homestead Act to encourage settlement on federal public land. An eligible adult could file a claim for up to 160 acres and, after living on and improving it for five years, receive title to the land. Claimants paid filing fees and had to build a home and cultivate the soil. This offered people with little money a path to owning a farm instead of buying land at market prices. Yet a claim was not a gift of a ready-made farm. Families needed money for tools, seed, food, and travel, and drought could ruin a crop.

2. The law did not instantly open all land in present-day Oklahoma. Much of the region was Indian Territory, where Native nations held lands under treaties with the United States. Federal officials later forced land cessions and changed land policies, making some areas available to non-Native settlers. In 1889, the federal government opened the Unassigned Lands to claims through a land run. At noon on April 22, thousands rushed to choose parcels. Claiming a parcel in the run was only the first step. Those seeking ownership under homestead rules still had to meet requirements for residence and improvement.

3. The chance to obtain farmland helped draw migrants from other states to the area that became Oklahoma Territory in 1890. Some came by train; others carried supplies in wagons. Their movement increased the non-Native population and led to new farms and towns. But opportunity was unequal: settlers with savings could better afford equipment and wait through poor harvests, while many Native people lost control of land as federal policies opened it to outsiders. The Homestead Act helped fuel mass migration only when land was made available for claims; the law by itself did not create an open frontier.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. Why might the Homestead Act have attracted a person who could not afford to buy a farm at market prices?

2. Why might filing a claim have been easier than keeping it long enough to gain ownership?

3. Why did the 1862 law not immediately bring a land rush to present-day Oklahoma?

4. How did migration for land claims change the region, and why were its effects unequal?

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

Imagine you edit a newspaper in April 1889. Write a brief message advising a reader whether to try for a land claim. Support your advice with an opportunity, a practical risk, and a consequence of migration for Native people in the region.

ANSWER KEY

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HIGH SCHOOL · OKH.C.3.3.A

PART 1 · READ AND MARK

Underline two opportunities the Homestead Act offered and circle two requirements or costs of making a claim. Number one sentence that explains why migrants came and one sentence that describes an effect of their arrival. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 · ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	Why might the Homestead Act have attracted a person who could not afford to buy a farm at market prices?	**An eligible person could claim up to 160 acres and gain title after meeting the law's requirements, rather than buying the land at market prices.**
2	Why might filing a claim have been easier than keeping it long enough to gain ownership?	**A claimant had to live on and improve the land for five years while paying for supplies and facing risks such as drought.**
3	Why did the 1862 law not immediately bring a land rush to present-day Oklahoma?	**Much of the region was Indian Territory, where Native nations held land under treaties. Land had to be made available for claims before settlers could seek it.**
4	How did migration for land claims change the region, and why were its effects unequal?	**Migration increased the non-Native population and led to new farms and towns. Settlers with savings had an advantage, while many Native people lost control of land.**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

If you have savings for supplies, consider making a claim, but do not mistake a land run for a free farm. The Homestead Act offers a way to gain title to farmland without paying its market price. You would still need to live on and improve your claim for years, and a failed crop could strain your savings. Think, too, about who bears the cost of this opportunity. Federal policies that opened land to newcomers also caused many Native people in the region to lose control of land.

Accept supported explanations that connect the chance to own land with migration and distinguish filing a claim from earning title. In the open response, students may advise for or against making a claim if they address all three requested factors.